



CHAPTER VIII
ON THE THRESHOLD

One thought had been dominant in the heart of Beatrice Mercer since the moment that Raymond Marshall's discovery of her duplicity had crushed her with humiliation. A bitter, cruel resolve that, come what might, he should never again see the face of the woman he loved!

"Patient" her fierce heart had throbbed out. "He loves her yet; he knows her to be true. He despises me, but—he shall yet love me. I cannot lose him. He shall never find or wed Edna Deane."

Then, calming her fierce, resolute nature to subtle, sinister regard of all the issues in the case in which mingled love and jealousy involved her, Beatrice made up her mind to study the chances in her favor.

She knew where Edna had gone; the letter that Edna had only half read, amid her excitement and anxiety, had been conned over and over again by the plotting Beatrice.

Her contents gave her an insight of the character of the father who had sent for his beloved child, into his secrets as well, and she knew that one of two things would happen when Edna reached home—her father would order her to forget all friends of the past, or, if any letter or word was sent to Raymond Marshall, it would be through her friends.

As the days passed by, however, and no word was received, she grew puzzled, disturbed, and finally anxious. The evening preceding that upon which Raymond Marshall appeared at the Seminary to find her gone, however, she made up her mind that started her into a new train of thought and action, under the spur of wild excitement.

A student living at quite a distance received regularly the weekly paper published at her home, and glancing over this, Beatrice felt the blood rush from her heart through her veins, as she noted an item that told her intuitively that she had found a trace of the missing Edna at last.

It was the record of the death by drowning of a man and a girl; the account of the scene at that broken bridge, where the two villagers had seen Edna Deane's companion plunge to his death, and had accredited Edna herself with falling a victim to the same fate.

Within an hour, from a careful study of the item and from a knowledge of the route taken by Edna and her guide, Beatrice knew that she no longer had a right to Edna Deane was dead.

She knew something—she knew that with the death of these two had perished a mighty secret—that somewhere, and she knew where, an anxious father was awaiting the return of his beloved daughter, to lay at her feet, as an atonement for the forced neglect of years, a royal fortune.

The next morning Beatrice Mercer's mind was made up. All night long she had plotted and planned. The jealous-minded school girl of the night previous had become in a few brief hours a wily, wicked siren, imbued with schemes as bold and cruel as the hardest heart ever yet designed.

She went straight to the town where Edna and her companion had disappeared. Within twenty-four hours she was satisfied that both had met their fate in the turbulent torrent that flowed beneath the broken rustic bridge.

"Pooh!—for Raymond Marshall's love!" she murmured resolutely, as a few hours later, she took a train for the next station.

Evening shadows were creeping over the autumnal landscape as Beatrice Mercer left the little depot and walked towards the outskirts of the village.

In the dim light she made out an antique but magnificent mansion, occupying elaborate grounds, but surrounded by great, high walls.

"So near to home and there to lose life, fortune, and love!" murmured the stately hearted siren. "Poor Edna! but I cannot miss this royal chance."

Her eyes sparkled as she drew from her pocket a little chain and locket that Edna had worn at school and which she had left behind her in her hurry to go to seek her father.

She calmed herself, as if for a mighty effort, as she seized the bell-knob at the iron gate and sounded one resonant, discordant peal through the gloomy structure beyond.

"Fairly on the threshold!" she breathed wildly, yet exultantly, as she awaited a reply to her summons—"one bold stroke, a single resolute assumption, and I shall be mistress of wealth untold, to pave the way to the heart of the man I love—Raymond Marshall!"

CHAPTER IX SUCCESS

A crabbed-faced man answered the ring at the iron gate after a lapse of several minutes, stared at the veiled figure without, first penetratingly and then without suspicion, and asked, unceremoniously:

"Who are you—what do you want?"

Beatrice Mercer was an actress. She had come prepared to feign a part, and she did it well.

All the fire and impetuosity of her passionate nature was subdued to the seemingly shrinking timidity of a shy young girl.

She commenced out a frightened apology and clung to the iron gate as if weary and weak.

"I have come a long ways," she murmured, "and I must make no mistake. The gentleman who lives here—Mr. Caleb Marston."

The servant or helper uttered a sharp ejaculation of surprise and renewed suspicion.

"Who told you that Mr. Caleb Marston lived here?" he demanded.

"I—I does not he. Then I will go, if I am in error," and Beatrice retreated.

Quick as a flash the man unlocked the gate, seized her arm, dragged her inside the overgrown, ill-kept garden, and regarded her much with the angry glare of an enemy.

"No, you don't!" he said. "Where did you get that name? Marston? Who told you? Speak! Have they guessed his hide?"

"I—I does not he. Then I will go, if I am in error," and Beatrice retreated.

How she loved him still! How the handsome, animated face of Raymond Marston haunted her.

"For his sake I did it all!" she murmured, tumultuously. "He must honest by it all. How! Ah! patience, my eager heart! I hold the strings of destiny!"

"Can I see him?"
"Can you see who?"
"Mr. Mar—Mr. Ralston? He sent for me."

