

SWEET IS REVENGE.

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CHAPTER XVI.—THE SPY AT WORK.

Mrs. Crayworth felt depressed, for her stay at the abbey was drawing to a close and she had not yet succeeded in her design. She had lost no opportunity of insinuating to Sir Danvers that he was wronged. She had dogged Ethel's footsteps that she might be able to inform the baronet where he would find his wife and Lord Hector; her eyes had directed the baronet to the corner where Lady Fothergille and her friend sat apart; her voice had expressed sympathy for his grief. As a gnat stinging a lion she had hovered round him, making him smart a thousand times by those feminine refinements of cruelty she understood so well, hinting by subtle words, by the lifting of eye-brows, by the expression of her face, by the breathing of a sigh, how deeply she commiserated him.

As she dressed herself one morning she regretfully reflected she had caused no positive breach between husband and wife, and then resolved she would not leave before she had wreaked her vengeance. What her action might be she could not decide, but she would hesitate at nothing which might bring disgrace on the woman she detested.

In this frame of mind she left her chamber and as she slowly walked along the corridor passed an open door which admitted a view of a spacious bedroom. Remembering she had seen Lord Hector enter it, she quickly stepped into the apartment. It was evident he intended returning. On the dressing table were bottles, near the door a row of boots and shoes, some clothes lay folded on a chair, in the corner stood a battered portmanteau bearing the labels of foreign hotels, whilst on a small table was a large sized writing desk. Toward this she glided with stealthy footsteps, and attempted to open it but found it locked. She smiled at an idea entered her mind and went down to breakfast.

At the head of the table Sir Danvers sat pale and abstracted as he wondered if, after all, the detective was right in hinting that Ethel had played into the thief's hands; and then dismissed the thought angrily, to entertain it once more a second later. What if she wished to enrich the man she loved, or desired to aid him in overcoming some temporary difficulty? What if she had need of a large sum to hush up some voice that threatened to proclaim a secret of her past life; to conciliate some trouble, some accomplice?

Sir Danvers groaned in spirit that such thoughts should beset him concerning one whom he had loved with all the fullness of his heart; despised and loathed himself that in moments of misery such ideas should seem plausible. It was disloyal to the woman who bore his name, to her in whose honor he had implicitly trusted; but he was tortured by jealousy, maddened by doubt, made desperate by fear. At times he felt inclined to confess his suspicions to her and beg her to rid him of the suspense from which he suffered; and again he could scarcely restrain himself from covering her with reproaches; but pride held him back. If she had betrayed him surely she would deny it; if she were innocent how would she feel on learning the estimate in which he held her. Bewildered by contending fears and hopes he knew not how to act; filled with uncertainty and grief his heart was well nigh broke.

So far, as Sir Danvers was aware, no trace had been found of the missing jewels, Felton had not communicated with him; it might be he held a clue in his hands which he was unwilling to make known until discovery was certain. The police authorities all over Great Britain and the continent had been communicated with; Lady Fothergille had made a sketch of the missing tiara and necklace, description of which had been given to every jeweller and pawnbroker in England, a precaution the detective had suggested, but in which he had little faith. "For, you see, Sir Danvers," he said, "there are nests of dealers in precious stones round and about Haddon Garden, who buy without ever asking a question, and mix up the unset diamonds they get over the counter, with the heaps already in their possession, so that it is impossible to say which is which. We have our eye on them, but they are much too sharp even for us, and manage to steer clear of the penal servitude they deserve."

"Are you unwell, dear Ethel?" Meg whispered as she left the table. "I am not very bright today, I have had a sleepless night. When I dozed my mind was filled with horrid dreams, so that I felt quite feverish by morning."

"Let us go on the terrace, or down to the Italian garden, the fresh sweet air of this delicious morning will serve you. How hot your hands are, Ethel, you are letting the robbery prey upon your mind."

"I cannot help it; it was through my fault the diamonds were stolen. I am sorry I let your father take them out of the safe, sorry I was ever vain enough to wear them."

"You are not vain; he wished you to wear them; they became you, and you became them."

"Did he say so?" she asked quickly.

"No, but I know he thought it, everyone did," the girl replied.

"What everyone thinks matters little to me, but what he thinks matters much," said Lady Fothergille sadly.

