

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 be his wife.

CHAPTERS III. AND IV.—The marriage of Sir Danvers and the governess came as a cruel surprise to 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 Barfly, the valet, and as she leaves without giving any name he resolves to follow her.

CHAPTERS V AND VI.—Captain Fothergille resolves to win Meg, Sir Danvers' daughter, for his wife, having an eye on her dowry of thirty thousand pounds. With this in view he plays his cards accordingly.

CHAPTER VII.—HER HAPPINESS IS MY WOE.

Captain Fothergille being no laggard in love quickly followed up the good impressions it was evident to himself he had produced on Meg. The morning ride was repeated, he was her companion in various afternoon rambles, hung over the piano when she sang, taught her to make skillful strokes at billiards, and read Shelley, Keats and Byron to her until he felt sick of his task, and wished such men had never been born.

One morning after dinner, when he had been more than usually attentive to Meg, he caught Mrs. Crayworth's dark eyes fixed on him scrutinisingly. When opportunity offered he went over and sat beside her; she was engaged in knitting a jacket for one of the village children, as she took care to inform the household. Meg was playing Mendelssohn's songs, the poor relation sitting beside her in rapt admiration, Lady Fothergille reclining on a low chair read the current number of *Temple Bar* by the light of a crimson shaded lamp, whilst Sir Danvers slumbered peacefully on an adjacent sofa.

"This is my contribution to local charity," said Mrs. Crayworth, holding up the little jacket for the captain's inspection. "So I suspected. You are a shining light; but you never told me how many years you have hidden yourself under the bushel of Hayton."

"I have been here about four years," she replied.

"You came soon after Crayworth's exit. Have you succeeded in your purpose?"

"What purpose?" she demanded, raising her well-marked eyebrows.

"That for which you came. I know you never make a move without some motive," he said.

She paused a moment to consider what she had best reply, and then believing frankness suitable for the occasion, answered "I haven't."

"Then you're not so lucky as usual; that you are less clever I can't believe. Was our worthy host the object connected with your settling at Hayton?"

"Not even years of close friendship could have warranted the freedom of his words or the familiarity of his manner, neither of which she resented.

"He was," she answered, with a smile far from pleasant to behold.

"And he escaped you?"

"Captain Fothergille."

"I mean he was insensible to your charms. You would have looked the mistress of the abbey to perfection. But the governess' artlessness succeeded where the widow's experience failed. Strange."

"I am not quite certain she is artless or without experience," she said softly.

"Do you know anything about her?" he asked eagerly.

"Nothing definite, save that she's a daughter of a dispensary doctor living in the north, and was brought up in France with a view to becoming a governess; but I suspect she has a history. We women are sharp at reading each other, and I have come to the conclusion that passive face hides more than her husband suspects."

"You hate her," he said, understanding the speaker's expression.

"I do, and so do you; she has come between you and the chances of inheritance. She has practically robbed you of twenty thousand a year. Mrs. Crayworth turned her eyes toward the woman of whom she spoke, and looked at the little graceful figure with envy and malice.

"It's all right so long as no heir comes upon the scene."

"How is that?"

"There must be no secrets between old friends," he said, with a smile that ended in a sneer, "so I don't mind telling you I have mortgaged my expectations up to the last penny I could wring from the money-lenders. Until a male child is born to Sir Danvers I am his heir presumptive, and the usurers remain hopeful. Before that event happens—it if ever does—I shall have secured a tidy little sum that will float me over my present difficulties."

"Can't you remove that woman?" said Mrs. Crayworth, almost in a whisper.

"The days when one could get rid of a friend by the judicious use of a little poison are over, I fear," he replied.

"Are there not other means? Who knows anything of her former life? From the guarded manner in which she speaks of her past associations, as well as from her face, I believe there is something she keeps concealed. A man has ways and means of making inquiries that a woman has not; you may gather some news, an acorn that may become an oak. You have not been over scrupulous in the past, why not exercise your talents in the present? A word whispered into the baronet's ear, a hint dropped as it were unawares, might rise up a wall of doubt, suspicion, and grief that would part them for life," said Mrs. Crayworth, her words coming with rapidity and vehemence.

"I always appreciated your cleverness," he answered with a sneer.

"Nor I your ability. It's your interest to awake that fool from his dream, and banish that woman from his heart and home."

