Sweet Violet.

IN TWO NSTALMENTS—PART II.

Then she thought, as she went up the broad and richly-carpted staircase, followed by Violet: 'Gracious Heaven! How like—like that poor unfortunate darling! I never saw such a likeness in all my born days!'

She, of course, referred to Violet's mother. She had not the slightest idea that this was the daughter. It was a singular but positive fact that she had entirely forgotten the name of Loveridge, and it never for a moment struck her about the Christian name.

The hall-porter had kept his secret. Had he informed the housekeeper of what happened on that fearful night more than seven years ago, it is a moral certainty that Sir Archibald would have lost a good and tried servant, for the housekeeper would not have stayed with him. Many a score of times she had cried bitterly over the absent daughter, whom she had nursed as a child. Many enquiries had she made, but without success.

Having rested and partaken of some light refreshment, Violet proceeded to attire herself in a becoming dress in order to visit Sir Archibald, who, she was informed, was awa ting her presence in the study.

'I shall wear that, my dear,' said the housekeeper, pointing to a lovely blue satin dress; 'that is very nice, and I am sure Sir Archibald will say so.'

Now that colour was Violet's mother's favourite when at home, and this the housekeeper had not forgotten.

'She is very much like that poor girl,' thought the housekeeper 'I wonder how she looks with it on?'

Violet accordingly donned the blue satin dress, and then the housekeeper ran off to the conservatory and brought out a single white rose. This she placed in Violet' hair, saying:

'There, my dear, you look lovely! Oh lovely is not the word. You do so put me in mind of someone I knew years ago. Such a lovely creature, poor darling!'

'Do you recollect——' commenced Violet, It was a wonder she did not let it out. But even as she spoke the form of Sir Archibald rose up before her, and with a deep sigh she passed down the stairs.

The study-door was slightly ajar, but Violet knocked.

No answer being returned, she opened it gently and entered the room Sir Archibald was indulging in his afternoon nap.

Violet, not wishing to disturb him, closed the door, and seating herself in an easy-chair, proceeded to wait for him to awake.

But although she had rested for some time after her journey, she was still very tired. She tried hard to battle with it, but sleep would come, and soon her head fell back and she slept.

An hour passed on, and then Sir Archibald started from his seat, and rubbing his eyes, looked before him. And as he looked his whole frame trembled as if with the ague Great beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead. Was he awake?

'Oh, my God!' he moaned as he clutched the table for support. 'What is this—is it her—returned to life? No, no, no! it cannot be.'

He approached Violet and looked long and earnestly into her beautiful face. She still slept on, calmly and peacefully.

Sir Archibald fell upon his knees before her, saying in a hushed whisper, 'No, not her—not her—her child! And oh, how like—every line! Oh, Heaven, in mercy spare me! But away with these thoughts!' he added, as he rose to his feet. 'I am getting old and foolish Girl, girl! awake awake! How dare you fall asleep in my study?'

Oh, pride, pride, thou hast indeed much to answer for!

Violet slowly opened her eyes, and then as slowly left her chair.

'I am so sorry, gra——, sir. I entered and found you asleep, and I was so very tired. But I did not intend to fall asleep, believe me.'

'Hem! Very good; but don't do it again It is against rules—quite. Now. what made you put on that blue dress, and who told you to put that rose in your hair? It is against rules—you must not do it. But, er——I have a few words to say to you I understand that you are perfect in education.'

'I think so.'

'Good. Now you must understand that since you have been at that school you have cost me a large amount of money. Do you know that?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Hem! No doubt you know as much about money as a baby. Did you find your pocket-money sufficient?'

'Oh yes, thank you; and I have saved two hundred pounds.'

'Oh, indeed! Saved it! Good girl. Hem! Well, I don t want it back. But now you must make up your mind to earn your own living. Did your governess give you any hint of that?'

'Yes, she often spoke of it.'

'Quite right. I shall secure you a good position; so you must be prepared to undertake it at a moment's notice. Now go, and, mark, don't talk'

Violet approached Sir Archibald, saying: 'I am so much obliged to you for all your kind treatment. Perhaps one day I may be able to repay all the money you have so generously expended on my education. Good-bye.'

'Good bye, girl, good-bye.'

'You will let me kiss you for your kindness, will you not?'

'Eh? Ah, but you are too old for that now.' Yet, as he saw the lovely face bending over him, the bright blue eyes looking so steadfastly into his, his pride once more wavered, and he added: 'But you may give me just one kiss; and mind you must not tell anyone.'

This promise Violet immediately made.

CHAPTER IV.

Two weeks passed away, and during that time Violet had not head from Ronald for the simple reason that he did not know where she was so he determined to run down to the school.

