



### CHAPTER XVIII.

CLOSURE.

"Too late!"

Just as Beatrice Mercer hurried toward the house again the words emanated from the shrubbery near the pit, and the speaker stepped into view.

It was Raymond Marshall, but not the Raymond Marshall of a few days previous. Hope, joy, excitement illuminated his radiant face; horror, too, shadowed it, as he glanced at the disappearing plotter. Then he drew into the open space another form.

"She meant murder. Oh, cruel! cruel! How can she be so heartless? And I loved her, trusted her as a sister."

"Courage, Edna," spoke Marshall.

"The faithful Bruno led me here, in time, it seems, to rescue you. You believe me now—that this woman deceived me into that marriage, a farce that cannot dim our love, though it may put us in this world."

"Wait, Raymond, let me leave this terrible place!"

"Yes, I will take you back to the farm-house. Then to return and learn the meaning of this woman being here. Wait! Some one else is coming."

He had been led to the spot by the clever Bruno not ten minutes previous, had discovered Edna in the pit, had rescued her, and now both shrank into the shrubbery again as two forms crossed the garden.

The steward and the housekeeper, returned from the village, their words reaching the ears of the listening Raymond Marshall caused him to start violently, for they were discussing Beatrice Mercer.

Coming nearer to them, within two minutes a hint, a word revealed to Raymond Marshall's quick mind a marvelously suggestion.

He guessed at the truth now. This dark schemer, Beatrice, had assumed Edna Deane's name and place. Her plots, her sudden wealth, her strange movements all verified the surmise.

For a few moments he reflected.

Then, as the two people entered the house, he took Edna's arm, and led her towards its open front portals.

Through the windows of a brightly lighted apartment he could see an old man reclining in an invalid's chair, and near to him sat his pretended daughter, Beatrice Mercer.

With a word of explanation to the serving Edna, fired with the zeal of a confident discovery, Raymond Marshall entered the house.

A wild cry rang from Beatrice Mercer's lips, and Mr. Ralston stared wonderingly at the intruders as Marshall and his trembling companion abruptly entered the room.

"Alice—Edna!" exclaimed the invalid; "who are these people?"

"Alice? Edna?" repeated Marshall, eagerly. "Is that the name she gives herself? Pardon me, sir, but I have intruded here because I deem it a duty to unmask that woman yonder."

"That woman—my daughter!" exclaimed Ralston indignantly.

"Not your daughter, Beatrice. Beatrice Mercer you are known. Silence! I will tell my story."

They Quoted His Own Poetry to Him.

The Rev. Mr. Haweis tells a good story of Mr. Wendell Holmes. He says: "At a reception given to Canon Farrar at the Hotel Brunswick, Boston, I found myself close to Oliver Wendell Holmes. 'Who is that Bishop?' I asked, 'who just spoke to me?'" "Oh," said Mr. Holmes, "it is the well-known Bishop of—, and not at all a bad fellow, either. I will tell you why I have a good opinion of him. I once saw him go up to two ladies in the street in the rain. He had on a brand new hat. I happened to know those ladies. They were total strangers to him, but he offered them his umbrella and walked on in the rain, and quietly spoiled his hat, and a Bishop's hat—. He paused. It was an awe-inspiring thought. 'Yes, I cut in, laying my hand gently on the poet's arm, and holding him with my glittering eye, 'Yes, yes, it is true!' he murmured. 'She has her sainted mother's face. Oh how could I be so deceived? As to you—'

"Yes, as to me," cried the baffled Beatrice, scornfully. "I am unmasked! So be it; but I still have the power to rule. I know your secret—you an escaped convict. You will be glad to silence my lips with half your fortune, or I betray all."

Ralston paled and shuddered. At that moment the door opened, however. An emaciated form crossed the room.

"Rodney!" cried Mr. Ralston, amazed.

It was the messenger he had sent for Edna at the Hopedale seminary, the man who had seemingly perished at the broken bridge.

"Yes, it is I," replied Rodney. "Miraculously escaped death; just recovered from my illness and the tortures of hunger, and in time to refute what that impudent says, for I overheard her words and your own. Ralston, light has come at last! The man for whose crimes you suffered imprisonment is dead; and dying, he has confessed all and cleared your name from every taint of guilt!"

