

# SWEET IS REVENGE.

By J. Fitzgerald Molloy.

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## CHAP. IX.—WHAT WORDS ARE THESE.

Mrs. Crayworth entered the white drawing room, an apartment specially decorated for its present mistress. On the large white panels reaching almost to the ceiling and heavily framed with mouldings of dead gold, an Italian artist had painted various designs, all bearing traces of the rich imagination and glowing color of his southern race. Here was a gallant knight and a lady fair, walking through trellised gardens, with a world of flowers all round and the blue sky above filled with birds of radiant plumage. A second was covered by wreaths of Tuscan vines and orange branches in bloom, from the intricacies of which wild birds and watchful eye animals peered here and there; a third showed groups of shepherds and shepherdesses with crooks and lutes, dancing near a fountain wedged in by woods.

Sir Danvers having drunk his coffee, quietly disappeared in order to keep an appointment with his agent; and presently Meg, followed by her poor relation left, that she might play tennis with her neighbors, the Deedsons. Mrs. Crayworth had intended to accompany her, knowing the curate was pretty certain to be present, but she excused herself, saying the sun was too strong, she had a slight headache, and preferred remaining indoors. Presently declaring she had forgotten her book in the adjoining library, she sauntered into that room, leaving the communicating door ajar. Ethel and Lord Hector were alone together for the first time since they had met. Being aware of this Mrs. Crayworth was anxious to hear what might pass between them, and therefore stationed herself as near as possible to the drawing room entrance, with an open volume on her knees.

Her design was, however, thwarted; she had scarcely been a minute in the library when Lady Fothergille and Lord Hector Maynes strolled on to the terrace followed by Tito. Mrs. Crayworth waited patiently until the sounds of their footsteps quite died away, before she rose to watch them. The wide and stately terrace extended in front of the abbey; at either end stood life-sized marble statues of Pagan divinities, once white but now yellow and discoloured by the rains and suns of many a season. In the green velvet sward of its bank a flight of time-worn steps led to a second terrace, below which stood a great stone basin holding the waters of a fountain that sparkled and splashed in the sunlight. Beyond this stretched acres of turf dotted here and there with clumps of spreading trees beneath which groups of deer browsed in the shade.

Mrs. Crayworth, book in hand, re-entered the white drawing-room, crossed the great hall, and walked into the small dining-room. The servants had cleared the luncheon table, the apartment was quite empty, seeing which she crept softly to the deep embrasure of a window just in time to see the figures she watched leave the terrace and turn to the left. Their course lay towards a quaint Italian garden with myrtle hedges and orange trees, fountains and statues, beds of roses and passion flowers, making a blaze of colour against their green surrounding. Halt encircling the garden, and sheltering it from northerly winds, rose shrubberies, thickly planted with lilac and silver broom, arbutus and larch, acacia and mountain ash. Winding pathways, where two could scarcely walk abreast, led by divers routes from the Italian garden to the heart of this plantation, in which a little rustic chalet had been built of rough wood, which kindly nature had covered with ivy, lichen and trailing plants.

The shrubbery was an ideal spot for a poet or a lover. Thick branches screened it from the heat and glare of the sun. Larch and lilac gave their perfume to every breeze; blackbird and thrush sang there all the day long. And on summer nights, when a fair moon hung in the azure sky, and all was silent save for the rustle of birds' wings in the branches, the nightingale's voice thrilled the air with the passion of her song.

Mrs. Crayworth felt little doubt Lady Fothergille and her companion would take their way towards the chalet, and had no hesitation in deciding to follow and overhear if possible what passed between them. Her dark eyes sparkled with excitement; her heart beat high in anticipation of some discovery which might give her a knowledge of their past feelings and present position towards each other, and place them within her power.

Slowly and cautiously she left the abbey by one of the French windows, an open book in her hands, and descending the terrace walked towards the Italian garden. Though her head was bent above the pages, her eyes wandered to right and left, but those whom she sought were nowhere in sight. They had evidently gone straight to the chalet. To that spot sheltered by the plants she would follow them; if by mischance she encountered them she would look up surprised from her volume, express her astonishment, and withdraw.

