

# SWEET IS REVENGE.

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## CHAPTER XI.—SEEKING REST.

Before Jack Barlyl had time to answer his strange visitor, the door had closed gently behind her and he was alone. He took up the photographic frame to replace it on the mantle-piece, and saw the portrait it contained was gone. Instantly he rushed for his hat and darted into the street, resolved to follow her. In a moment he caught sight of her tall figure with its veiled face and gliding motion, saw her enter Piccadilly and proceed in an opposite course from that she had taken when he last pursued and lost her.

She now directed her steps towards Hyde Park Corner, moving along swiftly and with a grace and ease of carriage that even more than her low soft voice and delicate-shaped hands, betrayed good breeding. Barlyl took the other side of the street, remaining a few yards in the rear, and never taking his eyes from her least she might vanish as before. The lamps had been lit, and now formed a chain of yellow light extending far up and down the thoroughfare: cabs and carriages passed to and fro, bearing men and women to the dinner-table or the theatre; "busses" carried many a family man to his suburban home in West Kensington.

Still watching her as he walked by the railing of the Green Park, Barlyl saw her slacken speed, then pause as if irresolute, retrace her steps for a few yards, and once more veering suddenly round resume her former pace.

He wondered if she had lost her way; if she was conscious she took a course exactly opposite to that she followed when he had last seen her. Presently he asked himself what did it matter to him who she was, where she went, what she did? Why had he thought of her, waited for her, followed her, offered to help her, whilst he could enjoy himself, instead of permitting his mind to be worried by her and her history.

"Man," he considered, "is a strange biped; a soft spoken word, the sight of a face, the flutter of a petticoat, will sometimes throw him off his mental balance, and reduce him in a moment from a free and noble creature to an abject slave; his whole mind and soul warped and occupied by one idea—the woman who has led him into captivity. Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "what fools the wisest of us can become."

As he arrived at this conclusion he saw the object of his pursuit look swiftly around as if she feared or expected to be followed, and then entering the park, take a path leading to Knightsbridge.

The sun had gone down more than an hour ago, but a hazy golden light yet lingered in the west. In the clear opal of the skies a few stars glimmered faint and faint; a gentle breeze sprang up too languid to stir the parched grass, but with just sufficient strength to make the leaves of the stately trees rustle in their topmost boughs; one late bird, a sweet voiced thrush, sang a farewell song to his mate already asleep in her nest close by, and when his note ceased, silence crept over all.

Faint dim yellow lamps, under wide-stretching boughs, and into the gathering shadows, growing deeper and more deep, the dark figure sped, black, spectral and weird, as if bent upon some errand fateful with the issues of life and death. Once more she paused where the light of a lamp fell on her, took a photograph from out the folds of her cloak, raised her veil and rivetted her eyes upon the portrait of a dark complexioned man, with heavy features and hair parted in the centre. Then she raised it to her lips again and again, and thrusting it into her bosom, crossed Rotten Row and came in sight of the motionless waters of the Serpentine.

Barlyl, who was now close upon her, suddenly stood still, transfixed by fear and anxiety. At sight of the river with its dim reflections of stars and sky, the memory of her wild words, the tone of her sad voice, the gleam that lighted her pale face, came back to him. He now understood what she meant by saying she would soon be numbered with the dead.

Step by step she glided under the trees, and down the grassy slope leading to the water's edge. An hour ago the bank had been crowded by bathers, who had been warned away at sundown; and it was now as silent and deserted as if it were removed by leagues from the great surrounding city. As she reached a wide stretching oak tree encircled by a rustic seat, she hesitated, and then sat down, her eyes fixed upon the glassy surface of the Serpentine now removed but by a few yards from her. Within its depths she would seek the peace and rest that had long been strangers to her heart, which in a little while would no more beat with wild desires for sight of him who had deserted her in an hour of greatest need; no longer throb in fear and hope at the prospect of meeting him. Her brain that of late had been filled with wild visions of strange faces and unknown cities, tortured by dark suspicions and awful presentiments, excited by imaginings of foul murders and deeds of bloodshed, would trouble her no more; here was rest.

