

SELF-RAISED

BY
EMMA D. M. SOUTHWORTH

They crossed the drawbridge over the ancient moat and entered the castle gate. The light above it revealed the ghastly, iron-toothed portcullis, that looked ready to fall and impale any audacious passenger under its impending fangs. And they entered the old paved courtyard and crossed over to the main entrance of the castle hall.

Here, at length, some of the attendant honors of Lady Vincent's new rank seemed ready to greet her.

The establishment had been expecting its lord and had heard the sound of carriages. The great doors were thrown open; lights flashed out; liveried servants appeared in attendance.

"You got my telegram, I perceive, Cuthbert," Lord Vincent said to a large, red-haired Scot, in plain citizen's clothes, who seemed to be the porter.

"Yes, me laird, though, as ye ken, the chieftain at yon office at Banff has to send it by a special messenger—sae it took a long time to win here."

"All right, Cuthbert, since you received it in time to be ready for us. Light us into the green parlor, and send the housekeeper here to attend Lady Vincent."

"Yes, me laird," answered the man, bowing low before he led the way into a room so elegantly furnished as to afford a pleasant surprise to Claudia, who certainly did not expect to find anything so bright and new in this dark, old castle.

Here she was presently joined by a tall, spare, respectable-looking old woman in a black linsey dress, white apron and neck shawl, and high-crowned Scotch cap.

"How do you do, dame? You will show Lady Vincent to her apartments and wait her orders."

"Oh, sirs, and what ane!" ejaculated the old woman under her breath; then turning to Claudia, with a courtesy she said:

"I am ready to attend your ladyship."

Claudia arose and followed her through the vast hall and up the lofty staircase to another great square stone hall, whose four walls were regularly indented by lines of doors leading into the bed chambers and dressing rooms.

And as Claudia looked upon this array, her first thought was that a stranger might easily get confused among them and open the wrong door. And that it would be well to have them numbered as at hotels to prevent mistakes.

The old housekeeper opened one of the doors and admitted her mistress into a beautifully furnished and decorated suite of apartments which consisted of boudoir, bedroom, and dressing room opening into each other, so that, as Claudia entered the first, she had the vista of the three before her eyes.

The floors were covered with Turkish carpets so soft and deep in texture that they yielded like turf under the tread. And the heavy furniture was all of black walnut; and the draperies were all of golden-brown satin damask and richly embroidered lace.

The effect of the whole was warm, rich, and comfortable.

Claudia looked around herself with approbation; her spirits rose, she felt reconciled to the rugged old fortress that contained such splendors within its walls; for who would care how rough the casket, so that the jewels it held were of the finest water? Her plans "soared up again like fire."

"She passed through the whole suite of rooms to the dressing room, which was the last in succession, and seated herself in an easy-chair beside a bright coal fire."

"The dinner will be served in an hour, me lady," said the housekeeper, "if you please, you may send it to me by one of my own women. You are too aged to walk up and down stairs," replied Claudia kindly.

"Heh, sirs! I'm e'en roddy to hand me ain wi' any lassie f' the house," said she, nodding her tall, flapping white cap.

"Will you tell me your name, that I may know in future what to call you?" Claudia asked.

"It's e'en just Mistress Murdoch, at your ladyship's bidding. And now I'll gae bring the tea."

"Send my servant Katie to me at the same time," said Lady Vincent, who, when she was left alone, turned again to view the magnificence that surrounded her.

"If ever I spend another autumn on this bleak coast, I shall take care to fill the castle halls and chambers with gay company," she said to herself.

The housekeeper entered with an elegant little tea-service of gold plate, and set it on a stand of mosaic work, by Claudia's side.

While she was drinking her tea Katie entered, smiling with both her eyes and all her teeth.

"Well, my ladyship, ma'am, this looks like life at last; don't it, though?"

"I think so, Katie," said her mistress, sipping her aromatic "oolong."

"I like Scraggy better nor I thought I would."

"You like what?"

"This big fall of a house—Scraggy something or other they call it."

"Castle Craig?"

"Yes, that's it; plague take the outlandish names, I say!"

"Now, Katie, unpurse my maizle-colored moire antique. I must dress for dinner."

"Of course Claudia expected to meet no one at dinner except the disagreeable companion of her journey; but Claudia would have made an elaborate toilette."

"So she arrayed herself with very great splendor and went downstairs."

"In the lower hall she found the porter and several footmen."

"Show me into the drawing room," she said to the former.

Old Cuthbert bowed and walked before her, and threw open a pair of folding doors leading into the grand saloon of the castle. And Claudia entered.

CHAPTER XVI.

PAISLEY.

And she was beautiful, they said; I saw that she was more—

One of those women women dread, Men fatally adore.

—Anon.

It was a saloon of magnificent proportions and splendid decorations. And Claudia was sitting across it with majestic gait, in the full consciousness of being the Viscountess Vincent and Lady of the Castle, when suddenly her eyes fell upon an object that arrested her footsteps, while she gazed in utter amazement.

One of the most transcendently beautiful women that she had ever beheld lay reclining in the most graceful and alluring attitude upon a low divan. Her luxuriant form, arrayed in rich, soft, white moire antique and lace, was thrown into harmonious relief by the crimson velvet cover of the divan. She was asleep, or perhaps affecting to be so. One fine, round, brown arm, with its elbow deep in the downy pillow, rose from its falling sleeve of silk and lace, and with its jeweled hand, buried in masses of glittering, purplish black ringlets, supported a head that Reubens would have loved to paint. Those rich ringlets, flowing down half veiled and the rounded arm and full, curved neck and bosom that were otherwise too bare for delicacy. The features were formed in the most perfect mold of Oriental beauty; the forehead was broad and low; the nose fine and straight; the lips plump and full, and the chin small and rounded. The eyebrows were black, arched, and tapering at the points; the eyelashes were black, long, and drooping over half-closed, almond-shaped, dark eyes that seemed floating in liquid fire. The complexion was of the richest brown, rippling into the most brilliant crimson in the oval cheeks and dewy lips that, falling half open, revealed a little glistening white teeth, within. While one jeweled hand supported her beautiful head and the other dropped over her reclining form, holding negligently, almost unconsciously, between thumb and finger, an odorous tea-rose.

(To Be Continued.)

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4 12

5 13

6 14

7 15

8 16