"And it's your desire," he responded.

"It is; the day on which I see her humiliated and suffering will be one of the happiest in my life. Do it, and help me to do it, and in return I can aid you in carrying out your schemes to marry Meg." She spoke in a subdued voice, but the sparkle of her dark eyes and the heaving of her bosom, showed the excitement she felt.

"So you know my little game?" he said.

"I have eyes, but I'm no longer jealous. We can help each other. I can paint you to Meg in heroic colors; endow you with honor, bravery, and generosity, qualities you never possessed. In return, you can at your leisure describe me as an angel to Mr. Sympington—I mean to marry him."

The captain threw himself back in his chair and laughed heartily. "Has it come to this?" he said.

"Fools often make the best husbands. I'll begin life in a new role as the wife of a parson; who knows that I may not die in the odor of sanctity as the spouse of a bishop," she answered, watching the effect of her words.

"All right," he answered, "I agree to the bargain. This running in partnership reminds me of old times. By the way, what became of your most devoted German Baron?"

"The wretch deserted me when he lost his money. I haven't heard of him since."

"Well, you had your revenge before-hand; how we fleeced him."

"You did; I merely looked on and distracted his attention."

"And shared the profits," he remarked.

"As much as you gave of them; I always had a suspicion I ought to have had far more," she answered.

"Well, if ever I succeed Sir Danvers, you'll have—"

"Make no rash promises."

"A snug living for your saintly husband."

"Thanks. You must leave me now, we mustn't be seen too much together, or they might suspect we are old friends and equal partners in a game that begins from this hour. Do you talk to Meg, I'll make myself pleasant to her ladyship."

She rose as she spoke, laid aside her work, and advancing with a smiling face towards Ethel, said, "Dear Lady Fothergille, will you not sing us one of your charming ballads?"

"Not tonight," replied the mistress of the Abbey, laying down her magazine and gazing calmly, penetratingly, into Mrs. Crayworth's face.

The widow never flinched. "Ah," she replied sweetly, "you are afraid of waking Sir Danvers. I remember how fond he was of hearing you sing at the rectory. Men are all the same, they get tired of us so soon; he now goes to sleep after dinner."

"I sleep with my eyes and ears open, Mrs. Crayworth," said the baronet, without moving from his sofa.

The widow started, and for a second a thrill of fear shot across her heart, until she convinced herself it was impossible for him to have overheard her conversation with his cousin. "Really, Sir Danvers, I thought you were in the land of dreams," she remarked.

"It would be unpardonable of me to seek dreamland whilst reality held such attractions," he answered, gallantly, but she felt his words were addressed to his wife rather than to herself.

"Quite a pretty speech," she said, biting her lip in her effort to subdue her anger.

"Ethel, my dear, now that Meg has finished those eternal songs without words, won't you give us something?"

"If you wish," she answered, smiling at him, as she rose and went towards the piano.

"You know one of my greatest pleasures is to hear your voice."

"Infatuated fool," thought Mrs. Crayworth, leaning back in her chair with an air of seeming attention; in reality she was picturing to herself the loss she suffered in failing to secure the baronet as her husband.

It was strange that a man so simple, sensitive, and readily pleased, should have escaped the toils of a woman so clever, subtle, and experienced. She remembered the sympathy she had assumed for every subject that interested him; the flattery she had lavished on him; the coquetry she had practised; and all in vain. To her smiles and to her frowns he had proved equally indifferent; she has no power to charm him. She sighed as she mentally surveyed this grand old abbey, with its priceless treasures of art, its innumerable luxuries, its host of well-trained menials; and considered the position its mistress occupied in the county, backed by an historic name and abundant wealth.

"It fate ever throw a chance in my way to drag her from her high place as wife of Sir Danvers and mistress of the abbey, I shall seize upon it, and show her no mercy. Beware, my lady, beware," she said, shading her face with a fan from the light of a neighbouring lamp, "for you have a dangerous enemy in me."

Meanwhile Ethel continued her song. The room was still, save for the rich full voice rising with the fervour of the music and passion of the words, and presently sinking into silence. Her husband listened delightedly, thanking Providence for giving him this woman as his wife, she who was the pride of his life, the love of his heart.

"Such words and such music stir my feelings," the Captain said to Meg. "I am easily moved and sensitive, and all that kind of thing, you know, and this song has made me quite sad."

