

SWEET IS REVENGE.

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SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

CHAPTERS I AND II.—Sir Danvers Fothergille, of Fothergille Abbey, a twenty year old widower, falls in love with a Miss Payne, a governess at the rectory of the Rev. Charles Harrow, and after telling the baronet she once loved another man, now dead, she, not without hesitation, consents to become his wife.

CHAPTERS III. AND IV.—The marriage of Sir Danvers and the governess came as a cruel surprise on Captain Jack Fothergille, a nephew of Sir Danvers who, a rove and gambler, has spent some time in the Australian bush and returning hears of his cousin's wedding which bids fair to deprive him of his expected inheritance. At the Abbey he meets the Hon. Mrs. Crayworth, a female adventuress, whom he has known in former years, and he thinks she may be useful to him in his schemes. Whilst on a visit to the abbey the captain leaves his valet at home as a matter of precaution. A female with a pensive face and with an air of mystery about her, calls at the house and asks for the captain. Her appearance and her strange talk about a dream which had separated her and the captain, interests Barly, the valet, and as she leaves without giving any name he resolves to follow her.

CHAPTER V.—I TRUST HER NOT AT ALL.

Spring woke the world from its slumber, swept heavy clouds from the skies, banished frost from the land, docted the fields with verdure, the trees with early buds, and lanes with violets hid deep amongst dewy moss. To Lady Fothergille's nature springtime had likewise come. The sorrow that had robbed her youth of its natural buoyancy, given gravity to her manner, and left lingering shadows of regret in her eyes, had now vanished.

That she had escaped the drudgery of the schoolroom, married a baronet, became mistress of Fothergille abbey, the owner of wide lands, the sharer of great wealth, gave her little satisfaction in comparison with the fact that she had gained the love of an honest man, one whom she rightly regarded as the highest type of an English gentleman.

She had begun by esteeming, but had ended by loving him. His generous thought, his untiring kindness, his watchful love, gave her hourly assurance of the place she held in his heart. A sympathy had sprung up between them, binding them soul to soul. Their happiness was complete.

Once more, as on the day they first met, they strolled down the park side by side; a great St. Bernard dog, a present to Ethel from her husband, following in their train. The sun had shone bright and warm since early morn, a thrush sang loud and clear to her mate as they passed, some rooks were busily engaged in building their nests in the branches of an elm, and away in the distance the cuckoo's notes echoed through the land.

"This is the spot where we first met," Sir Danvers said.

"No, dear; it's just a little lower down, where the pink hawthorne stands."

"You remember it, Ethel?"

"I shall never forget it," she answered, turning her eyes towards him. "I had no idea then that fate held such happiness in store for me."

"You're not sorry you took compassion on a widower and made him the most blissful of men?"

"Sorry," she replied, smilingly. "Every day of my life I feel fresh gratitude to providence for allowing me to win your love."

"It is I who should be grateful," said the baronet.

"Oh, no, Danvers, I can never tell you how much I owe you," she replied gravely.

"Twelve months ago I was without a home, almost without a friend. You have given me both, and have added what is more to me than all—your love. I wish it was in my power to repay you in some way."

"You have done so already. For more than twenty years life had been to me but a blank. The past held nothing but sorrow, the future was without hope, until you came and banished my solitude for ever, and made me the happiest of men."

He raised his arm and struck one of the boughs of pink hawthorne with his stick; a shower of blossoms fell upon their heads.

"See," she said, laughing, "spring gives us her blessing."

Tito, the St. Bernard dog, shook himself and barked.

"From the first moment I saw you here I loved you," Sir Danvers said, "but you, I fear—"

"I liked you. I said to myself, here is an honest man, the noblest work of God; and when you had gone away I thought a good deal of you, wondering what your life had been, and what you would make of it eventually. From the first you interested me."

"You judge of others by yourself," he said placing his arm within hers, and drawing her closer to him. "You are quite happy?" he asked.

"My happiness is so great that it creates fear."

"Fear," he repeated wonderingly.

"Yes; I often think how terrible it would be if anything arose to part us."

A little cloud passed over the sun as she spoke, the air suddenly faded from the path before them, and the spring air grew chill.

"Nothing can part us but death," he said, gravely, his thoughts going back to his first wife, who had been snatched from him in the early months of her wedded life.

"I would rather death came and took me from you than that we should be separated in heart by any other cause. I think it would kill me, Danvers, if I were to lose your confidence and your love," she said, a long quivering sigh escaping her lips.

"That you never can," he answered.

