

Literature.
TEMPTATION:
OR
The Lady of Ashurst.

CHAPTER LV.
ANOTHER REVELATION.

Frank had brought a small, beautifully mounted gun, together with a brace and shot-pouch, as a present for Maitland, and as the carriage drove through the grounds around Arden Place, he anxiously watched for the boy, intending to join him, and leave his two companions to seek the interview with Ashley, which they had intended must be private.

Just before the windings of the road brought the house in sight, a whoop resounded through the woodland as wild and shrill as an Indian yell, and the next moment Maitland sprang from the shelter of a clump of young trees, crying out:

"Frank, Frank, is that you? Have you brought my gun, and is it a regular beauty?"

The carriage was stopped, and the young man stepped out with the coveted prize in his hand, after saying to his companions:

"I shall join you in time to return to Ashurst; at present, my appearance would only exasperate my uncle."

The vehicle drove on, and the ecstatic rapture of the lad in his new possessions for a few moments held Frank silent, but the impatience of the lover soon found words.

"There, my little man, that will do for the present; and now, if you really prize my gift so much, repay me for it by telling me all about Evelyn. What has happened to her since I left?"

"Not much. You know she was sent back to her lock-up, but I found a way to get to her and give her my note. I stole up to her door one day when no body's about, and she seems to be in better spirits, though she is very anxious about your return. Yesterday she asked me to come to her door, and she said she must give you the minute I saw you after you came back."

"Quick, quick—give it to me this instant!"

Maitland thrust his hand in his pocket, and then said, with a craftful expression:

"I'm blessed if I don't believe I lost it!"

"You careless little wretch! If you have, I will take the gun from you at once, and you shall shut it up for a month. Find that letter instantly, my unfaithful messenger!"

In the prospect of losing his highly prized gun, Maitland bestirred himself, and hastened to examine every pocket in his clothing, but without any satisfactory result. The letter was in none of them, and he indignantly said:

"You won't take the little kill-deer from me, Frank; that would be too hard on a fellow. Besides, if you do, I'll never help you to another word with your dear sister!"

Curbing his desire to take him in hand and administer a good shaking to him, Frank said:

"Where have you been since the letter came into your possession? You must have dropped it!"

"I've been everywhere, for the pesky thing was given to me yesterday. Let me see—oh, yes, I remember now; I was afraid I might lose it, and I put it under the lining of my cap."

Frank snatched the battered, ill-used chapeau from his head, and nearly tore the lining out in his eager search for the promised missive.

Crushed and soiled, but still most precious, Frank at last drew it forth, and was turning away to read it in solitude, when Maitland said:

"The things are mine now, Frank, and I may do as I like with them?"

"Yes, yes, you have bravely won them, but don't go far from me, and, above all, don't shoot any person with your new gun!"

"Oh, I'll stay here till you come back. I'll only load the pretty little shiner, but I promise not to fire till you show me how to manage it."

Satisfied with this assurance, Frank leaned against a large tree just out of sight of the lad, and hurriedly opened Evelyn's letter. It ran thus:

"I have persuaded Maitland to bring me pencil and paper, that I may write to you, and what is more, that if I am not again and again reiterated the story, I could not have given credence to it."

"Frank, I am absolved from all duty to Mr. Ashley in a most extraordinary manner, for Jane most solemnly asserts that he is not my father. This is the story she tells."

"The daughter who was the wife of my father, who, you know, was the heiress to this estate, died in her infancy, and I was taken in her place from the house of Jane's sister, where I had been left to be taken care of."

"From the account of my nurse, it seems that I had been adopted by an American lady who died in France, and that my father, my husband placed me with Madame Tompkins, and never returned to claim me again."

"It is singular that I should bear the Ashley mark upon my nose, and that I have no claim on the name and fortune which considered mine."

"Nameless, homeless, fortuneless, I do not expect you to marry me now, Frank, but you must be my friend, and rescue me and the poor creature who was my wife from this dreadful captivity, and enable us to tell our story where it will be believed and acted on."

"Come to me as soon as you can, if that is impossible, send a reply by Maitland, that I may know what can be done."

EVELYN.

Frank read these lines over and over in a state of complete bewilderment, but he could make nothing more out of them than the plain facts stated, and at length, thrusting them into his pocket, and returning to Maitland, abruptly asked:

"Can you bring me within speech of Evelyn, youngster?"

The boy shook his head.