"It appeals to the heart," the girl answered.

"Yes; that's what I mean to say, only I couldn't express it like you. Do you know, Meg, I fancy we have a good many traits in common; it so often happens you express an idea which I am at the moment thinking, but can't find words to convey. Strange, isn't it?"

"Not very; sympathy of thought and feeling exists between us."

"That's just it; sympathy ensures you a perfect companion, but sympathy and affection combined make a perfect wife."

The girl blushed, and then rose. "Good night," she said, restrainedly.

"Won't you call me by my name—we are cousins, you know—and say 'Good night, Jack'?" he replied, as he held and pressed her hand.

"Good night—, Jack," she repeated, keeping her eyes lowered.

"Good night, dear Meg. I'm sorry you're going so soon, my pleasure for the evening always vanishes with you. Good night."

The poor relation advanced and offered him her cold hand, which he grasped with an emotion that made her feel grateful to him for life. He was in excellent humor with himself and the world at large.

"By Jove, I have got on capitally with her," he reflected, retreating to Meg. "I think I'm pretty sure of her thirty thousand pounds if nothing interferes with me. What a lucky haul it will be."

By degrees the ladies said good night and retired, leaving Sir Danvers and the captain alone. Since the latter had come to stay at the abbey, he had taken considerable pains to make a favorable impression on his cousin, and to prove he had reformed his ways and was anxious to begin life anew. His experiences of the world at large and his sojourn in various countries, gave him practical knowledge, which his natural shrewdness showed him how he might display to advantage. It is said that it takes a clever man to be a rogue; it is certain if the captain had devoted his time and talents to any legitimate pursuit he would have excelled in it: as it was a love of gaining the upper hand of his lower by subtlety, and of acquiring their property by craft, led him into dark paths which honest men shunned.

The constant company of Sir Danvers, he soon constituted himself his adviser, and his counsel was generally wise. He had saved his cousin from investing largely in foreign railway shares, promoted by a company having a brave show of some influential names—for the use of which the owners were liberally paid,—but having no solid basis. He had suggested the drainage of certain low lands on the estate, on a system he had seen applied with success in Australia, and sketched out a design for the erection of laborers' cottages on a new plan, giving more room to the tenant and prettier effect to the dwelling, than those already built by the local architect. Moreover, having an excellent eye for horse flesh, he had helped the baronet in the selection of a thoroughbred and reliable mount for Lady Fothergille, together with a pair of ponies for her pheasant.

From time to time he threw out hints of projects he would employ if he was the lucky possessor of a property; and sighed with quite a natural air to think he was a homeless waif.

"But you needn't be, replied Sir Danvers, on one of these occasions, when the captain had given expression to his new-born sense of desolation. "You have only to settle down, and I am quite sure you would become a happy and a prosperous man."

"It may be," his cousin replied, with an air of gentle gloom, "but I cannot settle down alone; I must have some interest in life, someone to love and work for, you know."

"Probably with your experience and attractions you needn't wait long," remarked the baronet, airily.

"You know well enough, Danvers, who I want, and who I am waiting for," he replied. "If she would only take me for better or worse, I believe I should be the happiest man alive."

His practical knowledge and his plain-spoken speeches made a favorable impression on his cousin, as did likewise his general conduct, which differed on many points from Sir Danvers' previous experience of him. Not once during the visit did he drink too much wine at dinner; his anecdotes when the ladies retired would bear repetition; he refrained from luring the baronet to play whilst he might win his sovereigns; when he played a game of billiards with the rector or a neighboring squire, the stakes were merely nominal sums, and even then he was sometimes the loser; he went to church every Sunday, listened without a yawn to one of Mr. Harrow's oft-read sermons, and returning home through the park talked to Meg of the famous preachers he had heard in London. He was civil to the poor relation; polite to Lady Fothergille, and devoted to her stepdaughter.

Sir Danvers came to the conclusion that however shadowy his ways may have been in the past, he had thoroughly reformed, and was now an excellent fellow all round; an expression his cousin had labored hard to produce.

On this evening they went as usual to the smoking room. The captain assumed a satirical, nay, almost a pensive air, and sat silent and absorbed for some minutes as became one who had a matter of importance to discuss.

"You seem dull tonight," remarked the baronet. "I hope nothing has happened to ruffle you."