"Then you should be satisfied," answered Meg, "for he believes you to be one of the sweetest, dearest, best of women."

"Do you know, dear, the thought comes to me often that he has grown tired of me, that he repents having made me his wife."

"How could you let such an idea near you, Ethel, I am sure he loves you very dearly. He is a man of deep feeling and far from being fickle or capricious."

"But there are days when we scarcely exchange a word; something seems to have come between and parted us, something I cannot fathom or understand."

"It is merely because he is worried by this loss," the girl answered, knowing not what to say for she had noticed the change.

"It cannot be that, for I felt the alteration in his manner before the jewels were missing."

Meg with her arm clasped round her stepmother's waist, drew her towards a high backed marble bench where they seated themselves. "You will find it restful here, dear," she said.

"I think Meg you love me," said Lady Fothergille.

"With all my heart," the girl answered. "If anything were to happen to you I would feel sorry."

"Don't talk like that, Ethel—what can possibly happen to you?"

"I don't know; we cannot see into the future, but sometimes I am oppressed with a dread I don't understand, as if some weight were hanging over me, some threatened misfortune. I have no one to speak to of such things but you."

"Then tell me all and I will share your burden and make it lighter for you to bear."

"I have nothing to tell; my dreams are formless phantoms, but Meg dear, if anything should occur you must always believe me guiltless of all wrong; truthful in all things, faithful to those I love."

"My dear Ethel, you excite yourself; all these dreams are but foolish imaginings, the result of illness and depression. You must see Dr. Welnings for you are nervous and depressed."

"It may be, but I will not see the doctor; draughts cannot heal the mind."

"Then fresh air and exercise can. You must let me drive you over to Lowbridge before lunch, and do some shopping there, it will serve as a distraction and relief. You will come to please me."

"Yes, if you like," Ethel answered listlessly.

"Very well, I'll order the phaeton at once, and off we'll go," she said, as they rose and returned to the abbey.

In the hall they encountered Mrs. Crayworth, who was going to her apartments in order, as she related, to spend the morning answering correspondents. Having gained her rooms, however, she made no preparations for writing, but taking a low comfortable chair, settled herself to think. She was well aware the servants dined at one o'clock; at that hour the important business of feeding would be certain to keep one and all of them from the upper part of the house, and she would be quite free to act as she pleased without chance of observation. There need be no fear of interruption from Lady Fothergille and Meg, who were on their way to Lowbridge, nor from the poor relation, whom she left in the library writing notes to every friend and acquaintance she possessed, with the intention of impressing their imaginations and gaining their consideration by the use of note paper and envelopes bearing her present address in large black letters. As the minute hand of Mrs. Crayworth's dainty little watch crept towards one o'clock, she became restless with suppressed excitement. Then taking a heavy bunch of keys from her pocket, she walked to the door of her room and flinging it open listened attentively for some seconds. Suddenly she caught the sounds of a bell ringing in the basement, the signal for dinner in the lower regions. Again she waited with strained ear, and hearing neither word nor footstep, glided softly along the corridor until she came to the apartments which had been occupied by Lord Hector Maynes, pushing open the door of which she entered, and turned the key standing in the lock.

Glancing rapidly round the room, her eyes once more fell upon the writing desk, to which she immediately advanced, and taking out her bunch of keys, fitted one into the lock. It turned round and round at will, not touching the wards. Withdrawing this she tried a second which was too large, and then a third which caught in the lock and refused to move. At this unexpected result she was startled, fearing she could neither remove the key nor open the desk. Every moment was of importance, she might be interrupted or caught locked within a room not hers. Perspiration gathered on her forehead underneath the line of black fringe as she tugged at the key which remained in spite of all her efforts obstinately stuck in the wards, until with one vigorous movement it was suddenly displaced.

Acting now more cautiously she tried key after key from the goodly bunch she held, determined to succeed in her undertaking. At last the lock yielded, and with a smile of triumph she opened the desk. She paused a second to assure herself that all was quite still, and then raising one of the leather covered flaps, began the work of a spy.

