

SWEET IS REVENGE.

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CHAPTER XXXII.—(Continued.)

"And you are ready to believe the slanders of a wicked world," she cried out.

"I believe what my own experience has shown me to be true. You pretended to love me, that I might become the dupe of your accomplice, you lured me on and deceived me so long as I had money to lose at the gambling-table in your house; when my gold was gone an end came to your affection, and you threatened to acquaint your husband with my advances. I came to England to see you and Capt. Fothergille, and demand the sum which I lost to you both. Death has snatched him from me, but you remain, and from you I shall exact your share in that sum, four thousand pounds."

"This is preposterous; it is sheer madness," she cried, her face no longer beaming with smiles but frowning in defiance. "You played and lost your money; you have no right to reclaim it now."

"I lost it because I know now I was duped. Fothergille was a cheat, who had been turned out of every gambling hell in Germany before I met him. He and you robbed me as much as if you stole the money from out of my pocket," he said, raising and gesticulating violently.

"It is false; I have never cheated she answered.

"Never. Not even when you played with young Lord Herrick, whose uncle forced you to return your winnings under threat of exposure?" said the baron.

Mrs. Crayworth's face assumed a look of terror. "That is another slander," she replied, "a base slander on a helpless woman."

"You were not helpless then. Your husband and Fothergille your accomplice were living, why did you not call on them to defend you?"

"Have you come here to injure me," she said in a quiet tone.

"I have come to ask you for your share of the spoils—four thousand pounds. I am now poor, and I demand the money stolen of me by you. The world has taught me the value of gold."

"Even if this were true, I am unable to meet your demands."

"I don't believe it; if this house is not yours it is your aunt's, get the cash from her," he said. "I want it at once."

"I cannot; she would not give me a penny. I haven't it, believe me."

"I must have it; it is mine, and I shall have my own."

"I cannot give it to you, even if you had a right to it, which I deny."

"Then there is but one thing left to me. I will tell the man who is about to marry you what character his future wife bears on the continent."

"Oh," she cried out, hearing the threat she had feared, "you cannot do this; he would not believe you."

"I have some letters of yours which will convince him."

"Baron," she said, in a pleading voice, "you would not ruin me. This man knows nothing of my past; in making me his wife he gives me a chance of beginning a new career, of becoming a better woman."

"I have no faith in your sudden conversion. You marry him to forward your own interests, not in the hope of living a better life."

"You loved me once, have mercy," she said, imploringly.

"You deceived and flung me aside without pity. I have no compassion for you now. For years you have duped men, led them to ruin and disgrace, aided a scoundrel because you profited by his cheating and feared his exposure. Pay me the money you owe me, your share, and we part forever; refuse and I will have my revenge," he said, his face flushed with anger.

"I cannot," she said, standing up and facing him. "Go, and do your worst, no one will believe you, a foreign adventurer."

He laughed bitterly, and then snapped the fingers of his right hand. "As to being an adventurer, I can refer enquirers to the ambassador of my emperor, and as to believing me, I have your letters as proof that what I say of you is true. For the last time, I ask you to give me back the money stolen from me in your house."

"The day had been when this man deemed it his greatest happiness to obey her commands; when a smile from her repaid him for his heaviest losses; when a sigh upon her lips brought him on his knees. She wondered if it still retained any of his old affection; or if indeed worldly experience on one hand, and the passage of time on the other, had deprived her of her former power over him. She would see."

"Baron," she said, gently, covering her face with her hands. "I cannot bear that you of all men, should use such words to me. I loved you once, I love you still, for I have never forgotten you; surely you will not injure me?"

"Madame," he answered, "I don't believe one word of what you say. You loved my money in the past; if you ever thought of me since, it was to hope you should never encounter me again, to pray that I was in my grave. Will you make restitution, and give me back the money of which you cheated me?"

