

# A TANGLED WEB.

CONCLUDED.

"I think I can understand how you were trapped, Audrey," said Neville, gravely. "But you are free now, and Lorrimore—what a good fellow he is, and how he loves you! You will reward him for his long devotion and faithfulness, Audrey?"

Her face crimsoned. "Hadn't—hadn't we better wait till he asks me?" she retorted, and ran from him. Neville went outside and found Lorrimore alone on the terrace. He turned quickly.

"Didn't I hear Miss Hope's voice?" he said.

"Yes," said Neville in his blunt fashion. "Look here, Lorrimore, if I were you I'd go to—"

"To Africa?" said Lorrimore, biting his lips.

"Africa be—blowed! No; to London, anywhere, just for a few weeks. Don't you know how it is with her? Man, you can't expect her to rush into your arms directly she is free!"

"No, I can't!" admitted Lorrimore, "but I'd like her to do so, all the same. But of course I'll go. I'll go up to London, and—-and for Heaven's sake send me a wire to the Athenian Club the very first moment you can!"

"I will," said Neville, grasping his hand.

"And tell her—No—yes! Why should I not tell her what she knows already? Tell her that I love her better than ever, and that the moment she will let me, I will come to her. That's all. Make my excuses. Good-bye."

After this dialogue, Lorrimore, with just a glance at the house—he did not see Audrey, who was watching them from behind a window curtain—ran down the steps.

"I suppose I'd better go, too," mused Neville, as he looked after him.

But he still hung about, and presently his patience met with its reward. He was lying back in a deck-chair in the smoking room when he heard the door open, and thinking it was the viscount, he said without looking round.

"I think I'd better clear out, Marlow; there's no chance of seeing her, I'm afraid. That's what I'm waiting for."

"If you'll tell me who 'her' is, I'll see," said a voice behind him that caused him to spring to his feet, upsetting the chair. Sylvia stood with her hand on the door, her eyes downcast, her face flushed.

"I thought I should find Lord Marlow here," she said, as if she were going to run away.

But he took the door out of her hand and closed it.

"Sylvia, I want to speak to you."

"Yes?" softly and demurely, without raising her eyes.

"I want to tell you that—I love you!" he blurted out.

Yes? still more softly, though her bosom was heaving.

Neville looked at her ruefully.

"And—oh, Syl, don't you love me?"

"Of—of course I do. One—one ought to love one's—brother."

His face reddened.

"Brother? I don't want you to love me like that. I don't love you as if you were a sister. I want you to be my wife. There!"

"Your wife?" she said almost inaudibly, her eyes still downcast.

"My wife!" he repeated. "I've loved you like that—ever since I lost you. Ah! you can't tell how I loved and longed for you. And—and—if I can't have you for my wife—well, I shall be the most miserable man in the world! Oh why don't you speak?" he cried, impatiently.

"I was thinking," she said softly, still keeping him from her at arm's length, as it were, by her manner. "Things have changed. You aren't Jack any longer, but Mr. Neville Lynne and a rich man."

"What difference does that mean?" he broke in.

"A great deal. You are an English gentleman and ought not to marry an opera singer, Mr.—Mr. Lynne."

Neville stared at her.

"Is that your answer?" he said. "You know it's only an excuse; and this morning, oh, Syl! I thought you loved me. Why did you stand up for me if you didn't?" he said with such disappointment and reproach in his voice and eyes that Syl could not withstand him any longer.

"So I do—so I did!" she exclaimed; and she cried as he took her in his arms. "You know I love you! It is you who were blind, not to see it long ago! I have always loved you. Ah, you didn't know—you didn't guess! Jack—dear Jack—my Jack!"

He kissed her brow and eyes and lips passionately as the light broke in upon him.

"Oh, what a blind idiot I was!" he said, remorsefully and with immense self-reproach and pity. "I—I thought you only cared for me as sisters do—"

"Sister! I hate the name!" she cried, with a stamp of her foot—"I shall hate it for the rest of my days!"

"All right," he said, intoning her still more tightly; "wife's better, isn't it? My wife! Oh, Syl! I'm like the viscount, and don't know whether I am standing on my head or my heels; but this I do know—that I have got the sweetest, the loveliest girl in all the world!" and he raised her face and looked into her upturned eyes with all the love that had been stored up for so many weary months.