Eagerly, hastily, she dived her hands into the contents of the desk, as yet not finding that which she sought. Here in a bulky package were bonds belonging to a South African diamond mine; a large envelope contained drawings and designs of a bridge intended to cross the Tweed, a bundle of receipts bills was in one corner, a few cigars wrapped in silver paper in another; a memorandum of expenses, a letter directed in a masculine hand and bearing the signature Rothsca, a water-colored sketch of a mountain with a train creeping round its base, lay at the bottom. So far she had discovered nothing serviceable to her purpose, and with an air of disappointment she replaced the papers and documents in the position she had found them.

With her hopes considerably fallen she turned to the other half of the desk. Opening an envelope lying on the top she took out a concert programme from which dropped a little bunch of faded violets tied with a piece of blue ribbon. Then came notes of invitation, cards for dances and receptions, duplicate tickets of opera stalls, doubtless preserved because of some memory associated with them, another letter from his father dated three years ago, brief, emphatic, and angry, forbidding his marriage under pain of disinheritation with some girl unnamed; then a woman's white glove, and last of all a large envelope directed to Lord Hector's club in town, in handwriting which Mrs. Crayworth immediately recognized as Lady Fothergille's.

Pouncing on this with eager hands she opened it with anticipations of finding what she desired, nor was she mistaken. Her eyes glared with malicious triumph as she drew forth a cabinet photograph of a woman in the dawn of life, with a full square

forehead, straight nose, delicately curved nostrils, and small mouth. There was no mistaking the face which had entrapped Sir Danvers' foolish fancy, and led him to marry a penniless governess. She laid the photograph on the desk, face downwards, and then for the first time caught sight of the writing on the back:

"To my own dear love, from his ever affectionate," "E. F."

Again and again she read the words, a sense of exultation swelling within her, for the defeat of her whom she hated was now certain. With such proof as this of Lady Fothergille's perfidy, there could be no longer doubt that she loved Lord Hector Maynes. No indignation arose in Mrs. Crayworth's mind at the betrayal of a husband who had raised his wife from independence to rank, who lavished on her the full affection of a loyal heart and noble nature, at the deception practiced on a man holding unbounded faith and perfect trust in the woman of his choice; she merely laughed scornfully at the simplicity of Ethel committing herself to words that by chance discovery or unforeseen accident might lead to her discovery.

"When we women are in love we never wait to measure our risks or heed the consequences," she thought, her mind reverting to some letters she had once written which she often wished had never been penned.

She was about to place the photograph in its envelope, when it caught, and looking to ascertain the cause, she saw a tress of bright chestnut hair tied with silken threads at each end. She knew the color well, and laughed to herself once more at this additional proof of Lady Fothergille's weakness. Securing the portrait and the hair in their envelope and putting it in her pocket, she replaced the remainder of the papers and locked the desk. Passing through the room she paused before the portmanteau, undecided if she should open it likewise, but reflecting she held in her possession sufficient evidence to damn her ladyship, she glided to the door, waited to make sure no footsteps approached, and then quickly regained her own rooms.

Seated in an easy chair she again took out the photograph, knitted her brows and glared at it as she longed to glare at the original, looked once more at the inscription on the back, and noted in a corner a date, showing it had been written but a month ago.

"You have put your head in the noose, my scornful lady," she said, "and I will make you suffer."

She listened for the luncheon bell to ring, but waited some time, the meal being delayed until Lady Fothergille's return from her drive. When at last she went down her step was more assured, her air more consequential than usual. As she entered the dining room she advanced towards Ethel, and with her sweetest smile said, "Dear Lady Fothergille, I hope you are better; I was quite grieved this morning to see how pale you looked."

"Thank you, I am quite well," was the cold reply.

"I am glad to hear it; I fancied you were depressed or grieved. We cannot have everything we like in this world."

"There is nothing left for me to desire."

"Indeed you are a happy woman. There are many things I covet, and many things I miss—amongst others the society of Lord Hector," she added, with an insolent glance at her hostess.

"I was not aware you were such good friends," Ethel replied, without flinching.

"He made himself agreeable to me; I hope you are not jealous, dear Lady Fothergille," she said, with a little laugh that had a cruel ring to a sensitive ear.

"Of you?" asked Ethel, in tones expressive of calm surprise, that struck her hearer like so many blows. "That would be impossible?"

"You think his devotion must be paid only at one shrine?" asked Mrs. Crayworth, with a well simulated air of amusement.