Gathering her skirts tightly around her, that their rustle might not be heard, she entered the shrubbery, and took a path she knew led by a circuitous route to the back of the chalet. From time to time she paused to listen. Once she heard Lady Fothergille's voice raised as if in supplication, but could not catch the words, and again she heard Lord Hector laughing merrily enough. Then Tito barked, on which she remained motionless, scarcely daring to breathe until those whom she tracked had placed a greater distance between themselves and her. With footsteps stealthy as a cat's, she followed, taking care not to move a branch or rustle a leaf as she glided forward.

At last she came in sight of the chalet to the back of which she directed her steps, and there paused once more. Voices sounded from within, she drew closer and closer yet, and heard Lady Fothergille say—

"Then you have returned almost as poor as you went?"

"Almost," he answered. "I am sorry I ever left England. Even if I were making money in Australia I should not have returned."

"Why?"

"Can you ask me? It was misery for me to be absent from the woman I loved. I envied every man around her the pleasure of which I of all others was denied—the mere happiness of looking on her face."

"Then," she said in a low voice, "you are still unchanged?"

"I am. Whether I was in the midst of crowded cities, or surrounded by vast solitudes, but one face rose up before me, but one woman filled my thoughts. I longed, prayed, and hoped to be near her: and here I am, back once more."

Mrs. Crayworth strained her ears to hear Lady Fothergille's answer, but none came; she neither rebuked him for his folly, nor expressed delight at his presence.

"Look at this," he said, and Mrs. Crayworth heard a sharp sound, as if a watch or locket was opened. "This photograph and this lock of hair have been as a talisman, keeping me heart-whole and loyal; they have been my only comfort through many a weary day."

The listener heard the sound of a kiss; she could not say whether it was imprinted on the photograph or on Lady Fothergille's lips. She searched for a crevice in the woodwork of the chalet through which she might spy, but could find none.

"How strange it all seems," Ethel remarked, "to look back and trace our lives. But a few brief years ago we were children playing in the grounds of your father's castle. You remember?"

"I have never forgotten," he replied.

"Then I was sent to France, and on my return came that foolish episode in my life."

"Is it foolish to have loved?" he asked sadly.

"As I have loved, yes. It took me years to wring it from my heart. I warred with myself, I prayed to heaven, and at last I have succeeded," she answered.

"And you have become mistress of Fothergille abbey," she said.

"Do you say this to chide me?" she asked.

The rustle of a dress gave notice that the speakers rose, whereupon Tito barked, and the listener retreated a few yards within the shade of some lilacs. But as those within the chalet did not depart, Mrs. Crayworth gently returned and resumed her place. The next words her ear caught were spoken by Lord Hector, and formed part of a sentence, the first words of which she lost.

"Then when I returned a young undergraduate and saw my old playfellow, the affection I felt as a boy burst into passion, and I swore to make her my wife, to win fortune for her sake, and give her the position she deserved."

"It was hardly wise. Your father would never have consented to the marriage, and you were depending on him."

"Unfortunately I was, and am to some extent even now; but my love is as strong to-day as it was then. Tell me, Ethel, are you happy?"

To catch her reply, Mrs. Crayworth moved closer to the chalet. As she did, she stepped on a broken branch, that snapped under her feet. Immediately Tito raised his voice and barked, the listener retreated behind the lilacs and down a pathway, the dog pursuing, until, catching sight of her, his barking ended in a low, threatening growl. Frightened and hurried she sped onward, left the shrubberies, and reached the Italian garden, where, panting and exhausted, she flung herself upon a marble bench beside a fountain.

Her first thought was, had she escaped unseen, and on consideration she came to the conclusion she had. The path she had taken curved suddenly to the right and then to the left, so that unless pursued she could not have been observed. She would then and there have willingly strangled or poisoned the dog, if it lay in her power, for having interrupted her at a critical moment; but she had heard sufficient to convince her Lord Hector had been, and was yet in love with Ethel, who had sacrificed her affection for the sake of wealth and position.