"If you will, I will give you the pony you liked so much at Ashurst."

"Oh, that will be as jolly as the gun! Let me see—oh, yes, I remember now; I was afraid I might lose it, and I put it under the lining of my cap."

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Maitland, if you'll only go down and keep watch half an hour at the lower door that no one may surprise us, I will give you a saddle and bridle with your pony."

"Oh, Frank, you're worth all the trumps in the pack," exclaimed the delighted lad, preparing to dash down the staircase. "If I see old Hagar coming, I'll give a whistle inside the door, and she'll be here, and you'll have time enough to get down stairs and hide yourself among the traps there before she comes in. I'm in for it now, and I mean to see you and Evelyn out of this scrape."

When he was fairly gone, Wentworth spoke to his imprisoned love.

"I have read your letter, Evelyn, and I do not know what to make of it. Is Jane prepared to swear before a magistrate that you are not the daughter of my uncle?"

"She is, and anxious to do so; but—I do not wish her to proclaim what he did in such a manner as to injure him. Oh, Frank, in spite of all his harshness toward me, I have a tender feeling of regard for him, and I cannot willingly become the means of bringing punishment on the man I have been taught to regard as my father."

"My dear love, I expected nothing less from your tender heart. I also wish to save the name of my uncle from disgrace, but in what way are we to do this, Evelyn, unless we take our fate into our own hands and carry out our original intention to elope with the first opportunity?"

"We wait for the train, but go at once to the magistrate across the line who will unite us in a few hours after we leave this place. Speak, my love, shall it not be?"

"Dear Frank, have you reflected that I am a nameless outcast, with little hope of ever discovering to whom I belong? We leave me from this dreadful imprisonment I entreat you; but beyond that I have no right to tax your generosity, nor can I consent to accept the sacrifice you would make for my sake."

"I shall make none, Evelyn, believe me. Bessie is betrothed to Delaney with the full consent of those most deeply interested in her, and I am consequently the heir of my grandfather. That codicil Minny produced I know is worthless, and the estate is mine. But it will be valuable to me if you will consent to share it with me. Do you think that I could see you cast upon the cold world, with no means of living—no shelter for your head, and the old woman who has been so faithful to you from your infancy?"

Jane, who seemed to have drawn near the door, here broke in:

"You are very right, Mr. Wentworth, and my young lady is full of romantic notions that she'll soon find she must give up. You only need to promise that she shall agree to whatever you think best, when the right time comes."

"That is talking sense, Jane, and I leave my dear lady to her. I shall be sure no time in rescuing you, you may be sure. After tonight I will come hither in a carriage, which I will conceal in the woodlands, and I will get here about the time the old woman comes with your supper, seize, gag and lock her up in your place. It will be easy enough to effect my escape."

"I understand, Mr. Frank, and I am quite ready to go with my young lady. I am stronger than I have been, and I am sure I should be no hindrance to you."

"That is well. Do you consent to this arrangement, Evelyn? Remember, you owe nothing to Mr. Ashley, and to me you have pledged your truth."

"Speak the truth, Miss Evelyn, for you know your heart is with him," insisted Jane.

"Yes—I know—that—and—and—I suppose I must follow it. If you succeed in your plan, Frank, I shall be ready to go with you; but pray leave me now; I tremble every moment lest you may be discovered."

"Farewell then till night. Before an hour day dawns I will rescue you and bear you away to happiness, my own precious one."

A shrill whistle sounded below, and Wentworth rushed down the stairs to encounter Maitland at the foot laughing in great glee.

"Time's up—thought you'd never come if I left you alone, so I waited, but old Hagar ain't coming yet, so I know of it."

"I am so happy to see you after giving Evelyn such a fright, and I was just leaving when you summoned me. Be sure and be silent as the dead about my visit to this place, Maitland."

"Do you think this child is a born idiot, Frank, to go and tell on himself what would be sure to bring him in a scrape?"

"Oh, no, I thank you, Mr. Wentworth. Wentworth smiled, and rewarded his sharpness by taking him into his confidence and enlisting him in his service for the evening."

"It's very well you told me about it," he replied, "for Hagar takes her grandson with her every night to watch at the door while she goes in; I can take care of him for you, so she shan't be in the way."

"So much the better; I shall rely on you."

They skirted the main building and separated before they came in sight of the entrance. When Wentworth entered he saw his aunt standing near the door of the room which Mr. Ashley usually occupied, and comprehended that she had been listening to what was passing within.