"I think Lord Hector Maynes is usually discreet in the selection of his friends," answered Lady Fothergille, moving away.

Mrs. Crayworth turned to a window that she might avoid showing the expression of rage that crossed her face. Looking out she saw Captain Fothergille approach.

"What has happened to ruffle your sweet temper?" he inquired, as he stepped from the terrace into the room through the open French window.

"Something of importance," she replied, shortly.

"To you or to me?"

"To you," she answered, looking over her shoulder to see no hearers were near. "Do you still wish to banish that woman, and remain heir presumptive to the title and estates?"

"Why, of course I do."

"Then the game is in your hands; play it properly and you must succeed," she said, determinedly.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Meet me in the avenue of limes after lunch, and you shall know."

CHAPTER XVII.—GREAT IS MY WRONG.

At the hour and in the place appointed the captain met Mrs. Crayworth, and received from her the photograph and lock of hair which she regarded as proof of Lady Fothergille's guilt, with the instructions that he should at once deliver them to Sir Danvers. Delighted with a mission which he believed would separate husband and wife, Fothergille sought his cousin, endeavoring the while to mask his satisfaction under a grave face. The baronet was in his study, and looked up wearily.

"Do you wish to see me?" he said, somewhat irritably.

"Yes; the fact is, I have something of importance to say."

"About your proposal to Meg?"

"No," said the captain, somewhat confused by the question, "but about Maynes."

"Well?"

"From my knowledge of him in the Bush I came to the conclusion he was without honor or honesty."

The baronet's face grew pale, and a look of trouble came into his blue eyes, but he made no reply.

"I fear I may pain you, Danvers, but for the sake of your honor it is best you should know all."

"Speak out, man, if you have anything to say."

"This," said the captain, taking an envelope out of his pocket, "has been found by the merest accident. You recognize the handwriting?"

"Yes; it is my wife's."

"It's already open; see what's inside."

The baronet quickly grasped it, and in taking out the photograph a tress of bright chestnut hair fell on the desk before him. His eyes fixed themselves upon it as if it were a living thing, his fingers trembled as he touched it; he did not doubt for a second to whom it belonged. He then glanced at the photograph of that beautiful face with its glorious eyes, which after years of solitude had won his heart. The lips smiled at him sadly, as if pitying his credulity and mocking his love. His cousin watched the working of his features with cruel eyes.

"Read the inscription on the back and notice its date—three weeks before Maynes came here on pretence of looking at the mine. You can no longer doubt the fellow is a scoundrel."

"Leave me," said Sir Danvers, in a husky voice.

When the door closed behind Fothergille, he said, "I shouldn't be surprised if he committed suicide; it would simplify matters greatly."

The baronet lay back in his chair, his mind seething in a whirlpool of madness. His faith in his wife was destroyed, the world crumbled beneath his feet. The thought that she no longer loved him filled her husband with desolation, whilst memories of the happiness he had known in the first months of his married life mocked him and bade him despair. Then his mind rose in revolt against the woman who had played him false, against the man who had gained her affection. As seas are lashed to fury by howling winds, so was his heart wrought to madness by the thoughts overwhelming him.

Rising he paced the floor backwards and forwards, unable to control his ideas or form his plans. If the present was a time of misery, the future would be a waste to him. He could trust no longer; the love which still held its place in his heart must be torn up and destroyed; henceforth, she and he must live apart.

He would seek and let her know he had become aware of her falsehood and treachery; and tell her their lives had been sundered by her faithlessness and deception. He took up the tress of hair and the photograph by way of confronting her with proofs of her guilt; but his sense of chivalry made him hesitate before admitting her conduct had been subjected to the scrutiny and comments of others. This he would spare her, though she deserved little mercy at his hands. Therefore flinging them into a drawer as it were mere contact with them caused him physical pain, he locked them up and strode out of the room, across the hall, and up the great staircase toward his wife's boudoir.

In this cosy apartment, with its curtains of azure satin, soft couches and low stools, vermillion spindle-legged tables, bowls of orange pottery filled with tea roses, oriental china on its brackets, tiny mirrors on its walls, fleecy rugs upon its floors, Lady Fothergille sat writing letters. As her husband entered she looked up and smiled, but the smile faded as her eyes met his, and she noted the angry expression of his countenance.