"Nothing. I have merely been thinking of the subject I broached to you a few weeks ago," he replied.

"About your marriage?"

"Yes. I think Meg cares for me as much as I care for her, which is saying a great deal. If she does, Danvers, will you give your consent to our union?" he asked.

"If she is satisfied to be your wife, I am willing to accept you for my son-in-law," replied Sir Danvers, cheerily.

"You are a good fellow," answered the captain; in his heart he thought, "You are a right good fool."

"You have not asked her yet?"

"No; I wanted to judge your consent. But I can pretty well judge what her answer will be. When we are married I shall settle down as a country squire."

"You must sink her fortune in a property; I'll undertake to wipe off your debts if you have any."

"I have. What man about town hasn't; but in future I'll keep myself free from duns. Danvers," he continued, "you have always been generous to me, but never more so than in giving me your daughter for my wife. I will do my best to deserve her."

"Make her a good husband, and I shall never regret what I've done. It would be a heavy blow to me if her future was unhappy," the baronet replied.

"Have no fear on that ground. I'll be

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all she deserves—the best of husbands. To-morrow or next day I shall ask her to become my wife."

"Then good luck to you," answered the baronet, and they fell to talking of some fresh additions Sir Danvers had made to his kennel.

Tomorrow came, bringing with it a circumstance which postponed the captain's proposal indefinitely.

CHAPTER VIII.—I KNEW HIM ONCE.

Elated by success, the captain resolved to propose to Meg as soon as possible, and decided that immediately after breakfast he would ask her to come with him to the tennis court. At that pleasant meal the whole family were present; Meg, on entering the room, had with lowered lids and a certain shyness of manner, given her hand to her cousin, and when he had detained her, hastened away. During breakfast she confined her conversation to Ethel and the poor relation, so that he was obliged to devote himself to Mrs. Crayworth or remain silent, Sir Danvers being busy over a batch of letters the morning post had brought him.

On finishing, Meg rose from the table, the poor relation following her example. Fothergille took out his cigarette case, and said, "I'm going to the tennis court, won't you come, Meg?"

"Thanks, not this morning," she replied, "I must go to the village, and look after some of my poor people."

"Ah, well, I must remain alone today," he remarked, striving to convey to her a sense of his disappointment. "When do you return?"

"Not before lunch," she said. "Au revoir, everyone," and she tripped out of the room.

The luncheon hour at the Abbey that day became to those who sat round the table a memorable point in their lives, towards which, in the coming years, they looked back with heavy hearts.

Sir Danvers' hale and hearty no shadow on his open brow, no trace of care in his frank eyes, a smile upon his florid face, talked of the nine in which a solid vein of silver lead had now without further possibility of a doubt been discovered. The poor relation, who had some shares in it given her by the generous Meg, rejoiced in silence, thinking the days of her poverty were now but dark spots in her past.

Lady Fothergille, always concerned in what interested her husband, declared he must invest in the mine on her behalf. Mrs. Crayworth watched the Captain as he talked across the table to his fair cousin.

"Are matters coming to a crisis?" she asked, in a low voice, when opportunity permitted, Meg being now engaged in chatting with her step-mother.

"Yes, I think so," he replied, briefly.

"Are the duns pressing; or has your love reached that point at which suspense is no longer possible?"

"Don't chaff, but help me if you can."

"As if I couldn't. You have only to command my services."

"And pay my price—what is it?" said the man of the world.

"That I'll tell you when the hour of reckoning comes," she answered, without resentment. "Meanwhile, tell me how I can help you."

"I am anxious to propose today; she suspects it, and doesn't want to give me the chance,—maidenly bashfulness, you know, or rather, I suppose, you once knew a deuced long time ago."

"Probably about the same time as you knew how to behave with courtesy and honour to women."

"Don't let us quarrel over a slip of the tongue. What I want you to do is this. When lunch is over, take Meg into the shrubbery or on to the tennis court, or anywhere that will give me a chance of speaking. Of course you will retire when I join you."

"All right," replied the widow, gaily, and then added, "You should be more civil to me. Remember I have but to whisper a word or two in the girl's ear, or to her father, and you would never touch a penny of her thirty thousand pounds."