## CHAPTER XLVII.

Lady Marlow arrived by the evening train, and the instant she had reached her own boudoir sent for Audrey and Sylvia.

"Now, my dears," she said, looking up from the chair in which she had seated herself without waiting to take her out-of-door things off. "I'll trouble you to tell me what this all means. The viscount has been endeavoring to do so all the way from the station, but he got so mixed up that I

can make nothing of it. Sylvia, I think you had better tell me," and she held out her hand to her. "Is it true that Neville Lynne has come back and that you are to be his wife?"

"Yes," faltered Sylvia, who had sunk beside the chair.

"And pray, where is he?"

"He has gone back to his own rooms in the village," she said in a low voice.

"Please ring the bell," said her ladyship.

"My love to Mr. Lynne, and he will please come to the Grange at once," she said to the lady's-maid; "and tell the coachman to take the dog-cart for Mr. Lynne's luggage. Now, then," to Sylvia; "and it's true, I suppose, that a will has been found, and he has been left a third of the fortune?"

"Yes," said Sylvia, more composedly.

"And that Jordan?"

She stopped and held out her arms to Audrey, and Sylvia stole from the room and left them alone together.

Perhaps Lady Marlow found that Audrey was not in need of much consolation. As Neville had said, she was to be congratulated.

When Neville arrived he found them all in the drawing-room ready for dinner, and he went straight up to Lady Marlow and took the hands she extended to him.

"May I, viscount?" he asked, looking round with a flush on his handsome, sun-burned face.

"Oh, certainly," replied the viscount; and Neville bent down and kissed her.

Lady Marlow laughed, the tears in her eyes.

"You haven't improved in your manners, sir," she said. "You were always a bad, bold boy. And so you have come back, and you are going to marry our old friend the signora?"

"Yes," said Neville, looking at Sylvia.

"Has she told you all?"

"Oh, yes, and a great deal more than you know," said her ladyship, dryly. "I think you are a very lucky man, Neville."

"So do I," he assented. "How well you look, Lady Marlow. I declare you are younger!"

"Thank you. Is that the style of compliment that obtains in the gold diggings?" But she looked pleased with him. "But you shall sit next me at dinner and talk to me all the time. The signora will have quite enough of your conversation for the rest of her life."

"I dare say," said Neville, happily, "but I regret to say I haven't got a dress-coat. You were kind enough to send for the luggage, but there wasn't any."

The viscount laughed.

"It's a good joke!" he said. "I shall have to lend you some things of mine. They'll come down as far as your ankles and elbows, I dare say."

They went in to dinner, and the charitable reader will not deem them selfish if they forgot Mercy upstairs and were happy. You see, they had not been happy for so long.

Neville and Lady Marlow did nearly all the talking, Sylvia listening with a smile and many blushes as Neville gave an account of their joint "brother and sister" establishment at Lorn Hope; and Audrey sat silent and thoughtful, but without that scared, hunted expression on her face which had haunted it for the last few weeks. She was—free!

By mutual consent the two gentlemen accompanied the ladies to the drawing room, and they were still talking over the wonderful past and the more wonderful present when a footman noiselessly approached the viscount and said:

"Mr. Trale would be much obliged if you'd see him, my lord."

"I think not," said the viscount promptly. "I've had enough of Trale and all his works for one day. To-morrow, James. I've gone to bed, please."

The footman returned again with a message for Neville. Would he please see Mr. Trale?

Her ladyship looked round.

"Why shouldn't we all see him?" she said. "Neville hasn't any more secrets."

"No, no!" said Neville. "Let him come in, Lady Marlow."

Trale was shown in, and looked rather nonplussed for the moment at the sight of his audience, but only for a moment.

"Sorry to disturb you, my lady," he said, turning to her quite naturally and as a matter of course, "but, Banks—"

"That's Lavarick," explained Neville in a low voice.

Lady Marlow nodded.

"I know; go on."

"Well, my lady, he's made a clean breast of it, and a part of his confession is so astonishing, and concerns"—he looked at Neville and then at Sylvia—"Mr. Neville, that I thought it my duty—"

"To bewilder and badger us without delay," finished the viscount, good-temperedly.