"What is it, Danvers?" she asked, laying down her pen. "Something has happened, I hope it is not anything unpleasant."

He looked at the face before him with its open brow and fearless eyes, and resented the fact that so fair a semblance should conceal such dark deception. The beauty which before had given him delight, now tortured him by the remembrance of his loss. He could not command himself sufficiently to speak; his whole nature, honest and true above all things, rose tempestuously, at the thought of her hypocrisy and his wrongs. What was their extent he dared not question, he dared not think.

"Is it the jewels?" she asked nervously, "has the thief been discovered?"

"Yes," he burst out, "I have discovered the thief who has stolen my happiness, who has broken into my house, and robbed me of my peace, perhaps of my honor."

"Stolen your happiness, peace, and honor," she repeated, gazing at him with wondering eyes. "What do you mean?"

"All that I say," he answered, advancing towards her, his face flushed with anger, his frame trembling with passion. "I was happy as a man can be until that villain entered my house and robbed me of what I valued most in life."

"Danvers, I don't understand you."

"Because you will not; but deception is no longer possible."

"Who is it you speak of, and what has he done?"

"You know well enough I mean Hector Maynes, who—"

"Who is as true and honorable a man as ever lived," she answered proudly.

Her defence exasperated him still more. "Was it honorable to come here and tempt a woman to disloyalty?"

"Who was that woman?" she asked her face growing deadly pale.

"Who?" he repeated. "The time for simulation is over. You are the woman, you have given him the love you pledged to me on our wedding day, you have betrayed the trust I placed in you, dishonored my name—"

"Stop," she cried out, rising to her feet, the blood rushing in a hot current to her face. "Though you are my husband you shall not insult me."

"Though you are my wife you shall no longer wrong me," he retorted.

"This is madness. I married you because I esteemed and loved you; I have never wronged you in thought, word, or deed," she said, calmly.

"It is too late for deception. You married me to secure your interest, to gratify your ambition."

"You believe this?" she asked, in a voice trembling with emotion.

"And then deceived me," he continued. "It is false," she cried in a defiant tone.

"I have proofs," he roared, striking the little writing table forcibly.

"And you can credit this of me?" she said reproachfully, his lack of trust in her rising above the grievousness of his accusations, and paining her most.

You can get the Wilmot Belfast Ginger Ale, Spa Water and Lemonade at your grocers, Druggists or Wine merchant and derive the same benefit as from its use at the springs.

"I know you now for what you are, an unfaithful wife."

"Danvers," she said, striving to stem the torrent of indignation that rushed through her mind, "hear what I have to say—"

"I'll hear nothing," he replied, his passion now at its height, "nor shall I ever willingly see you again. Henceforth we dwell apart; tomorrow morning I leave; your future shall be provided for so long as you bear my name, but you must live elsewhere. I shall not expect to find you here on my return." He went towards the door.

"One moment," she cried, following him and laying her hand on his arm. "You have wronged and insulted me, will you not listen to what I have to say?"

"You have deceived me once, I will not be your dupe a second time," he answered, flinging open the door and hurrying from his room.

She returned to the seat where he had found her on his entrance, her pulse beating tumultuously, his words of scorn and insult ringing in her ears. Resting her elbows on the table and supporting her head with her hands, she thought for some time, her cheeks burning with indignation, her heart hardening itself at the recollection of her husband's speeches. At whose instigations he had made these charges, what had wrought him to this fury, she did not think, she merely remembered the hard words in which he had framed his stinging insults. Her shame and anger scorched up her tears. Remain in his house an hour longer than was necessary she would not; nor would she write any protest against his injustice or in explanation of herself. Her soul rose in rebellion against one who hesitatingly accused her of infidelity, and refused to hear her denial. The course for her to pursue was clear; she should leave him without a word, and for the present seek a home with Mrs. Simmons, her old nurse, who kept a lodging-house in London. She was impatient to be gone, she felt suffocated whilst under the same roof with him. Looking at her watch she saw it was just five o'clock; three hours later a train started for London from Lowbridge, a distance of seven miles. She rang the bell, but before its summons could be answered a gentle scratch at the door told on her ears. She knew the sound full well, and immediately admitted Tito, who marching into the room looked up in her face. She knelt down and put her arms round his neck, whilst the tears fell on his great head.