There was no place for her in the crowds through which she had moved day after day; no face had been turned in friendship towards her; neither pleasant word nor sunny smile greeted her; she had voluntarily parted from those who had known her in childhood to follow the one man she loved with all her soul. The romance of her youth ended in heartweariness and anguish; her life must end in these quiet waters. Here she would die almost within reach of thousands, whilst she felt as lone as if she already lay in her grave; she had done with the world for ever and for aye. A few tears came into her eyes and trickled down her white, worn cheeks, and then rose. Barlyl, who had so lately stolen to the opposite side of the tree, watched her every movement with fearful expectancy. When she stood up he did likewise, and peering round the trunk saw her knot her thick veil tightly behind her head. Even if in her extremity she called for help, she was resolved her cry should reach no human ear. He could see that her hands trembled, and

a faint whisper fell upon his ear, as if she prayed for forgiveness. Then came a loud sob, succeeded by a rustle of her dress and a swift rush forward. In an instant Barlyl darted after her, and just as her feet reached the water, flung one arm round her and drew her back. She uttered a faint moan and fell senseless in his arms.

Gently and lightly he carried her back to the seat, propped her against the tree, and then hurrying back to the water, dipped his handkerchief in it, removed her veil, and bathed her face. The poor pale lips quivered in her effort to catch breath, she raised her heavy lids, and with a glassy senseless stare fixed her eyes on vacancy. He moistened her mouth and her brow, chafed her hands, and taking off his hat fanned her, his face being scarcely less pale than her own the while.

It took some time before she recovered consciousness, and a still greater while before she could recall her mind to what had passed.

"Has he saved me?" she said in a low tone, a long pause between each word.

"No," Barlyl answered, "I have."

She looked at him, striving to recall where she had seen him, and then remembering, asked, "Did he send you?"

"No," Barlyl again replied. "I followed you."

"Why?"

"I can't tell; but I'm glad I did, as I have saved your life."

"It is of no value to me or to anyone else," she remarked sadly.

"But you had no right to take it; you did wrong."

"Perhaps I did. He might regret it if ever he came to know."

"He might," the valet replied; considering within himself that if this woman in any way troubled or stood in his way, Capt. Fothergille would rejoice to hear of her death.

"I wanted to have seen him first, but I began to despair. You don't know how often I have watched the house day and night before I called the second time, always hoping to see him, always disappointed, until at last I believed we should never meet again. Do you think we shall?"

"If you wait a little while you will certainly see him; if you give me your address I will let you know when he returns."

"You are kind," she answered, "I know by your voice you are kind and that I can trust you."

"Thank you."

"No, it is I who must thank you; kindness is such a small thing to give, and yet such a boon to receive; and I have known but little of it during my time; the world seems cruel."

"I have saved your life and you owe me something," he said.

She looked at him with the wild startled glance he remembered so well. "How much?" she asked.

"Merely that you will promise not to attempt suicide again."

"Suicide," she whispered. "Did I attempt it. Oh God my brain is gone; it has given way under too much trouble," she added bursting into tears and crying heartily.

"You will not strive to drown yourself again," he said, when her outburst had subsided.

"No, no," she replied, gazing with horror on the surface of the still waters.

"Take me away from here. It grows dark and cold and lonely; but see," she said, pointing to the opposite shore, "the trees beckon me across, or are they human beings, I cannot see for the shadows that come between us, but their arms are outstretched towards me, and they point to the water below; how still and calm it is, one would surely find rest there; ah, that's what they mean; they know me, and they see what I need, rest, rest, rest!"

"Come with me," he said, taking her gently by the arm.

She went with him unhesitatingly, leaving the Serpentine, crossing the soft yellow soil of the row, and moving onward to Hyde Park corner from where the noise of traffic fell upon their ears.

"I am better now, said, "my brain is more calm. I'll go back to my lodging."

"Will you allow me to drive you there?"

"Your voice is kind, yes, I'll trust you; but you mustn't tell anyone where I live; they might come and take me away, and then I should never see him more, never more."

"No one shall know from me," said Barlyl, "give me your address."

She dived one hand into the pocket of her gown and took out a rumpled card on which was printed the name of a quiet street not far removed from Hanover square.

This she handed to her companion, who instantly hailed a cab, in which he placed her and took a seat beside her.

"Have you any friends in London?" he asked.

"None," she replied briefly.

"Then I hope you will let me come and see you sometimes."

"You will be able to tell me of him."

"Yes; and when you have grown to trust me, you will perhaps let me hear about your past. I may be able to help you."

"The past can't be helped."

"No; but the future may," he persisted.

She remained silent some time, her eyes fixed on space, her lips muttering words he could not catch. She evidently forgot what he had said.

"I may call sometimes and see you?" he repeated.

"Yes, I will have confidence in you."

"Thank you," said Barlyl quietly.

The cab had by this time stopped in front of her lodgings, at which he knocked. The door was presently opened by a portly, fresh looking woman, with a shrewd, honest look in her eyes. She gazed at her lodger and then at Barlyl, who stood on the doorstep, and from them to the cab, a puzzled expression in her face.