She was unable to give him what he demanded, for she had long since spent the money accumulated by her wits, and had for years lived up to the annuity inherited by her marriage settlement. Therefore she answered, "I haven't a penny saved, and I don't know one in the world of whom I could beg or borrow. Be reasonable, Baron, if you will not be merciful; the day may come when I can perhaps help you. Give me time."

"Until you have married that young simpleton—no. You shall pay me at once, or take the consequences," he said, bowing, and moving towards the door.

"I am helpless," she said, extending her hands towards him beseechingly. For—sake, have pity on me."

"You showed no pity to others. As you have treated them so shall I treat you," he answered, bowing once more, and leaving the room without another word.

She flung herself down on a sofa, feeling worsted in the fray. A dull feeling of despair crept over her; the world for which

she had labored and schemed seemed crumbling beneath her feet. There was no friend to whom she could turn for help, protection, or sympathy. Worse of all, she dared not look into her own heart.

CHAPTER XXXIII.—REUNITED.

On arriving at Paddington station, Sir Danvers impatiently jumped into a hansom, and was driven to that quiet street near Hanover Square where his wife had taken refuge. He had scarcely rung at the door of Mrs. Simmons' house, than that lady who had watched him from behind the curtains of her dining-room, immediately rushed to answer his summons, guessing who her visitor was, and the purpose of his coming.

"Lady Fothergille within," he asked, nervously.

"Yes, sir, will you please to step inside," the landlady replied, leading the way upstairs and ushering him into the drawing-room.

He looked round the apartment quickly, and felt disappointed at finding it empty.

"She will be here presently," said Mrs. Simmons explained as she vanished.

In another minute the door opened and Ethel stood before her husband. He rushed forward and clasped her in his arms, his face beaming with happiness.

"My dearest," he said, "can you forgive me. It was my great love for you that made me jealous, that caused me such bitter pain as wrought me to madness, for I must have been mad when I spoke to you as I did, when I doubted your love and loyalty for one moment."

"It is I, Danvers, who have to ask forgiveness. My pride was hurt by your doubts of me, my anger was roused because you would not listen to me. Humiliated by your words I held my peace when I could readily have explained and set your jealousy at rest. You had roused my spirit, and I wickedly determined you should suffer it only for a little while. But I have repented my stubbornness and my folly, dear; for in punishing you I have at the same time punished myself. Say you forgive me."

"The joy of meeting you again and being certain of your love recompenses me for my pain. You cannot tell, Ethel, how blank the world looked to me when I thought I had lost you," he said with a heavy sigh.

"You should never have thought it," she answered. "You should have known nothing but death could part us."

"I shall remember it in future. Am I quite forgiven?" he asked, striving to resume his old cheerful manner.

"You are—you were an hour after I had left your home."

"Then whilst I have you with me I shall be happy, no matter what else may happen," he said.

She looked at him questioning, and noted the grave expression of his face.

"Why, what can happen to rob us of happiness?" she asked.

"Nothing, dear," he replied, wishing to postpone all present reference to the captain's arrest. "And now tell me how is Hector—is he out of danger?"

"I hope so; his fever has been very slight, and the fracture promises to heal rapidly. There is every hope for his life. You know Edith is with him?"

"I didn't till this morning. She read of the attempted murder in Galignani, and started at once from her college. Think what a shock she must have received."

"It must have been terrible," he answered.

"Poor Hector!" she said presently.

"What enemy had he who would attempt to murder him?"

"The police have made no discovery as yet," he replied, an expression of pain crossing his face. Since the previous night when the captain stood convicted as a thief and charged as a murderer, Sir Danvers had grave suspicions it was his cousin's hand that dealt Lord Hector the blow that well-nigh proved fatal. No doubt, he considered, Maynes had become acquainted with some incidents in the captain's life which the latter wished to have forgotten, and feared would be disclosed. His cousin stood revealed in a new light from the sight of which the baronet turned away with loathing.

"Hector's marriage can no longer be kept secret from his father," Ethel said, after a few minutes' consideration.