"You trust me, Tito?" she said.

In answer the dog licked her hand.

At that moment her maid entered. "Clegg," she said, turning her face from the light, "tell Miss Meg as I have a headache I shall not come down to afternoon tea, and that I wish to remain undisturbed. When you have delivered my message come back."

"Yes, my lady," the maid answered, wondering as she went her way how it was servants were so mercifully free from headaches that prevented their mistresses from taking their regular meals.

On her return she found Lady Fothergille seated in a low chair, on the back of which her head rested with an air of weariness.

"Shall I bring your ladyship some tea?" she asked.

"Presently. Clegg, I think I can trust you."

"Law, of course you can, my lady."

"It is necessary I should go to London this evening, without Sir Danvers or any of the family knowing of my departure."

"Law bless us—that is, I beg your ladyship's pardon," exclaimed Clegg, who was given to read romances, and immediately conjectured that her mistress was about to elope.

"I am going alone, and shall stay during my absence with an old friend," Lady Fothergille condescended to explain by way of setting the girl's suspicions at rest.

"Am I to go with you, my lady?"

"No; I must be alone. Do you think you can take the under-coachman into your confidence?"

"He is my young man, please your ladyship," answered Clegg, as it that statement settled the question.

"You think he will not gossip?" asked Ethel, who feared least any unforeseen accident might prevent her putting her determination into action.

"Not if I forbid him," replied Clegg, proudly.

"Then tell him to have the brougham waiting for me just beyond the park gate at seven o'clock, where I will meet him. He must leave the Abbey as quietly as possible, and answer no inquiries as to where he is going. You understand?"

"I'll tell him," my lady," answered Clegg, who abandoning the idea of an elopement now foresaw an exciting and delightful mystery in her mistress' movements.

"You had better tell him this at once; remember that you bid him keep silence, then return and pack a trunk for me."

Clegg departed, full of the importance of her mission, and once more Ethel was left alone. She looked at a little clock on the table, it pointed to half-past five; in another hour and a half she would have begun her journey. She was now all impatient to leave her home. Sir Danvers need not fear she would seek to remain under one roof with him; nor need he leave the abbey next morning as he had threatened. Resentment for the wrong he had done her, for the unjust words he had spoken, still rankled in her mind, overcoming every other feeling. He was the dupe either of his own mad jealousy, or of the misrepresentations of her enemies; he had refused to listen to her, and she would therefore write him no words of explanation, defence, or farewell. He had judged her and she would seek no appeal, but she could not depart without saying adieu to Meg.

Sitting down, therefore, she wrote the following lines:

"I cannot leave what has been once a happy home without saying good-bye to you, dear. Why I go your father will best be able to explain. I am going where a faithful and affectionate friend will take care of me. Farewell, dear, believe and trust me if you can. ETHEL."

As she concluded the note Clegg entered the room, her color heightened, her eyes bright with excitement. "I have seen him, my lady, and it's all right," she said, with a self-satisfied air.

George! don't forget to bring home a packet of Kerr's Evaporated Vegetables for it is the cheapest and sweetest soup we have and saves so much trouble in cooking."

"When I am gone, but not before, give this letter to Miss Meg," her mistress said.

"Yes, my lady."

"And now, Clegg, you must help me to leave without observation. I shall go out by the side entrance into the pine wood, and on to the road, then I shall be free."

"When may I expect you back, my lady?"

Before answer could be made to this awkward question, a knock sounded at the door. Ethel's heart fluttered; perhaps this was someone who would prevent her carrying out her intentions. "See who it is," she said to the maid, as she took her place behind a Japanese screen.

The door opened, and Mrs. Crayworth standing on the threshold, said, "I have come to inquire for Lady Fothergille, her headache, I hope, is better."

"No, ma'am," replied Clegg, "it is worse."

The widow glanced around the room, but failed to catch sight of its owner. "I am so sorry. Sir Danvers has had a bad bilious attack; strange. Tell your mistress I shall call to see how she is before dinner."

"Please, ma'am, she doesn't wish to be disturbed."

"No doubt she doesn't wish to see anyone, but an old friend like myself might be able to give her some comfort. I know what such headaches are