"Good evening, Mrs. Freeman," she said stiffly.

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"I must say good-bye," said Barlyl, his quick ear catching the name.

His companion turned suddenly round. She had forgotten his existence, but reminded of it by his voice, she stretched out her hand. "Good-bye," she said, "and thank you very much for all your kindness," saying which she entered the hall and mounted the stairs.

He lingered for a moment as if desiring to speak with the woman who had opened the door, but on second thoughts turned away without a word. Scarcely had he reached the bottom of the street, however, when a fresh idea seemed to strike him, and retracing his steps he once more rang the bell. The landlady again opened the door; her maid-of-all-work was having her evening out, and the mistress was for the time being a slave to the bell and knocker, as she subsequently described herself. Seeing Barlyl again she looked surprised.

"Can I have a few words with you in private," he asked.

"About what?" she demanded.

"Business," he answered, meeting her gaze of astonishment.

"No one can ever say that Mrs. Simmons is above her business," she remarked.

"Please step into my parlor, sir, and let me hear what you have to say."

CHAPTER XII.—OLD CONFEDERATES PLOT.

It was a bright morning two days later than the afternoon on which Mrs. Crayworth had contrived that the baronet should see his wife and Lord Hector in the chalet; and the abbey household was assembled round the breakfast table. The breakfast-room had, at Lady Fothergille's request remained free from the hands of modern decorators, and stood in very much the same condition as when Sir Danvers' ancestors lived and had their being.

On the polished oak panels of the walls hung kit cat portraits in richly-gilded oval frames of famous statesmen, soldiers of renown, and court beauties whose charms gallants had toasted and poets had sung. On the high and delicately carved cabinets in the corners stood dragon jars, their deep red and vivid blue colors finely contrasted against the mellow hues of the dark oak; bronze dogs stood upon the open hearth guarding a pile of dried logs ready to kindle into a blaze at a moment's notice; curtains of tawny shaded brocade hung at the doors and windows.

The latter stood wide open to the terrace, giving a view of the great fountain sparkling in the morning sun, and of the wide green park beyond stretching into seemingly boundless space, its great oaks, stately beeches, Irish yews, and wide boughed elms casting deep shadows on the velvet sward.

The mistress of the abbey presided over the round centre table. Sir Danvers noted with his quick eyes of love that she looked pale and languid, and in manner was absent and almost melancholy. Lord Hector strove to maintain a flagrant conversation; the poor relation had mildly expressed her fears concerning the heat of the coming day, on which he contrasted the warmth of an English summer with the temperature he had experienced in tropical climates, and told them of a Christmas day spent in the Australian bush, when the thermometer was ninety degrees in the shade, when he and his companions ate roast mutton and plum pudding under the trees, and quaffed bumpers of rum and water to those they loved and longed to be with in old England.

"You may remember the day, Captain Fothergille," he said, addressing him across the table.

"Can't say I do," replied that individual, munching his toast.

"I should have thought you would. It was only a few weeks before the murder of poor Hawkins."

The captain's complexion suddenly turned to a pale leaden hue, he gave a little gasp, and let his eyes rest upon the cup in front of him. "Yes, yes," he ejaculated, presently, "I remember he picked a quarrel one night with a fellow who had too much rum."

"O'Mara, a noisy brawling Irishman, but harmless as a child, was suspected of the deed, but I'm sure he never put a knife into poor Hawkins—they were the best of friends."

"I always suspected him," answered the captain, his natural color returning slowly to his face, but his eyes still lowered on the table.

"Yes, and you didn't hesitate to say so at the time, but I believed you were wrong."

"Who then could have—"

"Murdered him," said Lord Hector, supplying the words the other hesitated to pronounce. "Well, that still remains to be discovered."

The captain suddenly put down the cup he was about raising to his lips.

"It will remain a mystery for ever," he answered. "Why, a thousand crimes have been committed in the bush that have never been traced. In a place where civilization was hardly known, and greed of gold was rampant in every man's breast, life was held of little value; a death or two more or less didn't matter," he answered with an attempt at a laugh.

"There's an old saying, murder will out," said Lord Hector.

Again the leaden hue spread itself over the captain's features, his mouth twitched convulsively, and he made no attempt to continue the conversation.

"I'm going over to West Hayton Farm, Ethel," said Sir Danvers. "Will you come?"

The drive will refresh you before the heat of the day begins and keeps you indoors."

"You forget, dear, I have to send out invitations for the dinner," she answered.

"You can write after lunch," he persisted.

"I have promised Mrs. Harrow to spend the afternoon with her."

Sir Danvers rose from the table. It was the first time she had refused to accompany him in his walks or drives.