Having, as she said, wrung her love from her heart, she was not likely to compromise herself with Lord Hector, and lose all she had gained. By her own confession, Mrs. Crayworth concluded she was a cold and mercenary woman with whom the good things of the world were of far more importance than affairs of the heart. With all her soul the widow wished it were otherwise. The baronet had repeatedly repulsed her advances, his wife had usurped a position she longed to enjoy, scarcely concealing her dislike under a thin veneer of politeness, and Mrs. Crayworth would gladly have seen both bowed down by humiliation and miseries. An opportunity seemed at hand by which she could, with judgment and malice, affect her desires; but how she might use it she could not yet determine. Would she stir up Sir Danvers suspicion and wrath, or let him rest in unconsciousness of what was passing, until, perhaps, his honor was ruined.

It might be safer to rouse the baronet's jealousy, for if Lady Fothergille had outlived her former love for Lord Hector, or was too prudent to risk her position, Mrs. Crayworth might never have the satisfaction of seeing her covered with shame. She would awake the husband's suspicions, see him writhe upon the rack of doubt and grief, and perhaps eventually urge him to take steps which would thrust his wife on the love and protection of his rival. If, as an unseen prompter, she could accomplish this, then would she feel happy, for her revenge would be complete. She had learned one thing concerning Lady Fothergille's past, and upon this foundation she hoped to erect a scheme that would effect her ruin.

As she came to this conclusion she heard steps advancing towards her, and supposed Captain Fothergille was coming to question her regarding Meg, whom she had wilfully let take her way without concerning herself about his request. She opened her book, and was seemingly absorbed in its pages, when a cheery, pleasant voice cried out—

"Ah, Mrs. Crayworth, delighted to find you."

She looked up and saw the baronet's tall, erect figure, and florid, smiling face, and remembered how often, led away by his gracious manner and pleasant courtesies, she had believed herself to have secured his heart.

"Dear Sir Danvers," she replied in her sweetest manner, "I haven't strayed very far; I have been here since lunch."

She moved her skirts aside and he sat down on the marble bench. "The house seems deserted; have you any idea where my wife is," he asked.

"If I don't mistake she went down to the rectory about an hour ago," replied Mrs. Crayworth. Her heart beat high, for the time had arrived when she might begin the game she meditated.

"Oh well, I'll go down and find her there presently. I expected to have seen her with Lord Hector in the tennis court."

"I believe he went around to the stables with Capt. Fothergille. By the way, what an interesting man your old friend is."

"Lord Hector. He's not an old friend of mine; I never saw him till today, but my wife and he have known each other since they were children."

"Indeed. That accounts for their close friendship."

Her tone grated on the baronet, but taking no heed of it he continued, "They come from the same place and were old playfellows."

"They seem about the same age," she remarked.

She had touched on a sensitive point, and her hearer winced. He had never regretted the fact of having reached his 46th year until he met Ethel Fayne, but from that hour the disparity of their ages was a constant source of unhappiness to him. Mrs. Crayworth had already placed him on the rack. "He must be," he answered, "a few years her senior."

"And he is interesting," she went on.

"Yes, good looking, undoubtedly."

"If I were young and romantic he is the man I should desire to marry," she continued, watching the effect of her words from out the corners of her keen, cold eyes.

"Dear Mrs. Crayworth, you are young. A girl is never more than eighteen, a married woman never exceeds four and twenty."

"I wish that were true, but dear Sir Danvers," she added, with a sigh, "when people have come to our age they have done with youth and its follies." The smile faded from his cheery face; the woman, he reflected, must be fifty if she were a day, and yet she clasped him with herself. Though he could count his six-and-forty years, he felt younger than many a man of thirty, whilst he looked much under forty.

"Lord Hector interests me much," she said, presently.

"I had no idea you were so susceptible."

"Believe me, all women are, though they may not show their hearts as I do. A man who has a history always fascinates us."

"And has he a history?" the baronet asked.

"Yes, quite a romance, as I gathered from stray hints he threw out whilst talking to Lady Fothergille. You know women are quick at coming to conclusions, and I can only give you the gist of his story."

"I must tell Lord Hector his tale has awakened your sympathy."

"Don't," she said. "I dare say he would not like to have it repeated to male ears, and I feel intuitively he would not wish you of all men to hear it."

"Then you mustn't tell me," said Sir Danvers, looking grave.

