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THE HOUSE ON THE MARSH.

A Romance.

BY FLORENCE WARDEN.

(Continued from page 506.)

As he turned to say this, I noticed a sudden flash of horror

As he turned to say this, I noticed a sudden flash of horror pass over Mrs. Rayner's pale features and disappear in a moment before her husband could see her face again; and I thought I saw on Sarah's dark face a look of intelligence when the order was given her, as if she too knew something about the expected visitor. I hope I am not very inquisitive; but in a quiet country-house to which some suspicion of mystery is attached, one cannot help noticing even trifles.

I tried not to think any more about it, but I did not succeed very well until I sat down in the empty schoolroom to my evening task of translating a page of Markham's English History into German. When the translation was finished, I had still to read a chapter of Guizot's French History; but that was pleasant, easy work, and might be enjoyed in the garden. I had seen the stranger as I was crossing the hall after tea. He was a small, slight man, with a fair mustache, who might be old or young; and, although he wore only a gray traveling-suit, he gave one the impression of being very well dressed indeed. I had forgotten all about him long before I made my way, with a heavy volume of history in my arms, to the pond, near the pretitest, reediest corner of which I had made myself a nice little nest. I read my Guizot until the light began to fade, when I heard voices that seemed to be coming toward me from the house.

The speakers seemed to be coming along the path. Whoever they might be, I would wait until they had gone by before I went in. I could not see them, nor could they see me, I knew. When they came a little nearer, I recognized Sarah's voice; the other was that of a man of a class much higher than her own. Could it be the stranger? He was talking familiarly and seriously with her; I could tell that before I heard any words. Sarah was speaking in a tone of bitter complaint, and the first words I heard were hers.

"How of the man are stranger in a lower one of bitter complaint, and the first words I heard were hers.

"How of the man are stranger

plainly.

"Look what I've done for him; think how I've worked for

"Look what I've done for him; think how I've worked for
him!" she said. "He would never be where he is now if it
wasn't for me. Does he think his new fancy will plan for him
and plot for him, and risk ___"

"Hush, hush—don't speak so loud! Where's you old discre"Hush, hush—don't speak so loud!"

"Hush. hush—don't speak so load."

tion, Sally?"
"Let him look for discretion in Miss Baby, with her round face and her child's eyes. Does he think he can make use of her? Nonsense! It wants a woman that's strong in her head and strong in her limbs to do the work he wants done, and not a soft little chit like that!"

"Depend upon it, however useful she might be, he would never compare her services with yours, Sally. He is only amusing himself with this little simpleton," the man said,

never compare ner services amusing himself with this little simpleton," the man said, soothingly.

But she interrupted him in a tone of half-suppressed savagery that made me shudder, out of her sight though I was. agery that made me shudder, out of her sight though I was. agery that made me shudder, out of her sight though I was. agery that made me shudder, out of her sight though I was. as the control of th

tation and the hall, up to my room, locked the door, and sat down appalled.

What a terrible tragedy in the servants' hall we were likely to have if things went on like this! If Mrs. Rayner had likely to have if things went on like this! If Mrs. Rayner had been only a woman, not a statue, I would have confessed all to her; but, as she was, it would do no good. It was not the her; but, as she was, it would do no good. It was not the for it but to lould tell Mr. Rayner, and there was no way sort of thing I could tell Mr. Rayner, and there was nothing of letting him know without telling him. There was nothing for it but to hope that little Jane would be wise and leave off provoking Sarah, and that Providence would bring Sarah herself to a better mind.

But what a dreadful woman to have in the house! And why had the stranger spoken of Tom Parkes as "Jim?"

CHAPTER VI.

CHAPTER VI.

The next morning I woke up with that strange feeling of oppression which is caused by something unpleasant heard the night before. I soon remembered what it was, and tried to shake off the recollection of the talk in the plantation and of Sarah's vindictive tones. I looked at her searchingly as she Sarah's vindictive tones. I looked at her searchingly as she Sarah's vindictive tones. I looked at her searchingly as she Sarah's vindictive tones. I looked the researchingly as she Sarah's vindictive tone in the cook and poor little came in demurely to prayers with the cook and poor little came in demurely to prayers with the cook and poor little judge, and I could not help thinking that Tom Parkes, or Jane, and I could not help thinking that Tom Parkes, or Jane, and I could not help thinking that to that forbid-ding-looking shrew.