"Will you come, Lord Hector?" he asked. "You haven't seen much of our country."

"Thanks, it would give me great pleasure, but I must write a report of the Fretwell mine for my clients this morning."

"All right," said the baronet, and turning to the door he added to the company generally, "Good day."

Ethel had risen and advanced a step towards him.

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wards him, but apparently he did not heed her. He had never before set out on his rides without taking her hand or kissing her forehead. She watched the door close upon him, expecting he would return, but she waited in vain, struggling with a sense of grief and loneliness that suddenly fell upon her life.

Captain Fothergille left the breakfast-room, passing Meg without word or look, and the girl sighed, remembering how much his manner had changed towards her since the arrival of Lord Hector Maynes; a fact which Mrs. Crayworth remarked and speculated on freely.

Lord Hector strode through one of the open French windows and walked up and down the terrace smoking a cigarette, and Mrs. Crayworth thinking this a favorable opportunity for learning, if possible, some of his relations with Fothergille, joined him.

"What a delightful morning," she said in her sweetest manner.

"Yes," he replied briefly, making a movement as if he wished to continue his walk.

This dear old park is a lovely pastoral scene. One almost expects to see shepherds and shepherdesses with lutes and flutes, dance upon the sward; or Pan with his double pipe followed by trains of flower-clad nymphs and laughing dryads dart in and out amongst those shady trees."

"The days when such harmless beings peopled the earth are over," he replied, "and their places are taken by a vicious race that turns this smiling world to a howling wilderness."

Mrs. Crayworth wondered if he included her among the vicious race, but not willing to show the cap fitted her, she continued blandly, "I suppose you're right, Lord Hector; no doubt in cities, and in the bush perhaps, there are plenty of wicked people, but here we are innocence itself."

"Indeed," he remarked coolly as his eyes wandered from her coquettish cap to the artificial hair dangling over her forehead, and the becoming bloom upon her cheeks. "There was a serpent found even in Eden."

His hearer gave a little rippling laugh to conceal her anger. "I fear you are a cynical creature," she said, shaking her head reprovingly. "Surely there are no serpents to be seen in the abbey park?"

"To be seen, no," he replied, his fingers playing with the locket depending from his watch chain, having the initials E. L. raised in blue enamel on its surface. "They always hide in the grass, but they leave a trail behind by which they can be discovered, and—"

"And what?" she asked, her eyes fastened on the locket.

"And crushed," he answered.

"Poor things," she remarked, striving to laugh but merely producing a grimace.

"I must go indoors to write some letters," he said, throwing away his cigarette, and raising his hat as he abruptly left her.

"We shall meet again," he added, turning his head over his shoulder and speaking as if on second thoughts.

"Yes," she said to herself, a venomous look crossing her face, "we shall meet again for I haven't yet done with you or the woman you love, and before we part the serpent will have stung you both."

It was evident to her he had either some knowledge of her past, or suspected her hatred of Lady Fothergille; for she could not blind herself to the covert meaning of his words, uttered as they were with emphasis that drove them securely home.

She sauntered down the park to where she had caught sight of Fothergille walking with bent head and meditative air.

"Do you want me?" he asked almost rudely as she joined him.

"Of course I do or I shouldn't have come here," she answered placidly.

"What is it?" he inquired.

"First let me ask you why haven't you proposed to Meg?"

"Because I don't wish to risk my chances of success by a hasty movement."

"And yet you were anxious to ask her the important question a few days ago—just before Lord Hector's arrival."

"What has that to do with it?" he demanded in an outburst of temper, looking at her suspiciously from under his heavy brows.

"Nothing," she replied, adding a second later, "that I know of at least." What was before a suspicion now became a certainty to her mind.

"Have you anything more to say," he asked in a surly tone.

"A great deal; you wish to get rid of Lord Hector."

"I never said so," he answered.

"But you thought it, and I can help you."

"How?" he asked eagerly.

"He was, perhaps, Lady Fothergille's lover."

"Her lover," repeated the captain.

"How do you know?"

"Women jump to conclusions whilst men weigh facts; but my conclusions haven't been arrived at without reason, as you shall hear."

She then told him of the conversation she had held in the chalet, and of the subsequent meeting of Sir Danvers and his wife.

Her hearer laughed aloud, his ill-humor completely vanishing. "I always said you were clever," he remarked.

"You did, when I helped you to win the baron's money. Ah, those were pleasant days."

"We didn't think so then, they were too full of risk; now when we have got safely out of the wood we look back and imagine we enjoyed them."

"We have become respectable now," she remarked.