"This is only my surmise, my nonsense perhaps, for after all there is nothing to tell of any importance. He merely fell in love when he was a youth, and his love was accepted. When he came to man's estate he went away to gain fame and fortune for the sake of her he worshipped, and returned to find she had already married a man for whom she didn't care, but who had secured her both wealth and position. Isn't it interesting?" she asked.

"Very," he said mechanically, his eyes fixed on the waters of the little fountain playing in the sunlight a look of pain gradually creeping over his face.

His thoughts went back to the summer day when standing in the shadow of the limes the woman he sought as his wife told him she had loved once with all her strength. That was seven years previously, when she was but eighteen, and since then the man to whom she had given the precious boon of her heart had passed out of her life. Could it be he had returned today from the dead; still anxious, perhaps, for her love, though she was the wife of another. It seemed probable, the time and circumstance seemed to fit with Lord Hector's movements. She had never told her husband the name of him she had loved, indeed she shrank from all reference to the past; but Sir Danvers could scarce doubt he and Lord Hector were one and the same.

But what if they were, he asked himself, brightening mentally. He had implicit faith and confidence in his wife; he would not suppose she had wedded him merely to gain position and fortune; she had told him she loved him, and he would believe her word against the world. Mrs. Crayworth, noting the expression of his face, saw he endeavored to release himself from the rack, and accordingly she strove to bind him down into firmer bondage.

"A little romance always interests the weaker sex. Lord Hector is now quite a suffering hero in my eyes; but I am not more susceptible than dear Lady Fothergille, whose seemed quite overcome by his narrative; she is really too good natured."

The shadow of pain crept over his features once more. "She is," he replied, "one of the best hearted women in the world."

"Indeed, she is all heart," his companion answered, her words laden with emphasis.

"I must go now, I fear I have interrupted you too long," he said, rising.

"Oh, no, Sir Danvers. I have been striving to read, but my headache is so bad I cannot get on with my book."

"Sitting in the sun will not improve it, I fear."

"No, but it is so close indoors; I should like to seek shelter in the chalet for a while, but I never can find it because of all these winding paths: it's like the maze at Hampton Court."

"Then let me conduct you there," he answered.

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"If you will be so kind," she said rising and walking beside him to the shrubberies. "I suppose I shall be able to find my way back again; but if you don't see me at dinner, you will know where to seek me, and come to the aid of a lady in distress," she went on laughingly, exulting in being able to lead Sir Danvers unsuspectingly to the spot where his wife and Lord Hector were seated.

"All right, I shall remember," he said, but there was no responsive gaiety in his tone, no smile upon his honest face.

As they advanced towards the chalet Tito's bark was heard and presently the dog came running down one of the paths. When he saw Mrs. Crayworth he stopped, looked at her from out the corners of his eyes, growled and showed his teeth. She stepped back with an affected cry of fear, and laid her hand on Sir Danvers's arm.

"Tito," said his master reproachfully, "you are a wicked dog, you mustn't behave in this way to a lady. What brings you here, Sir, eh?"

The animal came forward, rubbed his head against Sir Danvers's legs, wagged his bushy tail, and then bounded forward. They were now within a few yards of the chalet, in another minute they had turned the last winding of the path and coming in front, saw Lady Fothergille and Lord Hector seated on the little bench within.

"Ethel," said Sir Danvers, and then remained silent. The day had suddenly become dark for him.

"Did you want me, dear?" she asked calmly, but he could see traces of emotion on her face.

"Lady Fothergille and I have been talking of old times, Sir Danvers," Lord Hector said. "It seems quite an age since we met."

"No doubt," replied the baronet, who gazed earnestly at his wife. She met his eyes fearlessly, as he would fain persuade himself.

"I fear," replied the widow sweetly, "I am to blame for having interrupted you, dear Lady Fothergille. I have such a headache I was seeking shade, and Sir Danvers offered to conduct me to the chalet. I had not the least idea you were here."

"Your interruption does not matter. We had quite finished our conversation," Ethel replied, gazing at her, something of the old fear and distrust of the woman returning to her mind.

"What a delightful place you have, Sir Danvers," Lord Hector remarked. "I quite envy you," he added.

"Sir Danvers is to be envied in many ways," Mrs. Crayworth said with a covert sneer.