"Yes, my lord," said Trale, gravely. "You are aware that the third of the Lynne money is left to a young lady—the daughter of the lady Sir Greville was to marry."

"Yes, yes," said her ladyship. "I know who she is, or, rather, who her mother was. Her name was Chester."

"Quite right, my lady."

"She and her husband left England—" she stopped and looked at Neville; she had been going to say "driven from England by Sir Greville," but stopped in time.

"Right, my lady," said Trale, corroboratively.

"And this daughter of his must be found as quickly as possible. It will be difficult. Mr. Neville knows how difficult it is to find missing persons," and she smiled at Neville.

Trale shook his head eagerly.

"If Banks' story is true, and I think it is, there won't be any difficulty in the case, my lady." He stopped and looked at Sylvia and hesitated. "Banks' statement is this; that when he'd stolen the will, the night Sir Greville died, he thought he could make more money out of it by finding the young girl and the people belonging to her. He'd seen the

father once, and so set off hunting him. He learned that Mrs. Chester was dead, and that the young girl and her father had gone to Australia."

"Australia!" murmured Neville, looking at Sylvia, who sat with her hands clasped and her head bowed.

"Yes, sir; and Banks, who is as determined a man as you'd find in a day's walk, followed, on the chance of finding him; and he did discover him—found him on the point of death."

The tears were running down Sylvia's cheeks, and Neville, though he had not yet got the clew, went to her and put his arm round her.

"On the point of death. In fact, he saw him die, and, what's more, saw him give a packet to his little girl, telling her that it was the story of her birth. The girl was known by the name of—" he stopped.

"Shall—shall I go on?" he said, troubled and agitated.

Her ladyship nodded.

"Go on."

Sylvia got up, put Neville's arm gently from her, and left the room.

"Yes," said Trale, as it relieved. "The young lady's name was—Sylvia Bond; they were her two Christian names, and—"

Neville uttered a cry of amazement.

"Sylvia?" he said. "Do you mean—"

"Yes, Mr. Neville," responded Trale, gravely. "The young lady—the signora who has just left the room—is Mrs. Chester's daughter, and the heiress under the will!"

An excited colloquy followed.

"Then—then Sylvia owes one third of the money?" exclaimed the viscount.

Trale shook his head.

"Wait a bit, my lord, if you'll pardon me," he said, gravely. "Banks' statement may be true, and as I said, I think it is. But—but—well, I'm no lawyer, my lord, but I'm afraid it would be difficult to prove her claim unless that packet contained all the papers, certificates, and so on, and unless that packet is in existence—and I'm afraid that's too much to hope for, seeing the strange adventures the young lady has gone through. Lavarick tried to steal it, as Mr. Neville knows; and what he tried to do some one else may have succeeded in doing, or it may have got lost. I don't want Mr. Neville or the young lady to be buoyed up with a hope that can't be fulfilled."

"Quite right, Trale, quite right," said the viscount, ruefully. "As you say, this packet—"

The door opened as he was speaking, and Sylvia, with Audrey, who had gone after her, entered.

They came up to the table, and Sylvia, very pale, laid the packet in front of the viscount.

He took it with an ejaculation.

"It's—it's—but it's sealed, my dear. I'm to open it? Here, Neville, you open it."

Neville did so, and they gathered round him. He took up one of the several papers, and read solemnly:

"I, Julian Chester, declare these certificates, being the marriage certificate of my myself and wife, and the birth and baptismal certificate of my daughter, Sylvia Bond Chester, to be genuine, and I charge such person or persons into whose hands they may fall to preserve them. I have nothing to leave my beloved child, whom I consign to the care of her Heavenly Father in humble trust and confidence that He will protect and succor her."

(Signed) JULIAN CHESTER.

Sylvia hid her face on Neville's breast.

Trale was the first to speak, and his honest face was glowing with satisfaction and delight.

"It's all right!" he exclaimed, using his favorite formula. "It's all right, Mr. Neville. Every one of them can be verified and the claim proved. I'm lawyer enough to know that. Take care of 'em, my lord. Lock them up. Hurrah! Oh, I beg your ladyship's pardon!" and in the very act of swinging his hat he stopped, covered with confusion.