After a good deal of scheming, he got hold of one of the scholars, and learned from her that Violet had gone to Sir Archibald, and that his intention was to make her either a governess, or companion.

Lady Radstock was well known to Sir Archibald, and therefore, when he received a letter from her saying that if he happened to know of a well-educated young lady to act as companion, would he kindly let her know, he was delighted beyond measure.

He replied, saying that he did know of a young lady, and one whom he knew she would be pleased with. He placed all particulars before her, but of course omitted to say that Violet was any relation to him.

Immediately on receipt of this, Lady Radstock wired to say that Miss Violet Loveridge was to come down to her at once.

Violet was therefore sent for.

'I am glad to tell you,' said Sir Archibald, 'that I have found you a first-class engagement as companion. It is to a lady of title a little way out. Are you prepared to go?'

'Oh yes.'

'It is as companion to Lady Radstock, of—— Why, what is the matter with you? What made you start like that? You do not know Lady Radstock, do you?'

'No, but—er——'

'Ah, you thought you had heard the name before, and it's very likely you have She is a well known lady, and I am sure you will be very comfortable with her. You are to go at once, so get ready, and I will attend to the despatching of you'

In four hours Violet stood in the study, bidding good-bye to Sir Archibald.

'I may see you some day,' he said. 'Be careful and transact your duties carefully, and by so doing you will gain my approval. Good-bye. You may write to me and let me know how you are getting on. The carriage is waiting to take you to the station.'

And soon Violet was seated in the carriage and being conveyed to the station en route for Radstock Castle, Arkwell.

* * * *

Radstock Castle was indeed a noble piece of workmanship, Its architectural beauty was almost beyond comparison.

As Lady Radstock's carriage drove along the sweeping avenue leading to the entrance. Violet thought she had never beheld so lovely a place. Flowers of all kinds perfumed the air; costly statutes of the most exquisite designs were scattered in every direction, and in front of the grand hall peacocks with the most lovely plumage it is possible to imagine strutted proudly up and down.

'Shall I ever be mistress of this?' she thought. 'It seems impossible, and yet how is it I was selected as Lady Radstock's companion? It seems very strange. Well, well, if I wait I shall learn all, no doubt'

Lady Radstock received her, and Violet was surprised and delighted with the warmth that lady bestowed upon her.

'I am so happy to see you,' she said. 'My son has told me of you. He has often said what a lovely girl you were, and indeed he is right.'

Violet blushed.

'I have heard all about your engagem nt,' continued Lady Radstock, 'and as I always allow my son to do as he likes, I raised no opposition to it. It was by his desire that I wrote asking Sir Archibald to recommend me a companion.'

Violet smiled. She was beginning to see through it all now.

'Ronald is in London now,' said Lady Radstock; 'he is there for a day or two on business. We are about to invite a party of guests here for a few days, and so I am sure you will enjoy yourself.'

In a remarkably short space of time Lady Radstock and Violet were on terms of the greatest affection. Indeed, it seemed as if they had known each other for years, instead of only a short time.

Two days after this Ronald returned and greeted Violet in the most boisterous manner, bestowing more than one hearty kiss upon her lips.

'What do you think of my plan!' he laughed.

'I think it very ingenious,' replied Violet. 'I wonder what Sir Archibald would have said, if he knew anything of what had previously occurred?'

'Ah, my sweet Violet, I was too deep for that. Directly I ascertained that you had left school, and that you had gone to his house, I made up my mind what course to pursue, and I am very thankful it has proved successful. Sir Archibald will know all before long, my Violet, and now you want some amusement. To-morrow our guests commence to arrive, and rely upon it, you will now see a little life. Come, now, and let us take a long walk through the park. I want to show you many places that you have not yet seen, all of which you will be mistress of before—eh, Violet?'

Violet made no reply, she simply nestled her head upon his breast.

CHAPTER V.

A week passed away, and for nearly all that time Violet had been supremely happy. Numbers of the nobility and gentry had been invited to spend a fortnight at the Castle, and it was evident that all thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

Violet would have continued to be happy, but something happened which had served to damp her spirits considerably.

Among the guests invited was a certain Mrs Howland and her daughter Florence.

Florence was the recognised belle of the season, and was courted and petted by all with whom she came in contact. And truly she was a most beautiful and accomplished woman. But she was not a lovable woman She was not a woman possessed of any great amount of affection.

Perhaps this was due to her mother's teaching, and her mother was a most notorious match-maker.

She was also a woman who laughed to scorn the idea of marrying for love.

Her idea of happiness was in rolls of wealth, to be followed by a numerous train of servants, and the right to rule not only them, but her husband.

All this she had taken infinite pains to impress upon her only child, and it is only right to say she followed in her mother's footsteps step by step.