"I am going back to the house Danvers. Are you coming?" Ethel asked, placing one hand within his arm.

"Yes," he replied, "if Mrs. Crayworth will excuse me."

"Dear Sir Danvers, of course. Thanks so much for having conducted me here; it is a charming spot, and I hope I shall often enjoy the solitude,—that is if my coming doesn't interfere with Lady Fothergille."

Ethel made no response; with her husband beside her, and followed by Lord Hector and Tito, she left the spot.

"Mrs. Crayworth flung aside her book, pulled the black fringe half an inch lower over her forehead, and sat down. Lady Fothergille's cold disdain raked in her breast."

"She hates me," the widow thought; "but she shall fear me before I have done with her. Today I have made the first move in the game which I hope will end in bitterness and grief for her, and in humiliation for the fool who has made her his wife."

Feeling satisfied with having begun her scheme so well, she fell to considering how she might effect the ruin of the woman she detested.

CHAPTER X.—JACK BARYL'S VISITOR.

Jack Baryl had little difficulty in overtaking the mysterious visitor who had called at Capt. Fothergille's rooms. That tall figure heavily veiled, with its neutral tinted shabby garments, and nervous gait, was easily distinguishable amongst the tide of human life that at this hour flowed through Piccadilly. In what the attraction lay which she exercised over him he could not say; her quaint and singular appearance, her abrupt and nervous manner, aroused his curiosity, and excited his interest; something in the pale and worn face with its bright brown hair prematurely streaked with grey, assured him she had a history in which sorrow had played a prominent part.

Remaining well in the back ground he kept close watch on her, resolving to track her movements and ascertain where she lived. She continued her way down Piccadilly towards the circus; now moving swiftly along, and again falling into a slow listless pace. At the corners of streets she should turn to right or left, but after some hesitation invariably continued her onward way.

The pauses she made before shop windows tried the valet's patience to its utmost power of endurance. The gorgeous display of jewellery, the brave show of brocades and satin, white statuary on malachite pedestals thrown into relief against curtains of tawny hues, and rows of engravings and water-colours had, it was evident, all the charm of novelty to her eyes. Before such objects she tarried so long that the watchful eye of a suspicious detective, supposing she was one of the light-fingered fraternity, was attracted, and for some time Jack Baryl was not the only one who followed her footsteps.

But no matter how interested she might be in the objects at which she looked, she never once raised the heavy veil hiding her thin white face. Moreover, the valet noted that when others approached the spot where she stood, she started slightly, turned her head to watch them, and after a while glided slowly away. Once seeing a Life Guards man come swaggering down in front of her she made a sudden curve to avoid him, and repeated the movement on encountering a corpulent and harmless policeman.

The closer Baryl watched her the more his interest increased, and the questions came continually upwards in his mind, how was it she of all other women in the world sought his master; in what strange passage

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of her history had she encountered Capt. Fothergille. These were queries he resolved to have answered; not that he believed that she or his master would enlighten him upon these points, but he trusted to his own sagacity, watchfulness, and tact to find the clue to the problems.

So much occupied was he by these thoughts that quite unconsciously he relaxed his watch, and on recovering himself discovered with a start that the woman he followed had suddenly disappeared. They had come to the circus where the crowd was greatest, and he stood irresolute, not knowing if he should turn to right or left in continuance of his pursuit. The fact remained that she had vanished.

Whether she had turned to north or south, had stepped into a shop, or entered a cab, had crossed Regent street, or retraced her steps by the opposite pathway, he was unable to conjecture, he only knew she was no longer visible to him. He darted in and out of one or two shops, searched every passing omnibus, and examined a crowd which had gathered round a fallen horse, but he looked in vain for the tall shabbily clad figure of the woman. For upwards of half-an-hour he remained loitering about Piccadilly Circus in hopes of encountering her, rushing here and there when he fancied he caught a glimpse of her bonnet, but she was nowhere to be seen, and he was eventually obliged to return, feeling dissatisfied with his own powers as an amateur detective, and disappointed that the time he had wasted had not brought the result he desired.