"No; why should it? When he recovers I shall offer him Haynes' post as agent; you know Haynes leaves at Christmas. Maynes will then be independent of the duke."

"How good and thoughtful you are, Danvers. I'm sure Hector will be delighted to accept it, and it will make me so happy to have Edith near."

"Your happiness, dear, shall be my first consideration in all things," he answered.

"I feel I cannot sufficiently atone for the pain I have caused you."

"We will refer to it no more, dear; and if we think of it the memory will merely serve as a shadow to heighten the brightness of our joy," she replied.

"And now, Danvers, I have something to say which has troubled me and will, I fear, pain you."

"About the captain?" he said interrogatively.

"Yes, perhaps I should have written, but I preferred waiting until I could see you. Since I came here I learned he has a wife. I know he was paying more attention to Meg than was proper for a married man, and perhaps leading her to believe he loved her."

"I knew that, and though I did not mention it to you, he had asked my permission to marry her. She had a narrow escape, poor child."

"O, Danvers, there surely must be some mistake," she said, shocked at the news.

"Not in the least, the man is a thorough scoundrel," he replied, his honest eyes flashing with indignation.

"Then you know it was he who—who stole the diamonds," she asked.

"I do," he replied, and he told her the

incident of Felton finding the stolen jewels. "But unfortunately that is not all," he added, "he stands at the present moment charged with murder."

Ethel gave a cry, a look of horror came into her face, and she threw her arms round her husband's neck. Instinctively she knew what a blow this charge against a kinsman must be to one who was the soul of honor, how keenly his righteous pride must feel this foul slur cast upon his house, and immediately recognised it as her duty to comfort him in his affliction.

"My dear Danvers," she said, gently, "I am grieved that this pain should have fallen on you; but every family has its black sheep; nothing can dim the brightness of your personal honor."

Understanding her desire to soothe him, he bent down and kissed her.

"The world's opinion will be indifferent to me so long as you are near me," he replied.

"And after all the charge may be false," she added.

"Yes, we must give him the benefit of the doubt as long as possible. I shall do what I can for him, and must now see my solicitor to get his opinion."

"But you haven't had any lunch, dear."

"No, I had forgotten that—I have no appetite," he said.

"You must not leave until you have tasted my old nurse's cookery; she is the best cook in the world," saying which she hurried out of the room to consult Mrs. Simmons.

"I fear," she said, "Captain Fothergille has treated his wife shamefully, though the poor creature still loves and believes in him. She told me her story, part of which on consideration leads me to think he is guilty of the terrible charge brought against him. She rose from her bed one night, and coming into the room where she had a couple of hours previously left him playing cards, saw him stand above the prostrate and bleeding body of his partner. A blow felled her to the ground, fever attacked her, and for a while her mind was unhinged. He put her in a mad house and left her. On regaining her reason she came to believe the dreadful scene she witnessed was merely a dream, but from what you have told me I know it must have been real."

"Good—this is terrible," said the baronet, leaning back in his chair.

"Then she came from Australia in search of him; his servant said he was in France, and she has been impatiently waiting his return. I told her where he was and she went down to Hayton."

"Where he gave her one of the diamonds to sell for him."

"I'm sure she had no idea it was stolen. You must see that she is set free, Danvers."

"No doubt they will discharge her tomorrow."

"Then we must take care of her. She seems to have a little knowledge of the world as a child, and is quite penniless."

"Very well, my dear, we will look after her and take care that she wants for nothing in the future."

"You are always good and generous."

Praise from her lips was very sweet to him; the sight of her face, the sound of her voice brought him such happiness as but a day or two ago he had never hoped to know again.

"I shall have to stay in town for some time owing to this unhappy business," he said, a look of pain crossing his face such as ever rested there when he thought of his cousin.

"Don't you think we had better stay at the Bristol?"

"If you like, dear, but we can be very comfortable here, and if you don't mind I had rather remain. We can dine at the Grand or the Metropolitan, but this place is more homely than an hotel."