"Don't apologize, Trale!" exclaimed the viscount. "We all say hurrah! You're a good fellow, Trale. You've—you've arranged this business splendidly, and—yes, you're far too good a man for a hole and corner place like this. Why"—and for the first time in his life the viscount swore before ladies—"you ought to be chief commissioner! You come with me into the library and have a glass of wine; and you come, too, Neville, when—when you can get away. Prove her claim! We'll do it—as Jordan says—we spend every penny we've got!"

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

Indeed, the viscount was a great deal more keen about Sylvia's fortune than Sylvia herself.

"You don't know how rich I am, sir!" she said to Neville, as they wandered through the lanes the next morning and he showed her all his boyhood's playing grounds, as he had promised himself that he would, little dreaming how soon the delight of doing so would become possible to him. "Do you know, Ja—Neville, what I earn in the course of an operative season? Do you realize?"—and she drew herself up on tiptoe and looked at him with all the dignity she could put into her expression (and she was a good actress, as we know)—"do you realize that the young person who stands before you is Signora Stella, the celebrated prima-donna, and that she can afford to lose five thousand a year. Neville caught her as she stood on tiptoe and lifted her up in his strong arms until her waist was in line with his face.

"Put me down, sir! How dare you?" she cried, blushing furiously. "Do you suppose that because a certain wild girl called Sylvia allowed you to carry her about—the tom-boy!—that you can take such liberties with the Signora Stella? Oh, put me down, dearest—some one will see us! Neville"—as he let her feet touch the ground again—"Neville, we can do without the money."

"I think not," said Neville in his old style, that recalled the hut in Lorn Hope, and Meth, and the claim instantly to Sylvia. "The Signora will have to make her farewell bow to the public."

"But Jack—oh, how proud you are!—you—you worked for me one time—"

"And I'm perfectly willing to work for you now and forever," he said. "What I object to is the mere idea of your working for me. Besides"—his face darkened—"there is such a thing as justice—though I believe it's rather out of fashion to think so—and justice you shall have."

There was no more to be said. In fact, they had something else to talk about—these two. But the viscount was not to be dissuaded from fighting—indeed, he was eager to fight—and when they all, excepting Mercy, returned to London he went straight to his lawyers and instructed them to fire the first shot in the form of the usual letter.

They—Audrey Neville, and the two—went to the opera on the night of their return to hear Sylvia sing, and her ladyship anticipated much enjoyment in watching Neville's delight. But she was doomed to disappointment. He started when Sylvia came on; his face flushed when she began to sing; but presently it grew pale and his brows knit, and as the storm of applause broke out after her first important song, he got up from his chair and leaned against the back of the box. Then he leaned forward to Lady Marlow.

"I—I can't stand it any longer!" he growled. "It—it seems as if she belonged to all of them, and not to me. I must go; and out he went."

Lady Marlow joined him in the smoking room when they came home, sitting with a large cigar, and looking so unutterably jealous and wretched that, though she had meant to bully him, her heart melted.

"You jealous boy!" she said.

"I know, I know!" he assented, reddening. "But I can't help it. All the time she was singing I was thinking of how she used to sit on the edge of the claim and sing to me—alone, you understand—alone! And the sight of that crowded house sitting there as if they had paid to hear her—and they had paid, confound them!—drove me silly. Lady Marlow, she must leave the stage!"

"She's her own mistress, sir."

"But she is going to be my wife."

"Well, then," she retorted, "than you'd be her master, and in your present frame of mind the sooner—" she stopped. But she had said enough.

"Do you think—would she marry me at once? How can I ask her? I haven't a penny."

The door opened and Sylvia entered. She had caught the last words only. She stopped short and looked at him. She was in evening-dress, radiant, lovely, all that a man desires in woman.

"Who says he has not a penny?" she said.

"I—I," the poor fellow stammered. "I may never get the confounded money; I am a pauper, anyhow at present."

She glided up to meet him put both hands on his shoulders and forced his eyes to meet hers, full of love and adoration.

"You forget!" she said; "ah, Jack, you forget that you spent all when you bought me that night in Lorn Hope Camp!"

They were married. How trite, how hackneyed is the sentence, and yet how much it means to a man and woman who loved as these two loved.

They were married in Lynne Church quite quietly, as a sensible man ought to be, without any fuss, as the viscount who gave the bride away, declared, and one would be inclined to say that they were the happiest couple in Lynne, but that Audrey was present as bride-maid and Lorrimore as best man. Neville had sent him the wire the moment Sylvia had named the day.

