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## THE FAIR IMPOSTOR.

CHAPTER XXXIII.  
Those Beasty Carriages.

AND it did seem as if the eccentric gentleman had been playing a purposeless game. Since the afternoon when he had obtained the letters and pocketbook, neither Laura nor anyone else in the neighborhood had seen him. He had gone as quietly as he had come, and there seemed to be an end to him and his mysterious proceedings. It is true he had left his portmanteau at the farm; but Jones had told Lady Warner, who had mentioned him casually, in Laura's hearing, that he had had gone abroad, and would not return for months.

Baffled and helpless, Laura had to prepare to assist at the marriage which she would have moved heaven and earth to prevent. Throughout the preparations there was almost as much excitement at the Grange as at the Hall. Gerald, to his great delight, had been asked to act as groomsman; and if he had been Harold's own brother, he could not have shown more affectionate interest and enthusiasm. He was backward and forward between the Grange and the Hall every day; he caused materials for a huge bonfire to be reared on the village green; insisted upon the duke and everybody else could get hold of making this day a general holiday for the workpeople and laborers; stripped the Grange's hothouses for flowers to decorate his office.

"One would think you were going

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to marry Lillian yourself, my dear Gerald," said the duchess, smiling. And he had to turn aside quickly to hide the sudden flush which swept over his face.

"You see, Lillian had grown to be like a sister to me, aunt," he said, quietly. "I shouldn't like the most important day in her life to pass over as if it were an ordinary one."

"There is not much fear of that," laughed her grace. "I shall have only one regret," he added, "and that will be that poor old Slade will not be able to witness it."

"Perhaps he will," said her grace, "he seems so much better."

"No," said Gerald. "I hoped that he would, but he said to-day that he couldn't manage it, and seemed to dread the idea of attempting the exertion."

Ten days had passed since Ethel had told her story, and though Slade had gradually improved and gained strength, he still remained at the cottage, and almost kept his room. Sometimes he would walk slowly up and down the lane, but he seemed to shrink from any further contact with the outside world, and avoided the visitors who still came with inquiries and kind wishes.

Nevertheless, he was making progress, and, notably, had shaken off that dangerous indifference and lassitude. Of everything that was going on, he was kept closely informed by Louis, who, on some pretext or another, was frequently at the Grange and the Hall.

Gerald came almost daily, and would sit and tell of the preparations that were being made; and dilate on Lillian's beauty and general angelic perfection, and would never fail to explore that Slade could not be there to see her married; and Slade would sit, his head leaning on his hand, his face shaded and his eyes fixed on the fire, listening—generally in silence. Sometimes he would ask how Lillian was. "One afternoon he startled Gerald by a strange question. "You say that she is quite well. Have you heard her laugh lately?" "Heard her laugh," repeated Gerald, staring at him and laughing himself. "What a queer question, old chap."

"Why, indeed," said Gerald, but it was some time before he could shake off the impression which the strange question had made.

"Nothing," he replied, absently. "Slade stared at the fire."

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that I have. But Lillian is not one of the laughing sort. She looks, happy enough—at least—what a strange fellow you are, Slade! What are your aims?" and he began to look troubled and perplexed.

"Slade stared at the fire."

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er who was to take his mistress to his arms within a few short hours. "Lillian is very beautiful," he exclaimed, mimicking Harold's absent tone. "Why, you speak as if she were some picture or statue! That's the way with you fellows on whom the gods have bestowed the rarest and most precious gifts they have to give. Why, if I were in your place I think I should die to-night of excessive joy."

"Perhaps it would be as well," said Harold, mechanically. Gerald started and stared. "What did you say?" "—oh, I didn't say anything. I think. Have you got a drop of brandy anywhere about?" I have caught a chill, I think."

"It's those beastly railway carriages," said Gerald, sympathetically. "They nearly kill me. I'll bring you something in a minute—no, I'll go myself. Got a chill? You make me tremble! I want you to turn out to-morrow as fresh as paint, and as handsome as Antonious," and he bounced from the room.

Harold sank into a chair and stared at the fire—just as Dawson Slade, if he could only have seen him, was sitting and staring at his fire at that very moment—and shivered. "Yes, I've got a chill," he muttered; "but it isn't the railway carriages; it's the four sleepless nights. As fresh as paint!" and with a grim smile he looked up at the glass. "I look as if I were going to be hung." Then he started up and paced the room impatiently.

"Heaven and earth, am I mad! I must be bewitched! Here I am going to marry the loveliest creature on earth, the girl whom I would have died for a month ago—and I feel like this! Shame, shame on me for a feeble, shallow-hearted fool to-and-yet, how can I help it? I have striven to forget her—have struggled hard with my folly, but all to no purpose. Sleeping and waking, that other sweet face haunts me. Those eyes of hers are never out of my sight. I can feel the touch of her fingers on mine, even hear her voice. I have but to chance to hear or read her name—'Ethel'—and my heart throbs. God knows I have fought hard, but I have lost the battle. I know I love her. I love Lillian, too, love her dearly. I would die for her now this moment; but I love that gentle, sweet-faced girl better! And I have only seen her three times in my life! If I could only deaden my heart and senses! Time would cure me; it must, it shall! I am to marry Lillian, and I will force my love back to her. It is not a hard task, God knows! It will not be hard for me once I have forgotten that other. Would to Heaven I had never seen her! And she—ah! that's the worst of it!—fool as I am I have got the idea into my head that she—she—could learn to love me. No, no! that's madness! and yet—if it is true—oh, Heaven, how sweet it would have been. Pshaw! I must be going out of my mind. Come, let me play the man, and get rid of this hallucination. At any rate, let me stay this folly, and he sank into the chair again as the door opened.

To be continued.

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