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Love in the Abbey

Lady Ethel's Rival

CHAPTER XXXVIII.
 IN THE SHADOW.

"No one!" says Kitty. "He was not hurt—not touched?"

"He was not touched," replies the countess, with quiet emphasis.

Kitty's lips move, but they cannot hear what she breathes; but they think it must be "Thank God!"

"Neither was Sydney Calthrop," resumes the countess, with a hard accent on the name, as if she was not altogether pleased with this particular instance of watchful Providence.

"I am glad of that," says Kitty quietly.

"No, thanks to him, Sydney Calthrop got off scot-free."

"I saw it," breathes Kitty, with a shudder.

"I think he was bruised," said the countess, with a miserable enjoyment; "badly bruised; but he was able to get to London that same day."

Kitty closes her eyes—she cannot nod.

"You'll be glad to hear, my dear," says the countess, "that before he went he made a clean breast of it."

Kitty turns her eyes with feeble eagerness to the speaker's wrinkled face, and keeps them there, intent and expectant.

"It was the least he could do—the most, too, perhaps, in return for his miserable life. He made a clean breast of it, and told—the other—everything."

A questioning expression comes into Kitty's eyes.

"Told him?"

"My dear," says the countess, showing her teeth in the old familiar snarl, "he turned out to be the wolf and snake I warned you against. Trust him to act up to his nature. He did all the mischief—you've to thank him that you're lying here—as you are."

"To thank Mr. Calthrop?" murmurs Kitty.

The countess nods vindictively.

"Yes—it was he who made all the mischief and poisoned the other against you. Oh, Kitty! why didn't you pluck up your spirit—you had plenty of it—and tell Elliot Sterne that that monkey of a Reginald was with you at the theater—why didn't you have it all cleared up, and tell him that there was nothing between you and James Ainsley! My poor child, if I'd been at your elbow, this wouldn't have happened. Elliot Sterne behaved like a jealous idiot—it's his only weak point—but a word would have set it all right! Why didn't you, my poor, proud little Kitty, why didn't you speak it?"

A faint color struggles to the white face.

"When he was on his way to Ethel!" she murmurs. "I couldn't keep him from going there!"

"Ethel!" echoes the countess, with unutterable scorn. "Do you think Elliot Sterne is a fool? He'd as soon marry me!"

Kitty's lips quiver and part, and she sighs—it is not so much a sigh of regret, as of relief and happiness.

"That viper told you that lie, of course! It is all of a patch with the rest; while he was telling you that Elliot Sterne was jilting you for Ethel, he was telling Elliot that you were jilting him for James Ainsley. Heavens, that bull was a fool!"

"No, no," says Kitty faintly; "he has told all—he is sorry, and—and it was all my fault—as much mine as his. But it does not matter now, does it? It does not matter if—he has forgiven me?"

"Forgiven you! My poor, simple child!" echoes the countess. "Do you know that when James Ainsley had found him out—in some outlandish valley in Switzerland—they traveled night and day without stopping, until they reached here? If James had only found him a day—half a day sooner, all would have been right."

Kitty's face is colored like a blush rose.

"James found him," she murmurs; "I see! I see! Dear James, God bless him!"

"God bless him for a true-hearted boy!" responds the countess in the same tone. "He is a noble boy, Kitty, and suffers more than he ought. But the other, Kitty, I think this will be the death of him!"

Kitty looks up wistfully.

"When—I die, do you mean?" she murmurs.

The countess nods.

"If you could see him, Kitty," she says, "you would pity and forgive him."

Kitty closes her eyes for a moment, then opens them with a solemn tenderness.

"May I see him? Will he come?" she asks. "Where is he?"

The countess glances at Mary, who has risen, and is already turned toward the door.

"Not far off, my dear," she says grimly; "I think he sleeps outside the window there."

Mary goes noiselessly out of the room, and Kitty, watching until the door has closed on her, closes her eyes and waits. She has not to wait long—in a few minutes the sound of a man's footsteps, painfully hushed, is heard; the door opens, and Elliot Sterne stands within the room.