"Be my best man," he said; "she," meaning Audrey, "won't refuse to see you on our wedding day; and—well, weddings are as catching as measles!"

As the happy pair were starting from the Grange on their wedding-trip, and Sylvia had at last drawn her head into the carriage from the window of which she had been craning to catch the last glimpse of the group on the steps, she turned to Neville, who was busy digging the rice out of his mustache and waistcoat, and with eyes overbrimming with happiness and laughter, said softly:

"Aren't you sorry I'm not Miss Mary Brown, Jack?"

"Mary Brown?"

She clapped her hands.

"Oh, you heartless man! You have forgotten her!"

Then, as he laughed and colored, she nestled up to him and told him how she had suffered from the green-eyed monster.

"No!"

"Yes; and you never saw it. Ah, Jack, you were blind! They say that love is always on one side," she added, with a little quiver of the lips. "Is it; or do you love me a little, Jack? Are you sorry that you bought me with that nugget, or do you think it was not such a bad bargain, after all?"

And though he said not a word, she was quite satisfied with his answer.

They had left Mercy at the Grange, at her own desire, and Sylvia had left her better than could have been expected and with the understanding that Mercy, as soon as she was strong enough, should follow her to Bury Street.

But she did not do so. Instead of herself came a letter which Sylvia had shown to no one, not even her husband; but in it, while telling her of her whereabouts, and the plans for the future, Mercy had enjoined her to silence.

"Let me pass out of your life, dear," she had written. "Even the sight of your dear face would only rouse the old pain and anguish. Do not even attempt to see me, for I think I that could not bear to see you. Judge, then how little able I am to meet any one else who knows me and my history."

Sylvia understood, and obeyed the injunction. But she thought of her, even

during that happy moon in which the newly married bride is supposed to think of no one but her husband.

They spent their month in wondering—almost hand in hand, certainly heart to heart—about the Continent, then returned to London where their friends eagerly awaited them. And—so Audrey said—a second honeymoon began.

"You've come in time for all the best plays in the theater," she said, "and mamma's going to have a dance—"

"And we are just going to serve a wit on Right Honorable Sir Jordan," put in the viscount. "I suppose you have been so wrapped up in your two selves that you have forgotten all about your lawsuit?"

Neville colored.

"Pon my word, that's about the truth!" he said.

"Well, I haven't," said the viscount. "I've been hard at work. It's going to be a tough fight, I can tell you. Jordan is game to the backbone. Did you read his speech in the House last night?"

"No grunted Neville; "I read one once and one will do for me."

"It was splendid; it was, indeed!" said the viscount. "He's a wonderful man. It's a pity he's such a villain—I mean—"

Neville turned away.

"I'm not sure that he won't beat us yet," went on Lord Marlow. "My man—I mean the lawyer—says that, anyhow Jordan can keep us at it for months—perhaps years. You see, he's everything—the estates, the money, his great name at his back! Who'd believe such things of him as we shall charge him with? They seem incredible; and he shows not an inch of white feather. A regular ovation in the House last night, they tell me, and Jordan calm and composed as Pitt himself! A wonderful man. If it wasn't that we've got Trale on our side—and, by the way, I've managed to get our friend promoted. His fortune's made."

"I'm glad of that," said Neville heartily.

"Yes, the good fellow's delighted with his rise; but he's just as keen about his case as ever. He's in London 'working it up' as he calls it; almost lives at the lawyer's. You'll be sure to see him tomorrow."

But they saw him that same evening.

They were just going in to dinner—"the home party" as her ladyship called it—for Lorrimore was there, when Trale was announced.

He came in looking rather pale and evidently agitated, and the viscount at once jumped to the conclusion that something had gone wrong with "the case."

"What is it, Trale?" he said.

Neville held out his hand.

"How do you do, Trale?" he said.

"What's happened? How are you?" and he shook the man's hand in his frank, genial manner.

Trale opened his lips twice before a sound would come, then he stammered.

"There's—there's been an accident."

"An accident?"

"Yes. He was leaving the House to go to dinner, and—a cab coming across the bridge knocked him down, and—and the wheel went over his head."

"Whose head?" demanded the viscount.