That evening, after tea, when, my translation finished, That evening, after tea, when, my translation finished, the time came for Guizot, I remembered, with a pang of content the came for Guizot, I remembered, with a pang of content the came for Guizot, I remembered, with a pang of content in the damp science, that I had left that nicely-bound book out in the damp sall night, forgotten in my hasty flight. I hurried through the all night, forgotten in my hasty flight. I hurried through the all night, forgotten in my hasty flight. I hurried through the all night, forgotten in my hasty flight. I hurried through the looked when in his hand.

If I had been conscience-stricken before, when my guilt was known only to myself, what did I feel now that it was disvovered? I had not the courage to face him, but turned, and was sneaking back toward the house, when he called me—

"Miss Christie!"

I might have known I should not escape his sharp eyes and ears. I went back slowly, murmuring, "Yes, Mr. Rayner," and blushing with mortification. It was only a trifle after all,

"I am very sorry, Mr. Rayner," I began, in a low voice which almost threatened tears; "I brought that book out here to read yesterday evening, and I—I forgot to take it with me when I went in. I know it was most inexcusable carelessness—indeed I will never bring one of the library-books out again."

"And why not, Miss Christie?" said he, suddenly dispelling my anxiety by looking up with his usual kindly smile. "I am sure Guizot is dry enough to stand a little moisture, and if you were to throw him into the pond, you would be his only mourner, for nobody takes him off his shelf but you. But what makes you spoil your young eyes by plodding through such heavy stuff as this?"

"I am so ignorant," said I humbly, "and I want some day to be able to teach girls much older than Haidee, so that I have to read to improve myself. And I don't read only dry things. This morning I found time to read nearly the whole of yesterdar's near?"

"Well, that was dry enough; there was nothing in it, was there?

"Yes, there was an account of another murder in Ireland, and a long article on the present position of the Eastern difficulty, and the latest details about that big burglary." "What burglary?"

"Haven't you read about it? A large house in Derbyshire, belonging to Lord Dalston, was broken into last Wednesday, and a quantity of valuable things stolen. They say they've got a clew, but they haven't been able to find any of the thieves yet." "And they won't either." They never do, except by a fluke."

"Well, I hope they will catch this one. "Why, what harm has the poor thief done you? You have hing to fear from diamond-robbers, because you have no

anamonas.

"I believe you have more sympathy with the thieves than with the policemen," said I, laughing.

"I have, infinitely more. I have just the same admiration for the successful diamond-robber that you have for Robin Hood and Jack Sheppard, and just the same contempt for the policeman that you have for the Sheriff of Nottingham and Jack's iail."

policeman that you have for the Shefilf of Nottingham and Jack's jail."

"Oh, but that is different!"

"Oh, yes, it is very different, I know!" said Mr. Rayner maliciously. "Robin Hood wore Lincoln green and carried a picturesque bow and arrow, while Sheppard's costume, in colored prints, is enough of itself to win any woman's heart. And then the pretty story about Maid Marian! Jack Sheppard had a sweetheart, too, hadn't he?"

"Well, Mr. Rayner, their very appearance, which you laugh at, shows them to be superior to the modern burglar."

"Have you ever seen a modern burglar?"

"No; but I know what they look like. They have fustian caps, and long protruding upper lips, and their eyes are quite close together, and their ladyloves are like Nancy Sikes."

"I see. Then you don't sympathize with a criminal unless he is good-loeking, nicely dressed, and in love with a lady of beauty and refinement?"

"Oh, Mr. Rayner," I cried, "I don't know what the real "Oh, Mr. Rayner," I the Robin Hood and Jack Sheppard of the novels and poems that I can't help liking and admiring robbed only rich people who could afford to lose some of their ill-gotten wealth."

"Rayner "Rayner" interposed Mr. Rayner "Rayner" interposed Mr. Rayner

ill-gotten wealth."
"But all wealth is not ill-gotten," interposed Mr. Rayner

ill-gotten wealth."

"But all wealth is not ill-gotten," interposed Mr. Rayner mildly.

"It was then," I went on hastily—"at least generally. And Robin Hood didn't rob the good rich people, only the bad ones; and most of his spoil he distributed among the poor, you know," I finished triumphantly.