Noiselessly the old doctor lays his hand upon the strong man's arm.

"You will not let her agitate herself, my lord?"

Elliot Sterne does not speak, he does not turn his haggard eyes from the bed, but waits until the countess signs to him to approach; then he goes slowly toward the bed, and kneeling beside it, takes the white little hand. The rest move away into the other room, out of sight and hearing. For a moment Kitty does not open her eyes, then she does so slowly, and looks at him. That look—so full of love, of passionate pity, and wistful self-reproach—goes straight to the anguished heart of the strong man like a dagger's thrust.

Neither of them can speak, and for a full minute he holds her hand and looks at her.

Then, with a faint smile and sigh, she laboriously lifts her other hand and puts it in his, and scans his face pityingly.

"How ill you look," she murmurs—"you are as thin as I am, my poor darling! I am glad you have come back—in time."

His face works, and she feels his hand clasp, as if with a sudden pain, on hers.

"Don't look like that," she pleads. "If you knew how happy I am, you wouldn't feel it so. Elliot"—breathing his name with a faint blush—"I am glad you saved him!" A gleam of passionate hate shoots into his bloodshot eyes. "Yes, very glad; it was like you to save him after—after all he had done. It makes me love you more than ever I did, for I do love you—you know that now."

"Oh, my darling," he moans, and droops his head upon the bed.

Painfully she lays her hand upon his head, and twines her fingers in his hair.

"Yes," she murmurs, "I may say that now I am dying—it is worth dying for—I love you!"

His sobs come thick and fast, as if they racked him from head to foot.

"Hush!" she says, "you make me unhappy! Don't do that. If you want to pay me for all that has gone, tell me that you love me. Say it once—I love you!"

She asks more than he can grant for a minute. Till at last he raises his head and says the words hoarsely, brokenly.

Kitty smiles a happy, triumphant

smile, then moves her face nearer to his.

"Will you lift me up?" she asks him, with a childlike matter-of-course.

He puts his strong arm round her, and, with a convulsive shiver, lays her head upon his breast. It nestles there quietly for a moment, then she puts up her hand, and softly drawing his head down to hers, kisses him. After a moment, she looks up at him wistfully.

"It is hard that I should die now, isn't it?" she says. "But—you will not go back to Ethel; no, I know that! She could not love you as I do—no one could, I think. Yes, it is hard now. I wanted to die before you came; but now—oh!" clinging to him with a wild cry and a flush of color in her cheeks—"oh, darling, my love, my love; don't let me go from you! Not now—not now! I want to live! tell them all I want to live! I will live! Oh, darling, hold me back—hold me back! I cannot leave you now!"

Frenzied by her appeal, by the look in her wild eyes, by the weak clutch of her hands, Elliot Sterne presses her to his breast and covers her face with kisses; then, glancing around, as if he expected some mortal foe to come and snatch her from him, he cries in an awful voice:

"No, you shall not die! I hold you, my darling! I hold you. You shall live—live—live!"

Then with a great cry he sinks upon the bed, still holding her to him in a grasp of iron.

Pale and terrified, they hurry and press round him, not venturing to go within arm's length, for in his eyes there gleams a threatening madness; but suddenly he shudders and droops over her, then utters a great cry.

In an instant Doctor Greene takes her from his arms and lays her down; then he looks up, for the first time in his long life, with excitement.

"Stand away," he says, waving his hand. "Fetch me the brandy, one of you. Stand back, my lord. There is a change! By God's mercy we may save her yet—if you are calm—calm!"

(To be Continued.)

The Heir of Rosedene

AND
 The Game-Keeper's Hut

CHAPTER I.
 PROVIDENCE AND MAN.

THE great banker, John Weston, sat in the library of his magnificent home in Surrey. He was a very old, but a very brave man, for he sat with a smile on his wrinkled and colorless face, the face from which years of brain strain had driven the color, the face in which the struggles, the trials, of this transient world had carved wrinkles as deeply as if they had been cut with a graver's tool; a smile, notwithstanding that the doctor who had just left him had told him that he had only a few weeks, perhaps days to live.