"I know, I know," he replied, wondering what commission she would claim presently for her service, "but that's a game at which two can play." As he spoke a footman entered and approached Lady Fothergille, carrying a salver on which was laid a visiting card. "A gentleman wishes to see your ladyship particular," he said.

"Are you sure he wishes to see me," she asked, thinking the servant had made some mistake, and that the visitor was for Mrs. Crayworth.

"Yes, my lady," replied the man, holding out the salver.

She took the card and read the name. As she did her face flushed, her hands trembled, and she rose hurriedly from the table. "A friend—an old friend has called," she said to her husband, "and I must see him. Will you excuse me?" she added, turning to those around her.

"Of course you must see him, Ethel," replied the baronet, "but won't you ask him to join us?"

"I think I had better go," she murmured, confusedly.

"No, ask him to have some lunch with us—show him in," he added, turning to the man.

In another minute the servant re-entered and announced Lord Hector Maynes. As the name sounded through the room a crash was heard, for Capt. Fothergille, in raising a glass of wine to his lips, let it slip from his fingers, and its fragments lay scattered before him. Mrs. Crayworth's sharp eyes noticed that his face grew deadly pale, and suddenly assumed an expression of fear, anger, and confusion.

From him she turned to watch her hostess, who with a flush yet upon her cheeks, brightness in her eyes, a smile upon her lips, advanced to meet the stranger with outstretched hand.

"This is indeed a surprise, Lord Hector," she said, "I had no idea you had returned to England."

He took her hand and pressed it warmly, letting his eyes rest upon her face, with a look full of hidden meaning.

"Let me introduce my husband, Sir Danvers Fothergille," she continued, turning to the baronet, who stood behind her.

"Very glad to see you, Lord Hector," he said, warmly.

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"I fear I have called at a most unreasonable hour, Sir Danvers."

"Not at all. You will join us, I hope."

"Thanks, with great pleasure," the stranger replied.

A chair was placed for him beside Meg, and as he was about to sit down his eyes fell upon the man who sat opposite.

"Captain Fothergille," he said, in a low voice full of surprise. "Can it be possible?" he asked, as if speaking to himself.

"Quite," replied the captain, who, though his face was still livid, now appeared to recover his composure.

"But I believed—it was reported you were dead!"

"Well, you see, I'm very much alive," Sir Danvers' cousin answered, angrily. "We'll talk about it another time."

"You have met before?" asked the baronet.

"Oh, yes," replied Lord Hector, adding, with a certain meaning in his voice, "I knew Captain Fothergille in Australia. A relation of yours, Sir Danvers?"

"Yes, my cousin."

The stranger made no remark; he was critically examining his old acquaintance, whose eyes were riveted on his plate.

"Have you been long back?" the host presently asked Lord Hector.

"No, only a couple of months. Australia is a splendid country, but I wasn't particularly lucky there. I roughed it a good deal, had a share in a gold mine, at which I worked for fifteen months, but never chanced upon a nugget. Then I took to sheep-farming, but the awful solitude of the life, removed from my fellow-men, from action, interest and civilization, palled upon me. Day after day and week after week passed without a single event to record or remember, my life became a blank, until at last I felt with Alexander Selkirk that I'd rather dwell in the midst of alarms than reign in that terrible place, and so I returned."

"There is no country like old England," said the baronet.

"I quite agree with you. I never intended to renounce it: I merely went to the new world that I might make money with which to return and—settle down," Lord Hector replied, hesitating as to the manner of finishing the sentence.

"And have you succeeded?" the captain asked, with a sneer.

"You ought to know, Capt. Fothergille, as well as any man, that I have not," replied Lord Hector, his tone indicating more than his words conveyed.

"I left you behind me," remarked the captain, anxious to eradicate from the minds of his hearers the unpleasant impression Lord Hector's words might have created.

"True, I lived longer than you in the land, but I didn't grow richer."

"We are apt to think of Australia as Whittington regarded London town, that it is paved with gold," said Sir Danvers.

"And that supposition attracts a number of unmitigated scoundrels; it seems as if the gold had the power of drawing together from all quarters of the globe the worst specimens of humanity," said Maynes.

The captain moved uneasily in his chair, and helped himself to a deep draught of Burgundy. "It appears to me love of money is the curse of mankind," he remarked, philosophically.

"And yet you will no doubt be surprised to hear," Lord Hector continued with a smile, "that men in their greed for its possession,