She turned to him as she heard his step, and gasped:

"Oh, Frank! something dreadful is going on in there. I heard Leon's voice raised to such a furious pitch that I ran to him, but he ordered me out before those strangers, and commanded me not to come near him while his visitors stayed. What can it be—can it be that he has fallen into such a degree?"

"I do not think those gentlemen had anything to tell my uncle that can seriously affect you, Aunt Augusta, so you may compose yourself on that score. I know that the revelation they came to make concerning Bessie would excite my uncle fearfully, so I kept out of the way till they were gone."

"What of Bessie? Has she returned home?"

"Oh yes—I brought her back last night. I cannot explain her conduct, but Bessie has declared and gained her independence. Neither you nor Mr. Ashley will be troubled much more by her affairs."

Augusta then inquired, but at that moment the door near which they stood was thrown open with a crash, and Mr. Ashley came rushing out with unwonted speed for him; and, as if he were a man, he turned his angry face toward him and cried out:

"So you have come hither with the leeches of this profession, and I shall take pains to prove utterly false! Come in, sir, and tell me if you credit the infamy they would fix upon me."

As Wentworth entered to enter the room, Augusta did the same; but he furiously turned on her:

"Go away, Madam! What are you prying about here for? I should like to know—go back where you belong!"

Without venturing to reply, his wife retreated at once, though she was evidently in a state of fearful excitement as to what was passing so near her.

So soon as Wentworth entered the apartment in which Hunter and Martin were, his uncle slammed the door violently behind him, and threw himself panting upon the sofa.

Hunter hastened to say:

"I have not yet revealed my convictions on this affair to your nephew, Mr. Ashley. I considered it but justice to you to refrain from doing so till I had gained a confirmation of them from yourself."

Ashley uttered a tremendous oath, and thundered:

"That confirmation you will never get from me, but you are welcome to tell him what I said here for, I should like to know—go back where you belong!"

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"I have not yet revealed my convictions on this affair to your nephew, Mr. Ashley. I considered it but justice to you to refrain from doing so till I had gained a confirmation of them from yourself."

Ashley glared on him, and with a curling lip replied:

"Go, then, upon your fruitless errand. I deny the crime of which you would accuse me. Evelyn is the heiress to the Arden estate, and I shall maintain the right to her inheritance."

A new light began to dawn on Wentworth, and almost trembling with excitement, he turned to Hunter and said:

"For Heaven's sake, explain what you both mean; for I seem trembling with the force of a discovery which is of the last importance to me."

Hunter rapidly gave him an outline of the facts, and the suspicions arising from them, which he had just laid before his uncle with so disappointing a result.

Combining these with what Evelyn's letter revealed to him, Frank's mind flew to the heir of the Arden estate, and the child referred to; but his experience of his uncle's violent and unreasonable temper had taught him caution in his own mind that he resisted the first impulse to draw forth the letter and place it in Hunter's hands.

By this conclusively proving what that gentleman sought to establish, he would again place Evelyn in the position she held before, and possibly cause her to shrink at the last moment from keeping her word to him, and render it impossible for him to gain access to her.

He reflected a few moments, and then asked:

"Uncle, will it not be best to place my cousin in her true position, and carry out the will of my grandfather by uniting the two heirs to his estate? Since Bessie is now out of the question as my wife, for she is betrothed to Delaney, the best thing you can do is to consent to give Evelyn to me?"

While Wentworth thus spoke, the changes in Ashley's face were frightful, and the lookers on were apprehensive that he would fall down on his knees, and utter some words of prayer.

"How dare you refer to that beggarly Delaney in my presence! Regardless of truth, you dare have come here to captivate me with the story you have so cleverly concocted among you. If you expect me to believe such trash you are greatly mistaken. Mr. Ashley claims Bessie for his daughter, forsooth, that she may give her to the next heir to the Arden estate, when Evelyn's claims are once settled. Then she comes affecting to believe that she is so cleverly deceived among you, and coolly ask me to confirm the will of my father by giving you the girl who is the grandchild you assert to be his lawful heir!"

"I'll give you both in the inferno first!" Having uttered this defiance, he threw himself back upon his chair, and poured out a glass of brandy, which he drank, and cranked it off without diluting it with a drop of water.