"He did?"
"Yes. Take me to him. He will tell you it is all right."

The man studied a bit. He unlocked the gate and made sure that no one was lurking about the place. Then taking an enormous bunch of keys from his pocket, he led the way to the house.

A massive, gloomy structure, the care he manifested in penetrating the doubly locked portals, indicated a jail or a castle of defense. It was richly furnished within, but the closed and barred windows and chill pervading each apartment made the antiquated mansion seem somber, gloomy, and uninhabited in the extreme.

"You wait here."

"You are deceiving me. I can read it in your face. I caught you trying to speak. My child, if you have any secret to tell—"

The veiled eyes of the siren glowed triumphantly. The hour had come for a master stroke of finesse.

"Shall I tell you the truth, even if it disturbs you?" asked Beatrice, in a low, purring tone.

"Always, my dear."

"I am happy here, only there is a chapter in my past that haunts me," pursued the false-hearted Beatrice. "I have friends whom I love, whom I left in poverty, trouble. Father, if I had the means to visit them, to place them in a position beyond want, I would return here satisfied, never to leave you again."

"You mean this, my daughter?"

"I'm an it, father."

"As I understand it, you wish to go to these friends—to bid them a final farewell, and to enrich them?"

"Yes."

He led her to a room guarded with an iron door. With key he unlocked a cabinet. It was stored with money—coin, bank notes, bonds.

"Yours," he said generously; "all yours. Take what you want. I shall never ask how much, nor care. Deal as liberally with your friends as you like, only—must you go to them?"

"I must, father."

"Alone?"

"I will be careful—nothing will happen to me."

"I shall worry—your absence will trouble me."

"Not for long. Oh! dear father, you make me happy in enabling me to make my dearest friends happy. Let me go at once—to night, to-morrow. In a week—two, at the farthest, I shall return. Then I shall forget them—all the world save you."

She had carried her point. The first important step in the plot of her life was accomplished.

At the next morning, a little money-bag, saclike in her hand, she left the mansion bound for Hopedale, her confident heart told her that she would never return until she had won the man she loved.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

If I make no misstep, fortune and love are both mine in the end."

Her rooms had been papered for her with infinite care. They were more than luxurious, they were elegant. The steward and a housekeeper were the sole servants, but they attended like mute slaves to her every caprice as the day went by.

Ralston was not exacting. He asked an hour or two of her time each day to read to him in the garden, or play for him in the great, sonorous drawing-room on the piano. Even under the shadow of some great fear, he never left the walled grounds of the estate, and requested her to confine her long drives to the unfrequented roads leading away from the village.

A week passed thus, then the novelty of her new life began to wear away. The false Alice Ralston, the real Beatrice Mercer, began to grow restless, anxious, moody.

Then she fell to plotting. If she could only drag from that past life the secret of her love, Raymond Marshall, she would be content.

"You are getting wearied of the loneliness here, I fear," spoke Ralston, anxiously, one evening.

"No, father."

"You are deceiving me. I can read it in your face. I caught you trying to speak. My child, if you have any secret to tell—"

The veiled eyes of the siren glowed triumphantly. The hour had come for a master stroke of finesse.

"Shall I tell you the truth, even if it disturbs you?" asked Beatrice, in a low, purring tone.

"Always, my dear."

"I am happy here, only there is a chapter in my past that haunts me," pursued the false-hearted Beatrice. "I have friends whom I love, whom I left in poverty, trouble. Father, if I had the means to visit them, to place them in a position beyond want, I would return here satisfied, never to leave you again."

"You mean this, my daughter?"

"I'm an it, father."

"As I understand it, you wish to go to these friends—to bid them a final farewell, and to enrich them?"

"Yes."

He led her to a room guarded with an iron door. With key he unlocked a cabinet. It was stored with money—coin, bank notes, bonds.

"Yours," he said generously; "all yours. Take what you want. I shall never ask how much, nor care. Deal as liberally with your friends as you like, only—must you go to them?"

"I must, father."

"Alone?"

"I will be careful—nothing will happen to me."

"I shall worry—your absence will trouble me."

"Not for long. Oh! dear father, you make me happy in enabling me to make my dearest friends happy. Let me go at once—to night, to-morrow. In a week—two, at the farthest, I shall return. Then I shall forget them—all the world save you."

She had carried her point. The first important step in the plot of her life was accomplished.

At the next morning, a little money-bag, saclike in her hand, she left the mansion bound for Hopedale, her confident heart told her that she would never return until she had won the man she loved.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

How a Fish Sees.

The medium in which fresh-water fishes live gives them a chance to see a great distance only in the horizontal direction, and the proper adjustment of the eye would make, under usual conditions, the optical axis take this direction. To me it seems impossible to explain the constant revolution of the eyeball on any other hypothesis except that given, viz: That the optical axis extends forward instead of sideways.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this case the eyes are instantly adjusted in line with the body, so as to bring the image of the particle desired upon the posterior portion of the retina. In this case they lose their usual horizontal position.

When a fish wishes to eat anything, either at the bottom of the pond or at the surface of the water, it swims directly toward the object; and in this