"You have become to me what the oak is to the ivy; if I were torn from you I should die."

"You must not speak or think of such things, Ethel. If you fret yourself with such useless fears I shall begin to think you are ill."

"I shan't speak of them again," she answered. "But now that I have spoken you must always believe, no matter what happens, that I love you, and you only. We cannot always control events, and I think we are like puppets moved by the hands of fate, irrespective of our own wills or desires; but you will believe, Danvers, that I shall always be your true and loving wife."

"We are not puppets moved by fate,

but creatures ruled by Providence, whose ways are wise, even when to mortal eyes they seem the reverse. But, Ethel," he added, "I shall always believe in your love, and that must banish your nervous fears. See, the sun has come out again, the cloud has passed. Look up and smile dear; that's right, you must banish every shadow from your path."

"Whilst you are near I shall know no fear," she replied. Leaving the park they passed through Hayton, and took a winding road which soon brought them in sight of a handsome villa, fronted by a garden and surrounded by trees. This was known as the Arbour, and was at present the residence of Mrs. Crayworth. The widow caught sight of her visitors as they approached, and seeing their happy faces, a cruel, cold look came into her eyes, her heavy brows met in a frown, and her lips closed ominously. Hastening to a glass, she regarded herself, arranged the line of dark straight fringe that half covered her forehead, settled the dainty little cap which added to her height, and passed her handkerchief lightly over her cheek bones, where she feared her complexion was too brilliant to seem quite natural.

By the time Sir Danvers and Lady Fothergille entered her drawing-room, she was quite prepared to receive them, and went forward with outstretched hands and a smiling face to greet them.

"I'm so delighted to see you, dear Lady Fothergille; I should never have forgiven myself if I had been out when you called," she exclaimed, in sweetest tones. "Ah, Sir Danvers, how do you do?"

"You are very kind," replied Lady Fothergille, frigidly.

The widow, erect, in figure, portly, well corseted, and handsomely dressed, stood before her unabashed. "You cannot tell how pleasant it is to have such neighbors as you and Sir Danvers."

"You feel the place lonely," remarked the latter.

"No. I find Hayton most delightful," answered Mrs. Crayworth, who merely endured it because she had more chances of securing a husband here than if she dwelt in town, where candidates for matrimony were also too plentiful, and the male sex more discriminating.

"I am glad to hear you say that," said the baronet, in his hearty manner.

"You see, dear Lady Fothergille," she continued, addressing herself to Ethel, "at one period of my life I was obliged to live abroad and see a great deal of the world. It was repugnant to me; I always desired a quiet home, but I sacrificed my feelings to my duty. Now that I have found this place of rest I am quite happy."

"And you have settled down here?" queried Lady Fothergille.

"I hope so," she replied, thinking of her prospects of marrying the curate in case she could not secure a wealthy bachelor neighbor, eight two score years, on whom she had cast longing eyes. Her chief hope at present lay in Mr. Sympington, who was young, sentimental and inexperienced; in all ways fitted by nature as her lawful prey.

"You like this county, Lady Fothergille?"

"Extremely."

"I am so glad, for I suppose you will live here chiefly, and I hope to see a good deal of you."

"Thank you," said Ethel, remembering that although the widow had known her whilst she was a governess, she had never expressed her delight at their acquaintance.

Mrs. Crayworth rang for tea, and presently a neat little maid entered with a tray, followed by Tito, who, watching his opportunity as he lay in the hall, now boldly marched into the room.

"Oh, this is your new pet," exclaimed the hostess; "what a splendid dog." She advanced towards him with one hand outstretched, intending to pat his head, but he without moving looked at her out of the corners of his great eyes and growled. She immediately retreated, with a little cry of terror.

"Tito," said his mistress, "you must behave properly." The dog laid his head against her dress.

"I'll make friends with him. Here Tito, dear dog, here is a biscuit." She held it out at arm's length, but he merely fastened his eyes on her face and growled, this time more threateningly than before.

"Strange. He is usually most gentle," Lady Fothergille said.

"Tito," cried out Sir Danvers, "you are a bad dog, and should not have come into this room. Now go out. Do you hear?"

Tito understood him, rose up, looked his mistress plaintively in the face and moved towards the door; then suddenly turning around, he caught hold of her skirts in his mouth, and would have pulled her with him.

Sir Danvers laughed, the widow knit her dark brows, whilst Lady Fothergille let the animal lead her to the door, and then patting him on the head told him he must wait for her in the hall.

"He is a great pet," remarked Mrs. Crayworth, smilingly.