Now, while in London, they had been visited by Lord Ronald time after time, and we may say that he had been struck with her exceeding beauty.

So frequent was his attendance, and, at one time, so great had been his attentions, that he began to be looked upon as an accepted lover of Florence Howland.

And Florence tried her hardest to keep him to her side. She knew that to marry him mean't not only a title, but wealth to an enormous extent.

Was it any wonder therefore that she assisted by her mother, should endeavor to keep so desirable a person by her side?

But before long Lord Ronald had discovered the real character of Florence Howland, and by degrees his visits fell off. Yet whenever he met her he was always on terms of the greatest friendship with her.

Florence did not pretend to notice how few and far between his visits had become, but both she and her mother set themselves to find out whether Lord Ronald had fixed his affections in any other quarter.

But they found out nothing.

It was not very likely they would, for, as our readers are aware, Lord Ronald had wooed and won his intended bride far away from society, far away from where prying eyes would penetrate their secret.

On the second day of their visit to Radstock Castle, Violet happened to be walking alone in rather a secluded quarter of the park, when she was attracted by the sound of voices.

Not wishing to be seen at that moment she drew aside, and remained in the shadow of a large oak.

The sound of voices came nearer and nearer, and in another moment Violet had recognized the speakers.

They were Florence Howland and her mother.

Instead of passing on, they stopped directly opposite the tree by which Violet was standing, so that she distinctly heard every word they uttered.

'What is to be done?' asked Mrs. Howland.

'That I cannot say,' replied Florence. 'I have left all to you, and I presume I must still be guided by you.'

'But here is evidently the secret of his absence from us.'

'I have not yet seen it.'

'Not seen them together?'

'No.

'Then you must certainly be blind!'

'No, I believe my eyesight is perfectly sound. Do you mean to say that he would think of throwing himself away upon such a waxen doll as she is!'

'She is pretty.'

'But she has no fortune.'

'Neither have you'

'I have a little, she has none—at least so I have heard. Bah! Ronald would never think of marrying a poor nameless orphan.'

'Nameless! I have heard that my Lord Ronald thinks a great deal of the name. It sounds pretty—Violet—don't you think so? Ha, ha, ha!'

Violet turned cold from head to foot. They were talking of her, and him! Who was this woman? she thought. What was she to him? Had she ever been anything to him?'

'Well, never mind the name,' continued Florence in hard, cold tones, 'we must try what we can do in the matter. But you said you had something of very great importance to say to me. What is it?'

'Something you will be astonished to hear beyond question. Probably I take more interest in this matter than you think I do.'

'It is to your interest to do so,' replied Florence calmly.

'True; that I admit. Well, I have made enquiries, and find that this Violet Loveridge is the adopted daughter of Sir Archibald Blackmore.'

'Yes.'

'Well, I have been informed of certain things in connection with her, and I will now give you her history. More than seven years ago, in the depth of winter, a poor woman was found dead upon the doorstep of a large house not far from Sir Archibald's residence. Clasped to her breast was a child, a little girl of about nine years of age. The sad case came under the notice of Sir Archibald, and he—you know his reputation for charity—took compassion upon them. He buried the woman decently, and then adopted the daughter. He sent her to a boarding school, where she remained until a short time ago, when she returned to Sir Archibald, who obtained an engagement for her as companion to Lady Radstock. This child is Violet Loveridge.'

'Then there is no chance of Lord Ronald being in love with her. He would not marry a street wait.'

'But he does not know her history. I am sure of that.'

'If he does not, he shall know I will take good care of that. But I will wait and watch'

'And there is another thing which goes to prove that what I say is correct' said Mrs Howland. 'Does Lady Radstock treat her as a companion? Does she not treat her more like her own daughter?'

'I tell you that you are more observant than I am. I have not taken as much notice of it as I should have done. However, I will keep my eyes open'

'It is disgraceful that he should treat you as he has done. Although he did not actually propose to you, he led you to believe that he would do so.'

'If he did marry this outcast, what would society say so far as I am concerned? Fancy being rejected in favor of a pauper's child!'

With these words the pair moved off, while Violet, bursting into a passionate flood of tears, sank down by the tree and covered her face with her hands.

Thus she remained for several moments; then, starting to her feet, she fled to the Castle.

Without pausing to look to the right or the left she rushed into the small sitting room, her intention being to pass through and enter her own room. But it so happened that Lord Ronald was seated near the table, and hearing the rustling of a dress, he lookod up. The next instant he had started to his feet.

Violet took no notice of his presence, but he was quick to see her pale and tear stained face.

'My own sweet Violet,' he cried in tones of alarm, as he placed his arms about her, 'what is this? Speak, my own darling! What has happened?'

'Do not ask me, Ronald. Let me go; I want to go to my room.'