"Then here we remain," said Sir Danvers. "Your will is mine. Besides that poor woman, Mrs. Fothergille, will return here, and I should not like to miss her."

"And now, Ethel, I must hurry away to Lincoln's Inn or I shall miss my lawyer, and have to follow him to his home at Clapham, for I am resolved to see him before the day is over, and find out what can be done for this unfortunate man," he said, sighing deeply, for his cousin's fate weighed heavily on his mind. He had striven hard to hope the charge of murder was unfounded, but belief in the captain's innocence on that point had given way since he heard of Mrs. Fothergille's supposed dream. This unhappy man's prospects seemed black indeed, and the baronet felt his heart sink as he contemplated them.

"We must hope for the best, dear," Ethel said, as he left the room, and her words rang in his ears, as he was driven at a rapid pace towards Lincoln's Inn Fields.

At half-past seven o'clock, Mrs. Crayworth and her aunt sat waiting the coming of the Rev. Mr. Sympington. The former after having mentally revised her situation, and combated a legion of fears, had evidently convinced herself that the Baron would not put his threat into execution. Although she had in a moment of anger called him an adventurer, she knew him to be a gentleman, and her vanity assured her that having once loved her, he cared for her still; reasons she considered sufficient to prevent his revealing her past before the eyes of the unsophisticated curate.

She had spent some time before her toilet glass this evening, striving to erase all traces of care which the shock of the captain's suicide, and the terror of the baron's threats had left behind. After many anxious moments and skillful touches she had succeeded to her own satisfaction; and now clad in a gown of sage green velvet, which contrasted the alabaster whiteness of her ample bust, she sat in a state of nervous expectation, listening anxiously for the rap or ring which should announce the coming of her future husband.

They were to dine at eight, but she felt assured he would arrive long before that hour, and she patiently turned her eyes to the little Louis Quatorze clock on the chimney-piece, watching the slow movements of its hands, fancying it had suddenly stopped, and longing for the quarters to chime. She made no effort to sustain a conversation with her invalid aunt, she could scarcely control her thoughts sufficiently to give lucid answers to the questions asked. She found it impossible to subdue her nervousness. It was now a quarter to eight, and he had not put in an appearance; she rose, walked to one of the windows, and gazed into the street, where the yellow lights of the gas lamps

were glimmering in the dusk. The roll of cab wheels fell upon her ears; her heart beat as they approached, and sank as they sped into distance. Perhaps he might walk, the evening being fine. She listened for footsteps, opening the window a little the sooner to catch the sounds she expected, quite regardless of the invalid.

The clock struck eight; her aunt coughed, and moved uneasily. "Did you tell him we dined punctually at the hour?" she asked.

"Yes, but men are always late; he has much to do I dare say," Mrs. Crayworth answered, irritably.

"I am not used to be kept waiting, and I know the dinner will be quite spoiled," the old lady grumbled.

Mrs. Crayworth closed the window and returned to her seat. Her tears rose higher and higher, like a black tide threatening to lay waste her hopes. She clasped her hands in agony; her temples throbbed with pain, induced by tension of the nerves. Every second added to her misery—to know the worst at once would be relief. Suddenly a ring at the bell of the street door sounded through the house. She could not summon courage to leave the room and see if he had arrived, but waited, hearing steps gradually approach until a footman entered, bearing on a salver a letter he presented to her. She recognised Sympington's writing, and with trembling hands she took the envelope and tore it open. Then her eyes fell upon a brief note, which said:

"Baron Handstein has just called on me and made some revelations regarding your past life, which are supported by your letters. Having said this, I need scarcely add that all is over between us. I feel grateful this timely warning has been given me before I entered a life which would have ended in misery for you and for me. It will be best we should not meet again."

—Ezekiah Handworth Sympington.