"Yes, he is most sagacious," answered Ethel.

Her hostess winced. "Animals are usually fond of me," she said, knowing the contrary to be the fact.

"They usually like people who like them," the baronet replied.

Returning to her place, Ethel passed a little table, hitherto unnoticed, on which stood a framed picture of a saint in robes of crimson and gold; before it a tiny red lamp burned.

"That is a picture of my patron saint," explained Mrs. Crayworth, "St. Theodora, Virgin, and Martyr."

The picture had been placed there and the lamp lighted before it, for the benefit of the curate, whom she expected during the afternoon. Had a Mahomedan, wealthy and eligible, resided in the neighborhood, he would, on visiting Mrs. Crayworth, have found a copy of the koran on her knees.

"You have managed to make yourself quite a picturesque home," said Sir Danvers.

"Yes," she replied, "and I am quite

sorry to leave it only for a little while," she answered, delighted that an opportunity was given her of touching on the subject.

"Why are you going?"

"I consulted the agent yesterday, and we came to the conclusion the drainage is imperfect, and that I had better leave whilst it was being looked after."

"It will be a pleasant change for you to get away for a few weeks."

"A change," replied the widow, fixing her eyes pleadingly on the baronet, "but not a pleasant one, by any means."

"There are some delightful watering places on the south coast," said Ethel.

"Yes, but I hate watering places. I haven't yet made up my mind where I shall go."

"Then," said Sir Danvers, "come and stay with us at the Abbey until your home is made all right."

These were the words she had longed to hear. She smiled sweetly as she said, "That would indeed be delightful, if—"

Lady Fothergille found room for me."

"The abbey is large, replied Ethel, coldly.

Mrs. Crayworth's heart swelled with indignation, her eyes sparkled with anger, but the smile never left her mouth. To be invited to the abbey meant a decided step for her in the social scale. At present she stood on the border land of county society, blankly ignored by some of its members, reluctantly recognized by others, but once the guest of Sir Danvers and Lady Fothergille, her position would be assured; in the eyes of the curate and her bachelor neighbor she would gain in importance.

But, best of all, she could then leisurely and closely watch her hostess, discover if possible some weak place in her armor, and perhaps be enabled to gratify the hate she felt towards her. The occasion must not be let slip.

"Thank you so much," she said to Ethel, "it is most thoughtful of you, and, believe me, I have great pleasure in accepting your kind invitation."

Lady Fothergille looked at her wonderingly; Mrs. Crayworth was either the most obtuse or the most forward person she had ever met. "When may we expect you?" she asked.

"It will only take me a day to pack. This is Monday; I will be with you on Wednesday evening, if that will suit you."

"Yes."

"I will send the brougham for you; it can take your belongings," added Sir Danvers. "I hope you won't find us dull. My cousin, Captain Fothergille, is staying with us; by-the-way, you knew him abroad?"

"My dear husband did," she replied, evasively.

"Well, you will renew his acquaintance."

"That will be extremely pleasant."

Lady Fothergille rose and extended her hand to the widow, who seized it with effusion and pressed it warmly. As Ethel came into the hall Tito barked with delight and ran down the garden path before her. When they had walked some distance from the villa, the baronet said:

"I fear, Ethel, I did wrong in asking Mrs. Crayworth to stay with us without first consulting you. I see you don't like her."

"I don't," she answered bluntly.

"Why?"

"I can't say; but I fear her."

"Fear her!" he repeated, in astonishment.

"Fear is not the proper word," she replied, quickly, "I should have said I distrust her; and I can scarcely explain why, even to myself. You know there are some people whom we intuitively like at first sight, and others whom we loath. Tito evidently shares my feelings regarding Mrs. Crayworth."

The animal bearing his name raised his head and barked loudly, as if to affirm the words just spoken.

"It's the first thing on which we have disagreed," Sir Danvers said. "I wish I had not spoken so hastily; perhaps it is not too late to prevent her coming."

"It is. But we shall not disagree on this point, dear. I will do all in my power to overcome my feelings, and make the visit pleasant to her."

The baronet was relieved. "You are the best of women, Ethel."

"Even if I were, I should not be good enough for you, dear," she answered. He lifted her over a stile, and they took their way by a short cut homewards through the wood and park.

CHAPTER VI.—CAPT. FOTHERGILLE'S PROPOSAL.

Captain Fothergille had not been many days at the abbey when, after careful consideration, he made his first movement in the game he intended to play.