'You shall go, my love, but first tell me what has happened

'I cannot, I cannot—not at present; I will tell you by and by. But, Ronald—'

'Yes.'

'Do you know—did you?—oh, I will tell you all before long. Let me go.'

'Very well, my dear, I will let you go; but you ought to tell me what has happened.'

He released Violet, who went at once to her room, and there she relieved her full heart in true womanly fashion—to wit, tears.

'What can have happened?' muttered Ronald, as he walked slowly out upon the terrace. 'Has anyone here offended her? I hope not, for their sake. What can it be? Ah, Miss Howland, how do you do? I hope you and your mother are enjoying yourselves.'

'Yes, thanks,' replied Miss Howland, as she drew her handsome person nearer Lord Ronald. You are looking well, I see.'

'Oh yes, I enjoy fairly good health. This is a fine healthy spot, you must recollect.'

'It is, indeed. But, I say, Ronald, how is it you seldom call upon us now when in London? I heard you were there lately, but you did not favour us with a visit.'

'My business was so great there that I really had no time to call,'

'You have grown tired of us, I am afraid Ronald.'

'Tired! Why should I have grown tired?'

'I don't know, but I hope neither mamma nor myself have offended you'

'Make your mind easy on that score, Miss Howland.'

Miss Howland! At one time he had called her Florence.

She was not slow to observe the change, and she fairly bit her lips in vexation.

'By the way,' she said, 'what a pretty, ladylike girl your mother has as companion'

'Yes, indeed, and not only pretty, but she is a most accomplished young lady.

'Then you must mind what you are doing,' smiled Miss Howland, but it was cruelly forced, 'or you will lose your head in that direction.'

Ronald simply smiled. He did not choose to let Miss Howland into the secret of his affairs.

A gentleman friend coming up at this moment, Ronald left her and joined him.

'Oh yes,' muttered Miss Howland fiercely, as she walked away, 'there is something in it, after all! Oh, how cruel, how bitter is my disappointment! All my acquaintances will laugh at me! But wait—wait! I will let him into the secret of her history It is not likely that Sir Archibald, when he recommended her here, told Lady Radstock her history. Did they know it, they would scorn to look upon her longer—she would be turned from the doors By Heaven! I must tarry no longer. This very day he shall know of it!'

'Have you seen Lord Ronald?' asked mother when she met her.

'Yes, I have,' cried Florence, throwing herself into the nearest chair.

'Well?'

'Well? What?'

'How did he treat you?'

'Coldly and formally.'

'As I expected Hem! He has rather a singular taste I think.'

'I think so too, if he has set his mind upon a creature like her!'

'You had better make him acquainted with her history at the earliest possible moment.'

'I intend to let him know this very day.'

'Quite right. If you do not, you will stand a chance of losing him, and a prize like him cannot be obtained every day in the week'

'I am aware of it. Oh, how bitterly I am disappointed!'

'Nonsense! you have not absolutely lost him. No man is insensible to beauty, and surely you do not place your beauty in comparison with hers?'

'No; but different men—different tastes.

'True. Well, don't forget, my dear, that you let him know all I have told you concerning this girl's history. Do so as early as possible. More guests are to arrive today, and if you delay it you may not have the opportunity of speaking until it is too late.'

Yes, more guests were to arrive that day—a great many more, and among them would be Sir Archibald Blackmore.

CHAPTER VI.

The splendid park adjoining Radstock Castle was most brilliantly illuminated. Every tree held its dozens of small oil lamps.

A fine band had been engaged, and dancing had been going on for some considerable time.

Ronald was in the best of spirits, but not so Violet. She could not get out of her mind the conversation she had heard that morning

She had not yet had an opportunity of telling Ronald the cause of her tears, but she intended to do so.

Still, she endeavored to forget all about it for the time being, and she danced as much as anyone.

Almost all her dances were with Ronald. for he was jealous that she should be the partner of anyone but himself.

And oh, what a blow this was for Florence Howland. Many times during the evening she placed herself in Ronald's path, in the hope that he would request her to dance with him.

But he did not make a single request. He smiled upon her, hoped she enjoyed herself, and so on, but this was all.

'I will wait awhile,' she muttered; 'they will go for a stroll before long, no doubt and then will be my time. I will denounce her before him!'

She was right so far as this was concerned. When the Lancers were about to be started, she observed Ronald place his arms about Violet's waist and move off towards the back, where they knew they would be free from the glare of the lamps and where they could enjoy the luxury of a few minutes uninterrupted conversation.

And Miss Howland, unseen by either of them, followed

* * * *

'Ah, Sir Archibald, I am so glad to see you!' cried Lady Radstock, as Sir Archi-

CONTINUED ON PAGE FIFTEEN.

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