When one is as old as John Weston death often comes as a relief, a discharge; the sentry is relieved at his post, and stretching weary limbs, goes off to his rest. The soldier, scarred in many a battle, takes his discharge and limps wearily to the repose, which to him is sweeter than the glitter of gold or the rustle of fame's laurels.

And John Weston had received his death sentence with the equanimity of the brave man, and the tired veteran. He had hosts of friends, he would be sorry to leave them, yes; but sorer still to leave the young girl, the child of a younger and dearly loved brother. The girl—she was little more than a baby—had wound herself round the heart of the great banker, as the delicate ivy winds itself round the rugged oak; and for nine years past, ever since she had been brought to his house one summer's day, to see him, John Weston had ever held her in his mind.

And now he was going to die and leave her. Well, she would not be left friendless. His sister-in-law, the widow of his elder brother, would take loving care of her; and little Edna would not be left in poverty.

As he thought of his vast wealth—how much was it; how long ago was it since he had ceased to count it?—a change came over the old man's face. The smile disappeared, his brows knit together, the eyes, still

bright and keen, became cloudy as if something were weighing on his mind, something were rising from the past to disturb him, to remind him that he, who had paid his debts, with this one exception, had left one great claim, one great debt, unpaid.

He rang the bell, and, when the footman came noiselessly, with the air of respect, the bent head and discreet eyes, the master said:

"Send this letter to Mr. Burdon—at once."

The footman said, "Yes, sir," and waited.

Mr. Weston looked up.

"Well?" he asked, sternly.

"The letter, sir," explained the footman.

John Weston started slightly and smiled. Yes; it was as well he was going, going before his mind—the mind that had governed so many men, saved so many fortunes—and wrecked some—began to wane.

He wrote the letter; it was no more than a note:

"Dear Burdon: Please come at once. I mean—at once."

"Yours faithfully,
 "JOHN WESTON."

He sealed the envelope in the good, old-fashioned way, and the footman dispatched a groom with the letter.

In two hours time Richard Burdon, the solid, trustworthy lawyer, was in attendance on his old client and friend.

He found Mr. Weston just sitting down to dinner, and the banker generally, affectionately, waved Mr. Burdon to a chair. They ate of the good things in those times without the fear and trembling which nowadays wait upon our repasts; and the two men enjoyed their turtle soup, filleted sweets, curried chicken, roast beef, colds and cheese; and washed down this substantial fare with hock, sherry, port and a liqueur of rare old.

Such a menu is calculated to make most of the diet faddists of these more scientific times shudder as they read; but it was on such food as this—and plenty of it—that our fathers and forefathers made England what it is; and, pondering over the degeneracies of these later times, one is tempted to fill to one like provender, exclaiming, "What was good enough for them is good enough for us!"

The two men when they had sipped their liqueur or whisky, lit cigars—not cigarettes, be it noted—and then, and not till then, John Weston began to talk on business. "I'm going to die, Dick," he said as quietly, almost as casually, as if he had said, "I am going to get my hair cut."

Burdon started, but he knew his friend too well to utter an exclamation.

"Who says so?" he inquired, with a little grunt of incredulity.

"Old Mossop," replied John Weston, "and he's never wrong. Singular that, for a doctor; for, by gad! they're seldom right. But I've received the information from another and still more reliable source."

He touched his heart and smiled grimly. "I have had my suspicions for some time; that is why I sent for Mossop. And he confirmed them. Pah, my dear Dick, don't look so glum. A man must die some time; one can't expect to go on forever; and for my part—Ah, well, life ceases to be amusing after three-score-and-ten, and one rather longs for a change of scene. Cheer up, man! And fill your glass. Of course, I sent for you about my will, Dick."

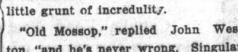
Burdon filled his glass and cleared his throat.

(To be Continued.)

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