"Oh, thank heaven!" cried Ralston fervently. "At last! At last! Alice—Edna, my darling child, at last I can offer you an honored name, a loving home!"

"May you be happy!" sneered Beatrice, malevolently. "I am baffled, beaten—at every point except one, it seems. Raymond Marshall, remember that the law gives your name! You are here now. That is all that to me than the honor of being an ex-convict's daughter or a wealthy heiress!"

"So be it!" spoke Raymond Marshall solemnly. "In name I am your husband, but Edna Deane or Alice Ralston has my love till death. Fear not; I shall not bring reproach on her fair name by remaining near her until the law annuls a fraudulent marriage. Edna, I must hasten to your friends, the Blakes, and tell them that you are safe. They are very anxious about you. To-morrow I will come to see that you are safe and happy, and then I leave you to battle this woman for my rights."

He passed from the house as he spoke. His heart was happy, despite the complications that evil plotters had about his life.

"I say, old fellow!" uttered a mauldin tone, as he neared the road outside the mansion grounds.

"Well, what is it?" demanded Marshall, regarding curiously the swaying, shabby form of a half-intoxicated man near the wall.

"Can you direct me? Looking for the way into this place, after a—a friend—a lady friend. You see—"

"Mercy! The minister!"

With a start, Raymond Marshall surveyed the man before him. Could it be possible? Yes; despite the vivid contrast between those two times, the ragged, intoxicated tramp before him was certainly the well-dressed, dandified clergymen who had performed the marriage ceremony between himself and Beatrice at the Hopedale hotel.

What did it mean? A wild thrill pervaded his frame at the man's next words.

"*TRUE AS STEEL*  
BY  
MRS. ALVAN JORDAN GARTIE

*THE LADY'S MYSTERY*

Three hundred years ago the founders of a Spanish fort were laid within the confines of St. Augustine, Fla. At the present moment work is progressing on a building patterned after it in every detail, and which, when completed, will be the State's representative structure at the World's Columbian Exposition. Old Fort San Marco, now Fort Marion, is the historic fortress which has stood the storms of battle and the elements for so many hundred years. Its pygmy counterpart in the Exposition grounds will have become dust within a space of time which would not add one dingier shade to the massive stones frowning from the sea wall of St. Augustine upon the blue, dancing waves of the Atlantic.

Raymond Marshall was in possession of his secret, stupidly blurted out in his mad wanderings.

Dr. Simms, unable to secure the village clergyman, hired this adventurer to personate one.

The marriage was a fraud. It was no marriage at all, and the last blow was given to Beatrice Mercer's state fabric of fraud she had so carefully erected, as the tramp told his story in the drawing-room of the mansion a few moments later.

"She leaves my roof at once!" cried the excited Mr. Ralston, but Edna, more merciful, insisted that Beatrice be provided with sufficient to begin life over again in some remote place, and tearfully bade her go and sin no more.

They never heard of her again, and when they thought of her it was with a shudder, as they realized how nearly her cruel plottings had ruined all their hopes and happiness.

And the stately mansion and its beautiful grounds became an earthly paradise to the two united hearts, whose loyal devotion had brought them, at the last, love's brightest, holiest reward.

[THE END]

Longest Swim on Record.

The longest swim ever made without the aid of artificial help, such as life preservers, life suits, etc., was made by Samuel Brock, a Yarmouth (England) beachman, the night of Oct. 14, 1845, says the St. Louis Republic.

On the afternoon of the 14th Brock had noticed a ship at sea signaling for a pilot. He, in company with nine other seamen, started for the vessel in the yawl Increase. At 4 o'clock they came up alongside the ship, which proved to be the Spanish brig Paquette de Bilbao. A pilot and three beachmen were put on board and the Increase then headed for shore, which was twelve miles distant. At 6:30 o'clock, when the nearest was six miles off, the yawl sunk and the Increase and drowns on board, except Brock. From the time that he had been swimming off shore it became evident to the man in the water that if he ever did manage to reach the land alive he would have to swim about fifteen miles in a roundabout way. A swell sea drove him out over Cross-sand ridge before the 9 o'clock bell tolled at St. Nicholas' gate, and it was a long two hours and a half later before the nearly exhausted swimmer caught sight of the bell and light buoys thereon.

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