"It won't do, Miss Christie; I must destroy your edifice of "It won't do, Miss Christie; I must destroy your edifice of argument at a blow," said he, shaking his head mournfully. "I happen to know something about this Lord Dalston whose house was broken into; and he is a very bad rich person indeed, much more so than the poor old abbots whom your favorite Robin Hood treated so roughly. He ill-treated his wife, and tried to shut her up in a lunatic asylum; knocked his wife, and tried to shut her up in a lunatic asylum; knocked out in a passion the left eye of one of his own grooms, had out in a passion the left eye of one of his own grooms, had heavy debts to half the big tradesmen in London. So that he is something like a thief. Now, if you were to find out that is something like a thief. Now, if you were to find out that is something like a thief. Now, if you were to find out that is much as property was young, good-looking, well-dressed, a large subscriber to charities, and in love with a pretty, lady-large subscriber to charities, and in love with a pretty, lady-large subscriber to charities, and in love with a pretty, lady-large subscriber to charities, and in love with a pretty, lady-large subscriber to charities, and in love with a pretty, lady-large subscriber to charities, and in love with a pretty, lady-large subscriber to charities, and in love with a pretty, lady-large subscriber to charities, and in love with a pretty, lady-large subscriber to charities, and in love with a pretty, lady-large subscriber to charities, and in love with a pretty, lady-large subscriber to charities, and in love with a pretty, lady-large subscriber to charities, and in love with a pretty, lady-large subscriber to charities, and

absurd! In those days the laws were unjust, so that even good men were forced into defiance of them; but now that the laws are really, upon the whole, fair, it is only wicked people who disobey them."

"Then you don't like wicked people, Miss Christie?"

"Oh, Mr. Rayner, of course not!" said I, aghast at such a question, which he asked quite seriously.

"Ah, you must know some before you decide too hastily that you don't like them!" said he.

"Know some wicked people, Mr. Rayner?" I gasped.

"Know some wicked people, Mr. Rayner?" I gasped.

"You won't like all of them, any more than you dislike all the good people you know. But you will find that those you do like beat the good people hollow."

"Indeed, I am sure I shouldn't like them at all. I wouldn't speak to a wicked person if I could help it."

"And what would you do if, in the course of your career as a governess, you found yourself in a family of whose morals you could not approve?"

"If I found myself among very dreadful people, I should just run away back to my uncle's house, where my mother lives, on the first opportunity, without saying anything to any one till I was gone, and without even writing to say I was coming, lest my letter should be intercepted. I should be so horribly afraid of them."

"Well, child, I hope you will never have to do anything so desperate as that; but the profession of teaching has its dangers for a beautiful woman, he said gravely.

The last words gave a shock to me. I had never heard them applied to me before, and for a moment I was without an anapplied to me before, and for a moment I was without an anapplied to me before, and for a moment I was without an ahrill little cry as from out of the ground caused him to start, a shrill little cry as from out of the ground caused him to start, a shrill little cry as from out of the ground caused him to start, a shrill little cry as from out of the ground caused him to start, a shrill little cry as from out of the ground caused him to start, a shrill little cry as from out of the

CHAPTER VII.

CHAPTER VII.

The country air, which had brought unwonted roses to my cheeks while the weather was fine and dry, affected me very differently when, in the first days of September, the rain fell daily in a steady, continuous downpour that soon swelled the river and turned part of the marsh from a swamp into a stagnant, unwholesome lake. The air round the house seemed never free from mist; the moss grew greener and thicker on the pillars of the portico, and bright green stains grew broader and broader down the side of that wing of the house where Mr. and Mrs. Rayner's room was.

I often wondered why they slept there; I knew by the doors and windows that the ground-floor of that wing contained two rooms, a large and a small one. My own was in the same wing, but on the story above; and over mine was a turret that looked out high above the trees, but which was not used, so far as I knew. Haidee slept on the ground-floor, in a cot in the dressing-room next to her parents' bedroom, I knew, while the nursery and servants' room and several spare-rooms were on the upper story besides my own. Why did not Mr. and Mrs. Rayner? I showed the change more quickly than any one, being less used to the place; but little fragile Haidee soon followed suit, and grew more wan and listless than ever, until the luster of her large blue eyes and listless than ever, until the luster of her large blue eyes and not been able to go to church at all. So we knew nothing of what was going on in the parish for two whole weeks. We did not have to wait until the church-porch gathering on the following Sunday, though; for on the second day after the weather had at last grown fine again, when we were all in the drawing-room reading the morning papers over our coffee, we heard the sound of a horse's hoofs coming down the drive. Mr. Rayner hore was to the ark! Come in, ome in; the ladies will make even more of you than usual."