Soberly and thoughtfully Jack Baryl went back to his master's rooms, and took up his theological novel. For a while he strove to read, but the pages no longer contained any interest for him. He felt that a romance in real life, in which this mysterious woman played a principal part, was being enacted, and his concern in humanity was greater than his thirst for theological disquisition. He could not erase her image from his mind; once or twice he started from his chair, believing he heard a soft footfall and the rustle of a dress in the passage outside, and waited with his eyes fixed upon the handle of the door, expecting it to turn and admit her once more. She haunted him, and he had not the power to banish her from his memory.

Hour after hour he waited, thinking, hoping she might come back; his mind filled with speculations as to her past history and her present designs. He resolved on not mentioning her visit to his master when writing to him; why he scarcely knew, save that he feared the captain would take steps to prevent her returning.

Days passed, but she did not re-appear. Baryl's only visitors were unfortunate tradesmen who scowled and threatened, and inquisitive money-lenders who, writhing under the weight of bills, muttered threats of dire vengeance unless cash was speedily forthcoming. Baryl received them all with a lofty air, urbane smile, and shrug of the shoulders, giving them words of faint promise never meant to be fulfilled, and pledges which his hearers knew were made to be broken.

But one June evening, just as twilight had set in, and Jack Baryl was preparing to join some friendly and kindred spirits in the parlor of a neighboring public-house much frequented by the military, a timid rap sounded at the door which made him start. A blow on the panels would not have effected him so much as this gentle tap.

Immediately he rushed to the door, flung it open, and saw the figure of the mysterious woman who had so strangely impressed him, standing on the threshold, looking tall and spectral in the gathering gloom. Her veil was down, her garments seemed more faded and threadbare than before, and, looking at her feet, Baryl saw they were encased in thin slippers. A feeling of compassion now mingled with his curiosity, and in courteous tones he asked her if she would not enter. Without replying, she moved slowly and, as it seemed, cautiously into the room, glancing nervously all round her, and then took the chair the valet offered.

"I'll light the gas," he said, striking a match.

"No, no, pray don't," she cried, starting from her seat. "I don't want light. I have been long used to darkness and a glare hurts me."

He wondered what she meant by saying she was used to darkness, but he made no comment on her words.

"Just as you please," he replied. "I rather like the twilight myself."

"You do?" she said. "Then you have been—"

"She had taken off her thread gloves, and now interlaced her long nervous fingers, as if by some violent effort she strove to overcome her feelings and repress the words she would have spoken."

Baryl gazed at her in mute astonishment; her manner seemed more strange and abrupt than during her former visit, and her voice was more marked by that peculiar ring that had first arrested his attention.

"Has he—has Captain Fothergille returned?" she asked, turning her face towards the valet, who fancied he could see her eyes burning through the thick black veil.

"No," he answered, "he has not been back since."

A sigh of relief escaped her lips. "Not back," she said, partly to herself. "When he returns it may be too late?"

"For what?" her hearer asked.

She started at the question, looked all round her, and then answered in a low, timid voice, "I don't know, nor does he; it is a query which fate alone could solve."

"Has he spoken of me?" she asked, timidly, as if she feared the reply.

"How can I say when I don't know your name," he answered.

"True," she said, "quite true; but if he had mentioned me you would have known. It doesn't matter; nothing matters in this world after a little while—after a little while." She spoke as if she were reconciling herself to a fact, and was quite unconscious of her hearer.

"Surely some things do," remarked Baryl.

"What are they," she asked. "If the

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life or death of a woman makes no difference to the man she loves what else can matter to her?"

"But others may care for her."

"Others it may be, but that is outside the question. Many a woman exists whose life is bounded by one man. What he thinks of her, feels towards her, how he behaves to her are alone of importance; to the feelings, opinions, and conduct of the world beside she is indifferent; she has no room for such considerations in an existence completely filled by one object."

Baryl being puzzled, remained silent.

"When does he come back?" she asked, passing her handkerchief under the veil to wipe her forehead and cheeks.

"I really cannot say; his movements are always uncertain."

"You don't expect him tomorrow or next day. Tell me the truth, he may regret you did not speak frankly."

"I don't expect him, but at the same time I should not be surprised if he returned any day."

"But you are not sure he will come," she asked in plaintive tones.

"No," he said, "I am not sure."