The three gentlemen exchanged glances and Hunter arose, as he said:

"I had a faint hope that this interview would end differently, Ashley. I recalled our early intimacy, and I will prove some good impulses which as a young man you possessed, induced me to believe that all sense of justice and humanity were not dead within you, and that this morning has convinced me of the contrary, and I now declare war to the knife against you. I will not only strip you of the wealth you illegally enjoy, but I will prove your villainous actions before the world, and men shall know all your baseness."

The black eyes of Ashley flashed a look of hatred and defiance upon the speaker, and he roared like a lion:

"Do your worst. By the time you get back from your Quixotic voyage, I shall be where all the accusations that can be brought against me will have no power to harm me, even if you could prove them; but that I defy you to do."

"We shall see," replied Hunter, bowing slightly. "If you refer to your speedy appearance before a higher tribunal to answer for the deeds done in the flesh, I think the best preparation you can make for the great occasion will be to right the wrong you are doing by giving up the power to do so is placed in your hands."

"I have often heard it said that the d-I can quote Scripture to serve his own purpose, and I see it now illustrated, I can dispense with any further lecturing from Mr. Hunter."

The visitors, finding that nothing was to be gained by prolonging the interview, moved to ward the door. As Frank passed him, Ashley said to him:

"I advise you not to show your face here again, Mr. Francis Wentworth. From this day you are to consider my doors closed against you. As to Evelyn, I will lay her in her grave sooner than give her to you for your wife."

Wentworth made no reply, but he congratulated himself that the defiance which he had acted in withholding what he knew from his uncle. When they were again in the carriage and on the way to Ashurst, Captain Martin said:

"The hard-hearted obstinacy of that man is beyond belief; but no one will be troubled with his opposition long. Death is in his face now, and the death of liquid fire he constantly imbibes will take a very little while to do his business effectually."

"The sooner the better for all concerned with him," replied Hunter; "for if death does not come to the rescue, Ashley's violence will compel me to bring pistol pointed at his head, and I shall not be long in being shot to pieces. I feel only loathing and contempt toward him. It will be a long journey to Europe, but I will make it without delay, and I will here to see justice done on such a miscreant as Ashley has proved himself in every relation of life."

Wentworth had by this time regained composure enough to reflect on the best course for him to pursue. He now spoke:

"What will you say, Mr. Hunter, when I tell you that I have the proof you seek in my pocket now?—I am now a Jew, my will be quite unnecessary."

His companion stared at him in surprise and Hunter asked:

"Why, in heaven's name, did you not produce it just now? We might then have dictated terms to Leon Ashley."

Frank shook his head.

"If you would be more wary than I do, or you should be more wary than that. He never listens to anything that conflicts with his own arbitrary will, and if I had betrayed him, he would have resorted to such severe measures with her that I should even have trembled before her."

"I do not wish her to suspect that she is really her grandfather's daughter, and she is bound irreversibly to such high ideas of honor and duty in spite of his cruel treatment, so strong an attachment to my uncle, that she would be capable of refusing to go with me were I to stand in her way."

"Then the young lady herself has made some discovery affecting her position? Excuse me, Mr. Wentworth, and do not speak a rational word for weeks."

"My head is not as clear as it might be; the astounding revelation I have heard today have slightly bewildered it. But pray read this letter sent to me by Miss Ashley, and you will comprehend my meaning. Her nurse, Jane, can furnish all the evidence necessary to prove that Evelyn is the child left by her sister by Mr. Allen."

After glancing over the letter, Hunter passed it to Martin and said:

"I inquired for this woman, and asked to have her confronted with me this morning; but Ashley declared that she was in a dying condition, and had not spoken a rational word for weeks. I did not then insist on seeing her and judging of her condition myself, because I had no return there with a warrant demanding the person of the woman, and ascertain what her condition actually is."

"We can manage better than that. If Jane has been ill, now even she is shut up in the same room with her, her good nurse must have restored her, and she spoke to me to-day when I went the way to the door of the tower, and declared herself strong enough to effect her escape with her young mistress. With Maitland's assistance, I am certain that I can release them, and I shall leave her in ignorance of what you have told me to-day."

"Bravo! my lad; you are good at planning," said Martin, "if you only prove as good at executing, all will be well; but if that madcap boy who saluted us with such a yell this morning is your ally, I am afraid he will prove rather a dangerous one."

"Oh, I have brought up Maitland, and he has too little love for his father to betray me. I must marry Evelyn within the next four days, or the estate of my grandfather may pass into other hands to be devoted to charitable purposes."