"Can't come in, thanks, Mr. Rayner — I'm too much splashed: the roads are awful still. I've only come with a

"Hallo, Laurence, you are as welcome as the dove was to the ark! Come in, come in; the ladies will make even more of you than usual."

"Can't come in, thanks, Mr. Rayner —I'm too much splashed; the roads are awful still. I've only come with a note from Mrs. Manners to Mrs. Rayner."

"Nonsense! Come in, mud and all."

So he tied up his horse and came in.

Mrs. Manners was the clergyman's wife, and generally sent her notes by one of her half-dozen boys; and I confess I her notes by one of her half-dozen boys; and I confess I hought when I heard what a filmsy sort of errand had brought Mr. Reade, that perhaps—that perhaps some other silly motive had helped to bring him, too. But my own half-acknowledged lancy was disappointed. Not only did Mr. Reade devote all fancy was disappointed. Not only did Mr. Reade devote all fancy was disappointed. Not only did Mr. Reade devote all fancy was disappointed. Not only did Mr. Reade devote all fancy was disappointed. Not only did Mr. Reade devote all remark, he did not even look at me. I confess I was piqued; I certainly did not want Mr. Reade either to look at me or speak to me, but surely common courtesy, especially to a dependent, demanded that he should not ignore my presence pendent, demanded that he should not ignore my presence altogether. So I thought I would take a small and impotent revenge by ignoring his, and, when Haidee got up and slipped out of the window to look at Mr. Reade's horse, I followed her. She was not a bit afraid of him, but ran into the house for some sugar and fed him, and talked to him in a language which he seemed to understand, though I could not.

I was near the bottom of the drive, pulling off some small branches of copper beech to put among the flowers, when I branches of copper beech to put among the flowers, when I heard him utter impatient ejaculations, and I looked and saw then I just turned my head over my shoulder and said stiffly, then I just turned my head over my shoulder and said stiffly, then I just turned my head over my shoulder

gate. "How stupid he is not to get off and open it with his

that he was fumbling with his whip at the fastening of the gate. How stupid he is not to get off and open it with his fingers!"

I was frowning with impatience, when he suddenly looked up and his eyes met mine. There was nothing for it then but in common civility to go and open the gate for him myself; so I walked up the drive very reluctantly and opened it wide without smile.

"Thank you, thank you—so much obliged to you! I walked up the drive very reluctantly and opened it wide without smile.

"Thank you, thank you—so much obliged to you! I walked the well of the world stand still?"

"Pray don't mention it. It is no trouble at all," I said icily, occupied in keeping my armful of flowers together.

And he raised his hat and rode off at a walking pace, while I shut the gate and turned to go down the drive again. I had such a curiously hurt and disappointed feeling—I could not tell why; when again I heard hoofs behind me and the latch of the gate go, and, glancing round, Isaw Mr. Reade on horse-back inside the gate.

"I must apologize for returning so soon, but I find I have lost a stone from my ring, and I think it must have dropped out while I was tumbling at the gate just now.

Politeness obliged me to help him. He fastened his horse's relias round the gate-post and showed me the ring, and I saw the hole where there was a stone missing. Suddenly it flashed through my mind that, while we stood under the shed on that Sunday in the rain, I had noticed the very same hole in the very same ring, and I was just going to tell him that it was no use for him to look, for he had lost the stone much longer than ne fancied, when another thought, which brought the color swiftly to my face and made my lips quiver and my heart beat faster, flashed into my mind and stopped ame. And the thought was that Mr. Reade must know how long ago he had lost that stone, at least as well as I did. And from that moment I would not condescend to pretund to looked hunting about so the shore neck and glanced every now and then at his master,

up surprised.
"Did I? Ah, yes! But, now that you have grown attached to—to—the place, and—and Mrs. Rayner—"No, indeed, I haven't," I interrupted. I don't like her at

"No, indeed, I haven, Thierreport all."

"Well, to Haidee, or the baby. You must have grown "tatached to something or to somebody, or you wouldn't talk as if you didn't want to leave the place," he said, with such abrupt earnestness as to be almost rude.

"I like the house, in spite of the damp, and I love the garden even when it is a swamp, and I like Haidee, and Jane the kitchen-maid, and Mr. Rayner," I said quietly.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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