She crushed the note in her hand, and said, dry-eyed, staring before her, mentally viewing the prospect of a better life slowly fade into nothingness. She had played her game and lost, feeling this loss meant far more for her in the future than she could mourn or perceive in the present; fearing this blow would be the first to send her drifting down the social stream past the peaceful shores of conventionality where she had hoped to dwell—beyond the reach of sheltering heavens where she had longed for rest—and out into perilous sea of recklessness where so many women go smiling to their doom, to disappear beneath its waters, unregretted, nameless, and unpitied.

CHAPTER XXXIV.—AH, NO MORE PAIN.

It was early in the afternoon of the day on which her husband committed suicide, that the necessary forms being complied with, Mrs. Fothergille was liberated from the Marlborough street police station. No mention was made to her of the fate which had befallen her husband, nor did she know he had been lodged within a few yards of her cell. The officials who were aware of her relationship to the deceased prisoner, did not consider themselves bound to enlighten her regarding his death, and therefore avoided incurring a scene concerning an act they regarded with short indifference. On what ground she was so speedily discharged she neither knew nor enquired, being quite satisfied the charge of robbery had been found a grievous mistake.

Once more free she glided through the streets scanning every face that approached her, as if fearful of being again arrested. Now and then she hesitated in her onward way, crossed to the opposite side of the thoroughfare, and occasionally laughed softly to herself. Her reason which had never fully recovered the fright of seeing her husband stand red-headed above the body of his victim, had received a shock when she was arrested that well-nigh flung it from its balance once more. Her stay in the cells of the police station had forcibly reminded her of the long and terrible days and nights she had spent in the madhouse, and preyed upon her mind. It had occurred to her that this charge of theft was but another horrible dream which might perhaps cause her to be deprived again of the light of heaven, freedom of will, and companionship of her kind.

By slow degrees she arrived at Mrs. Simmons' house, and after considerable hesitation rapped timidly at the door, which was immediately opened by the maid of all works, who cried out—"Law, ma'am, is it you?"

This exclamation brought the landlady into the hall, and before her, Mrs. Fothergille stood mute and motionless as if doubtful of her reception.

"Come in, my dear," said Mrs. Simmons compassionately, for news of the captain's suicide having at once been communicated by Felton to Sir Danvers had already reached the landlady's ears.

At sound of her kindly voice, she slid within the words were addressed, glided swiftly forward, and putting her thin hands on Mrs. Simmons' ample arms, said in a wild hysterical voice, "It was all a mistake, I knew it would be, for he has been to explain, though I haven't seen him yet. Is he here?"

"My husband," she answered, not noting the pitiful expression that crossed her hearer's face.

"You haven't been told—" Mrs. Simmons began and then paused.

"Where he is—no, but I felt sure he would be here to wait for me, perhaps he will come later on," she added in a disappointed tone.

"Come and see my lady. Sir Danvers is staying here, but he has gone out. Just wait a moment until I tell her you have returned," she added, it occurring to her she had best warn Ethel of Mrs. Fothergille's ignorance of the captain's death.

She left the new-made widow in the hall, but in a minute called over the banisters, "Come up, my dear," and Mrs. Fothergille obeying was met in the drawing-room doorway by Ethel, who kissed her and welcomed her back.

"My husband has been to the police station and explained the mistake, but I haven't seen him; I fancied he would be here with you. Has he been?" Mrs. Fothergille asked.

"No, dear, I haven't seen him," replied Ethel, wondering if she had better break the intelligence of the captain's fate at

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once. "Will you not take off your bonnet?"

"No, it he doesn't come here soon, I shall go to his rooms and seek him."

"You will not find him there."

"Are you sure—perhaps he is expecting me," she said.

"I am quite sure. He is not in town."

"But he must have been to the police station," she said eagerly.

"Yes, he has been there, but he has gone."

"Where?" she demanded in an excited voice.

"I cannot say."

"Are you keeping me from him? Surely you who have been so kind would not part us after all this weary time; now that we shall be so happy together she said pleadingly."