"Do you know, Danvers," he said, as he and the baronet lighted their cigars one night in the smoking-room, "I think you've done the wisest thing in the world in marrying again."

His cousin smiled gratefully, considering this a good-natured speech from a man who in all probability would lose twenty thousand a year and a baronetcy by the act of which he expressed approval; for being wholly unsuspicious, he believed the speaker meant what he said.

"At first I feared it would be a blow for you," Sir Danvers replied, "but then there was always a chance of my marrying again."

"My dear fellow, I never counted on succeeding you," said the Captain, "for I'm not many years your junior, and I've led a much harder life than you, and that pays a man out in the end."

"I suppose so," reflected the baronet.

"Why don't you marry and settle down?"

The captain smiled, thinking how readily his cousin had fallen into the trap laid for him. "I wish I could," he said in a melancholy tone, "but before I ask any woman to become my wife I must find some occupation. I might break in horses, but many a groom would do that quite as well. The wine trade and tea business are overcrowded by men of our order. I'm not quite fitted to become a man milliner like that fellow in Bond street; I don't know how to write smartly enough for the society papers; and I'm too old to go on the stage."

But there must be other ways and means by which you could earn an honorable livelihood."

"Yes; I heard of an ex-military man, a capital whist and chess player, who hired himself out by the hour or by the game, and made quite a decent living. I think of hiring myself out to the talking bore, what a boon I should be to his relatives

and friends; monologues listened to (for your bore does all the conversation himself) and boredom endured for five shillings an hour. Excellent idea, isn't it?"

"Not bad," answered Sir Danvers, laughing, "the ways of earning money nowadays are strange."

"Why? Because everyone is hard pressed for coin. It's the one thing needful to most men and women, and the hardest thing to get or keep." Then he added, after a moment's pause, "But, seriously speaking, I wish to settle down. I have seen a good deal of the world, and I'm heartily sick of it. I can tell you. I think, Danvers, you could help me."

He continued, fixing his keen eyes upon his cousin.

"If you mean you are prevented marrying because of your debts, I'll do the best I can for you. I'll help you to begin life anew with a clean bill of health."

"You're a good fellow," answered the captain, and then believing the time had come when he might speak freely, he continued, "There's something else I want you to do for me."

"What's that?"

"I'll tell you straight. I've fallen desperately in love with Meg; don't refuse your consent if I can gain her."

"In love with Meg," said the baronet, taking the cigar from his lips, and looking at the man before him in surprise.

"Why not? I may have lived a hard and fast life, but I've sown my wild oats and have done with them. I'm not a bad fellow at heart, and I'll make her the best of husbands."

Sir Danvers was vaguely aware his cousin's career had been adventurous, but he was wholly ignorant of its particular chapters. "You take me by surprise," he said, feeling some answer was expected.

"I dare say," coolly remarked the Captain. "We have got on capital since I came here, and I'm very fond of her, I assure you."

"Of one thing you may be certain; I shall never force her to wed a man she doesn't care for, or prevent her marrying the man she loves."

"Then, if she wishes to make me happy you will not say nay?"

"Well speak of this another time," answered Sir Danvers, after a moment's pause, "but," he added, "don't say anything to her about the matter just yet."

"Not a word," said the captain, resolving to act as he thought best as to whether he would immediately propose to Meg or not.

"You're going to have another cigar, so I'll leave you and say good-night."

"Good-night, Danvers," replied the captain, watching the retreating figure. As the door closed behind the baronet, he winked, and an ugly sneer came across his dark face.

"I'll have her thirty thousand pounds, safe," he soliloquised, "and once it's in my hands I'll just do as I please. Let us see what your chances are, old boy; better look things straight in the face. Danvers has evidently heard nothing of that nasty little affair in the card room of the Satan Club, and is quite unaware I raised some cash on the prospect of his death and my inheritance; nor has any tidings reached him of that bad business in Australia—dead men tell no tales. Altogether, I may pose as a prodigal, anxious to return to the ways of respectability—always an interesting role. And now for my chances of success—I'm not bad-looking; experience has taught me how to impress the fair sex; and I'm clever enough to play my cards well. I'll begin the game in earnest tomorrow. Here's to my success," he concluded draining a tumbler of brandy and soda.

At breakfast next morning he proposed to Meg that they should ride over to Fretweal, and see the machinery being set up for the working of the lead mine recently discovered there. To this she at once assented. "Will you not come also, Ethel," she asked.