"You have, and I am going to be presently; I'm beginning to think it's the game that pays best in the end."

"It does, but it's dull," she replied with a sigh, her thoughts going back to the days she had spent at French watering places and German gambling halls.

A vision rose before her of yellow shores washed by blue waters, in which crowds clad in showy hued clinging garments, disported themselves; of gas-light casinos where the rattle of dice and the roll of roulette balls were succeeded by an outburst of voices in all tones and tongues; of lamp-lit gardens where the music of hands stirred the hearts of their hearers, and the whisper of voices and ripple of laughter came

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from alleys shaded by arbutus, syringas, and magnolia trees; and of dainty little suppers where champagne flowed, eyes sparkled, and cigarettes were smoked, until the light of dawn fell pale and cold on the flushed and haggard faces of the revelers. All that was but a dream of the past.

"This is a game which must be played cleverly," said the captain.

"Yes, but the stakes are well worth winning. If you are clever enough you may continue her presumptive to the estate. Where subtlety and caution are necessary, trust to a woman's guidance; you must use both in this case."

"How am I to begin," he enquired.

"I have begun, do you follow suit. There are many things a man can say to a man which a woman cannot; we must work together. Do you know anything derogatory to Lord Hector's character whilst he was in Australia?"

"Nothing," he answered, as though reluctant to make such an admission.

"Then you must invent some story concerning him for Sir Danvers's ear. Poison your suppleton of a cousin with hints and insinuations as if you knew more than you said, but withheld your words lest they might wound too much. Give him but one fact at present for his mind to grasp and build upon."

"What is that?" he demanded eagerly; thinking the while what a clever friend this woman could be so long as her own interests were served. What an unscrupulous and deadly enemy she might prove to those who roused her hate.

"The locket he wears contains her portrait and a lock of her hair; its cover bears her monogram—E. F.—Ethel Fayne or Ethel Fothergille. Perhaps you could obtain it by hook or crook," she said, her eyes glistening, an unpleasant smile upon her face.

"I fear that would be difficult, but I'll think about it. What else do you want me to do?"

"I suggest that you will take every opportunity to convince Sir Danvers his wife is in love with this man. People who believe in the honor and faith of humanity become, when once roused, an easy prey to jealousy and suspicion. Your cousin is one of them. Trifles light as air are to the jealous confirmation strong as proofs of holy writ," she quoted. "Rouse his indignation and he may cast off his wife, who will, of course, fly to her lover's arms; then follows a divorce, and the worthy baronet, becoming disgusted with the charming sex, dies unwed, leaving you heir to twenty thousand a year and a title."

"A promising scheme," he said, puffing away at his cigar.

"Well, if you like it act upon it, and the reward is yours," she answered.

"And what reward shall yours be?"

"Leave that to me," she replied, with a smile that gave an almost fiendish expression to her face.

"He passed me by and repulsed me; she occupies the place I coveted, and treats me with disdain, for which I will render them miserable and ruin their lives," Mrs. Crayworth thought, but she was too wise to give expression to her ideas.

"I must get rid of this fellow—curse him," the captain thought, referring to Lord Hector. "If he would only elope with Lady Fothergille he would be out of my way."

"Are you willing to follow my suggestions?" Mrs. Crayworth asked.

"I am. I shall begin the first opportunity that offers."

"Then let us return to keep our eyes and ears open to watch and to wait for such chance as fate may place in our way," she responded, as they directed their steps towards the abbey.

Sir Danvers did not return for lunch, but as this was not an unusual circumstance when he drove to one of the out farms it caused little comment. The meal however seemed incomplete without his cheery presence, sitting at the head of the table; but the captain and Mrs. Crayworth, who seldom allowed outward influences to affect their appetites, thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Meg, who had been reading Shelley all the morning, and who more than ever missed her woeer's company, looked upon the world with dolorous eyes; the poor relation felt satisfied at having made herself useful to her kind hostess, and wondered in silence when she would be expected to return to the back par of rooms of her dingy Bloomsbury lodging.

Lord Hector sat at Ethel's right hand; occasionally their conversation referred to times and events in their past, to which Mrs. Crayworth lent an attentive ear. Something in Lady Fothergille's manner seemed to assert that her treatment of Lord Hector Maynes was more intimate and closer than old friendship might warrant. An understanding was evidently established between them, of which those around were supposed to be completely ignorant.

This state of things, more plain today than yesterday, delighted Mrs. Crayworth. The lovers, as she considered them, were drifting to a rock ahead, and she would soon raise a storm that would send them to doom. The couple or three glasses of champagne she drank comforted her spirit, and a cigarette was only permissible she would have felt quite happy.