"No," Ethel answered, "rest assured I shall do nothing to pain you."

Something in the expression of her eyes, in the tone of her voice, in the wildness of her manner, assured Lady Fothergille the unhappy woman's reason had suffered a shock since last they met, and fearful of the consequences, she resolved to postpone breaking the news of the captain's death.

"No, I am certain you would not pain me. I must wait here till he comes—he cannot be very long away."

"You would be very unhappy if you never saw him again?"

Mrs. Fothergille's face became deadly white. "I should not care to live if we were separated; the world would be empty to me without him."

"But perhaps he was not always kind to you?"

"That does not matter; his presence was my greatest happiness," she replied, with a smile that brightened and beautified her face.

Ethel sighed. "Would you not like to come and live with me in the country, far removed from the noise and bustle of cities, surrounded only by friends who care for you?" she asked.

"Yes, if he were there. Wherever he is, there alone can I be happy."

"But supposing he was summoned away, and had to obey?"

"Then I should follow him."

Lady Fothergille saw she was not fitted to receive news of the suicide just then, and found it impossible to prepare her for the intelligence. She hoped that later on some suitable opportunity might arise to break the news of the captain's death to his unhappy widow.

Meanwhile, she postponed the task, and extracted a promise from Mrs. Fothergille that she would not leave the house that day. This was readily given. "If I were away when he called, I should never forgive myself for disappointing him. He is certain to come here," she said.

In the course of the afternoon Sir Danvers returned, looking jaded and dispirited. The news of his cousin's suicide had come upon him with a shock; the sight of the rigid form and bloodless face fixed in a cynical smile, haunted him. He shook hands gravely with Mrs. Fothergille, and forewarned by Ethel, evaded her eager questions. Gradually she became calmer, being fortified by the belief that his return was now but a question of hours.

Next morning Sir Danvers attended the inquest, and the subsequent removal of the captain's body to his rooms, where it was to remain until arrangements for interment were completed. Ethel had again sought to break the tidings of the tragedy to the widow; but the slightest hint that her husband would not return caused Mrs. Fothergille such excitement that she thought it best to wait until Sir Danvers was present to aid her in this painful duty.

All through the afternoon Mrs. Fothergille wandered restlessly from room to room, talking to herself, laughing softly, singing snatches of songs, and exhibiting a lightness of spirit she had not hitherto shown. Every knock at the street door, every ring at the bell, every footstep on the stair, made her start and tremble. She walked from window to window eagerly watching the passengers in the street, listening to the roll of every cab, trusting it might stop before the house, longing with all her heart and soul to see the man whose quick return she prayed for fervently.

The day wore slowly and painfully away, but still she waited with unvarying trust, for had he not promised to seek her. As evening advanced it suddenly occurred to her he might not know she was at Mrs. Simmons'. He was aware she had been taken to the police-court, and maybe believed she was there still. This idea troubled her, and gradually her patience gave way to uneasiness. The atmosphere of the house seemed to suffocate her, its rooms became as prison walls to her sight; its inmates as warders. They should not prevent her from seeing and letting him know she was free, and willing to join and remain with him for evermore.

Keeping her intention a secret from those whom she feared would thwart her designs, she awaited her opportunity, and stealing from the house as noiselessly as a shadow, glided swiftly down the street, scarcely knowing where to turn, yet involuntarily directing her steps to the quarter in which his rooms were situated. The thoroughfare was almost deserted as she entered it, and with hesitating steps approached the house she had passed and re-passed on many a weary day. At sound of the bell ringing in answer to her touch, she started; what if he did not wish her to call! She could scarcely suppress her excitement as she waited, thinking that within

the next few minutes she might see him and hear once more that voice which fell as music on her ears. The door was opened by Barlyl, who started at sight of her and gazed at her a second or two without speaking.

"Is he—Captain Fothergille—here?" she asked.

"He is," the valet answered, gravely. "They have just brought him."