"No, dear, not today," her stepmother answered, and the captain rejoiced. Half an hour later she and her cousin were riding in the direction of Fretweal. Her companion examined her critically as her horse rode a few yards in advance. Her graceful, erect, and well-developed figure looked to advantage in a riding habit; her pure complexion was heightened by exercise, her blue eyes shone with pleasure, and the massive coils of her brown hair looked golden in the morning sunlight.

"Not bad," the captain muttered, "a little too rustic, perhaps, but that's a fault easily remedied: she'll make a creditable wife."

He started at the last word, looked hurriedly round, and then smiled bitterly. "Why not?" he asked himself, as if replying to some thought, "I must have her money, let what will happen afterwards."

He was determined to play his part skillfully, for the reward success promised was great; and he therefore roused himself to begin the game, as he said.

The morning was bright and exhilarating, a few fleecy clouds flecked an azure sky, a balmy breeze laden with the odour of hawthorne swept over the land.

"This is a day such as only an English climate can produce," he said, joining her. "Spring is my favorite season," she answered; "It makes the poor old world young again, and I feel that it rejoices in its youth."

"I suppose it does. I often wish I could spend more of my time in the country, live face to face with nature; you don't know how often I long for the peace and purity of such an existence which circumstances have denied me." His tones were almost pathetic, and his dark eyes full of wistfulness as he turned to gaze on her face.

"That's about the style," he thought, and he could scarcely refrain from winking.

"I had no idea you were dissatisfied with life; I fancied you desired nothing but excitement and pleasure," she replied.

"I dare say the world thinks the same. It's not to every one I reveal my inner self; cynics would only mock me, the generality of men laugh at me, but you, Meg, I know you will understand me," he said, feeling he was making rapid progress in his suite.

"Fully," she replied, in a gentle voice.

"There's a bond of sympathy between us which tells me that. Had my surroundings been different I would have been a different man. The one thing which I have desired all my days is a peaceful happy home, where I could ever find a mind congenial to my own, a heart which I might trust, a woman I might love; but this has been denied me."

"I'm sorry," she answered, in a low

tone, and he knew he had secured her pity, and where pity is given, love frequently follows.

"This is my ideal, which I fear I shall never gain."

"Let us hope you will some day," she said, encouragingly.

"If I might, the loneliness and unhappiness I have endured would be amply compensated for; I would ask no greater reward for all my weary waiting," he continued.

"I have heard it said all things come to those who wait."

"And you think there may yet be some good luck in store for me?"

"Assuredly," she said, a blush spreading all over her cheeks.

"Then I'll accept your word as a favorable omen. I'll tell you what, Meg, I am not a rich man, and have but little to give the woman who becomes my wife, save a heart that would love and cherish her all the days of my life."

He spoke as if he were appealing to her, and his words stirred her strangely. None of the young men she knew—the broad-shouldered, hard-riding athletic sons of the county families—had ever talked to her in this manner. Their conversations principally dwelt on the next race, the last meet, the amounts they had gained or lost in sweepstakes; they were satisfied with life, they had no special admiration for nature, and regarded a landscape with a view to the hunting-field; they were devoid of aspirations, hopes, and ideals, save those bounded by the kennel and the preserves. With the man beside her it was different; he had a soul that swelled with noble desires, a heart that throbbed with tender feeling.

"No woman could desire more than what you offer," she said.

"Some only think of a man's banking account," he remarked.

"Then they have no heart."

"Not as you and I understand the world. If I loved I could abandon the whole world for the sake of the woman who held my love," he remarked, turning away his head to conceal a grin of delight at the rapid progress he was making.

His companion sighed. "I think," she said, presently, "I had rather go back, unless you are anxious to see the mine to-day."

"I will do whatever you wish," he answered, immediately wheeling round, hoping she might be impressed by his obedience.

She followed his example and they rode homewards in silence. He was too clever an actor to overdo his part, and therefore said no more. He had sown the seed, and must await the result. She thought over what he had said, aware of which he discreetly withheld from disturbing her. As they came through the park they caught sight of a brougham driving towards the abbey, and as they arrived at the door saw Mrs. Crayworth descend. The captain assisted Meg with great care to dismount; she greeted the widow, and disappeared with her into the abbey.

Fothergille watched them with a lowering brow. "She knows enough," he thought, referring to Mrs. Crayworth, "to check my game if she feels inclined; but then I could whisper a word or two concerning her which she might not wish to have repeated. I think we hold pretty equal cards, better we should become partners than play against each other."

With which reflection he followed the horses round to the stables to have a chat with the head groom.

(To be continued.)

One Kind of Reciprocity.

"It is a fact,"