"Oh, what's that! Could so sensible a man as Judge Ashley have made such a provision as that? There is no time to be lost, sure enough, and the young lady must be kept in the dark for her own good till it is too late to give any weight to her father's claims upon her."

"Such is my view, and that is one reason why I withheld the proof of Mr. Hunter's accusation from my uncle."

Hunter now spoke:

"You have acted with discretion, Mr. Wentworth, and I feel the certainty that in your poor Eva's child will find the protector she so greatly needs. In your union with her, and that of Miss Wilde with the heir of the Arden estate, all necessity for a public exposure of the double crime which has been committed may be avoided. Furious as Ashley is in the prospect of such a denouement, it is the only one in which he can find safety."

"Then Delaney is really the heir whose existence my uncle has tried to ignore. How is it that the estates go to another name?"

"His father took that of Delaney for money bequeathed on that condition, but my young friend will resume his family name when he takes possession of his inheritance," explained Captain Martin.

The remainder of the drive was taken up in arranging the details of the proposed elopement. It was settled that Hunter should accompany Wentworth, and remain in charge of the carriage, while Frank went on foot to the tower, and thence to the rescue of the captive ladies.

When they gained the cross roads, Bessie would meet them there, and take the place of Jane in the carriage, send the woman on to recruit her exhausted strength in the quiet and repose of Ashurst, while Bessie accompanied the lovers to their home.

When the result of the drive to Arden Place was made known to Bessie, she eagerly entered into the plan proposed, and Delaney so earnestly requested to be included in the party that he gained his point.

The State in his mind was twelve miles from Ashurst, and the old man who officiated there as Hymen's delegate, was known always to be in readiness at the shortest notice, and at any hour, to perform his devoir.

Frank insisted that they could reach their destination by ten o'clock, and he again at Ashurst by midnight. Within an hour he was in the carriage, and his husband, Evelyn soon learned who she really was, and on the following day made such overtures of reconciliation to her father as she deemed most likely to succeed.

Bessie seized an opportunity to go up to her mother, and explain to her what had that morning happened. When Mrs. Ashley learned how providentially things had turned out, she wept bitterly and with deep emotion said:

"God has been far better to me than I deserved. Bessie, I must prove to you that my penitence is sincere, by confessing to you a sin that I might have concealed with impunity. Open my desk, and give me the two folded papers you will find there."

Bessie obeyed, and her mother held them up and said:

"This is the codicil and its copy. They are forgeries, Bessie, made by me in my mad desire to force you into my mad scheme to force you into Frank's arms. Frank told me that I did not succeed, for I now know that you would both have been miserable. Burn them; let me see them consumed to ashes as soon as may be."

"Oh, Minny!" exclaimed the appalling girl, "how dared you do such a thing as this?"

"Oh, child, child, I would have done anything to save you from the fate I dreaded for you; but God has mercifully brought good out of evil. The sin is bitterly repented of, Bessie, and Christ himself has said, 'though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow.' I have atoned for my evil ways as far as lies in my power, and now, my dear daughter, pray for me that I may be made whole."

Bessie was too much overcome by this unexpected confession to return very soon to her guests. She shut herself up in her own room till dinner was announced, and then, with some effort, she sought to meet her mother, but the cloud of humiliation that rested on it through her mother's wrong-doing, "Deliver us from temptation," was the prayer upon her lips when she again went in to Mrs. Ashley, and gave her the kiss of reconciliation and forgiveness.

(To be continued)

A lady in Syracuse writes: "For about seven years before taking Northrop & Lyman's Vegetable Compound, I suffered from a complaint very prevalent with our sex. I was unable to walk any distance, or stand on my feet for more than a few minutes at a time, without feeling exhausted; but now, I am thankful to say, I can walk two miles without feeling the least inconvenience. For female complaints it has no equal."

"Papa," said an inquisitive youth, "what is the difference between a broker and a banker?" Papa is puzzled, but brings experience to his aid. He finally tells the difference—"A broker is one who breaks you to pieces by degrees; a banker takes you in at a gulp."

In God Repulse. James McMurdo, writing from Kinsale, says:—"B. B. R., as a remedy for diseases of the blood, liver and kidneys, has an excellent reputation in this country. I have used it, and speak with experience as well as observation. It is the only medicine I want, and I advise others afflicted to try it."

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