

A CROWN OF FAITH

CHAPTER VIII.—(Continued.)

The players played; the dancers danced; the guests thronged in. Stately Colonel Wycherly pulled his iron-gray mustache, and smiled his supercilious smile; and Mrs. Wycherly sat superb in black velvet and oriental pearls, watching the dancers, her black eyes flashing fire, her thin lips smiling, her proud nostrils dilating. Arthur Calthorpe hung over Ella.

"Mamma will not let me waltz," said the heiress.

"Then will you excuse me if I run away?" rejoined the heiress. "See—there is Miss Pritchard, the lady principal of St. Martha's College, with thirteen of her pupils and teachers, and some of them are deplorably shy."

"Go, go!" cried Ella; "one of them has nothing deplorable at all about her—I mean that stately creature who has chosen to wear a dress of black lace over a pale-primrose skirt. She is covered up close to the throat; she wears no ornament but a gold necklace and cross; she is like a Spanish princess; she is very handsome."

Five minutes afterward, Arthur Calthorpe, heir to the earldom of Beryl, was whirling round in the waltz with Leila Leigh, under-teacher at St. Martha's College for Ladies. The blond, blue-eyed young man, the stately, dark-eyed girl, looked into one another's faces and read volumes; but it might be that those volumes were in an unknown tongue. They paused, panting, in a little anteroom—a costly gem of a chamber, where light refreshments were laid out daintily on an inlaid table.

Arthur was handing Leila a jelly, when there entered a woman. She was young, not more than twenty. She wore black—a plain dress, made high to the throat, with linen collar and cuffs. Her light-brown hair was disordered and rough. Her face was neither pretty nor plain, and her blue eyes were sinister and cruel. Her complexion was fair naturally, but the pallor at that moment was surely unnatural. Arthur Calthorpe dropped the jelly he was handing to Leila; the glass was shattered.

"I must speak to you!" she said impetuously—"at once—out there in the Laurel Walk!"

And without a word of apology, Arthur Calthorpe drew the curtains from before a French window and passed into the garden. Leila Leigh sat there, indignant, silent, wondering, and waiting. Arthur did not return. After a while she re-entered the ball room. The night wore heavily for her. Her interest in the ball was suspended while Arthur was absent.

Presently she saw him standing in a doorway. She started, looked again. Arthur, and not Arthur; like and unlike. The same height, figure, build, complexion, but different eyes, different mouth, different expression. This young man was talking to her own brother, Lionel Leigh, who soon crossed the room and spoke to Leila.

"Leila, that gentleman is Mr. Calthorpe's twin brother. He has been away for two or three years, and now he wishes to speak to his brother. Where is he? He was seen with you last."

Leila rose up and led the way toward the little ante-room. Her brother went with her. He whom we have known as Dick Barrington followed, and there was a buzz of recognition among some of the guests.

"He went through that window," said Leila.

Lionel opened the window, and Arthur's twin brother passed out into the garden. It was a frosty night, with bright, blinding stars, keen, piercing air. Leila wrapped her head and neck in her opera cloak, walked swiftly along the gravel path, slipped, and fell. Then she returned hastily to the anteroom, passed into the blaze of light and uttered a shriek which brought the guests thronging into the little chamber.

Her satin skirt, satin shoes, and fair hands were stained with that deep-red stain which tells of the ebbing of a human life. Then it was remembered that Arthur had been missed for some hours. The little anteroom filled so full that the guests surged out into the frosty laurel path.

Leila lay back, fainting; but there was one face amid the throng which burned itself terribly, mysteriously, and—so it seemed—without reason, into the consciousness of Leila Leigh—the haughty, white, fearful face of Mrs. Wycherly. Lionel Leigh, towering above the heads of the crowd, came on toward where his sister lay on the little couch. He sat down near her and took her hands into his.

"What has happened, Lionel?"

"Mr. Calthorpe is hurt."

"How? By whom? Where is he?"

"They have carried him round to the other side of the house. He is in one of the drawing rooms, and there are three doctors at the ball. I am going to send Dr. Dundas; the other two are with him."

"Is he much hurt?"

"Frightfully. I should say he must die."

Lionel shuddered. She closed her eyes, and wondered in a dreary way what use her youth and her beauty would be to her now. No word of love had passed the lips of the earl's heir. He had written her two little notes, and begged her acceptance of two splendid bouquets; he had taken off his hat when he met her in the lanes; and now—tonight he had walked with her, and looked at her with eyes which spoke volumes.

"Tell me how it happened?" she said.

"I went out through that French window with Dick Barrington. I thought he had gone out that way. We walked to the end, and Barrington should, called him 'Flitter'!—which was his nickname when they were boys—and there was no answer. Then Barrington ran down the shrubby walk. I know every inch of the place," he said. I came back toward the house, stumbled against something in the path, found it was a man, dragged it toward a lighted window, and saw that it was Mr. Calthorpe, quite

senseless, and with the blood streaming from a wound at the back of his head."

"That Barrington?" cried Leila, "or the woman in black?"

"What woman?"

"A young woman who came into the room, and beckoned him out—a horrible looking creature, sly and cruel, rather pretty, so far as fair skin and blonde dresses go."

"I carried him round to the drawing room, and went in to find the doctors, and then you ran out and slipped on the gravel, where it was wet with the poor fellow's blood, and came in here and screamed."

Lionel hurried off and sought Dr. Dundas in every hall, room and corridor; but, amid all the eager, talking crowd, which as yet showed no signs of clearing Beryl Court of its elation and excited presence, no trace or sign of the doctor; neither could he see Mrs. Wycherly, nor the colonel, nor Ella, in the throng.

He had not exchanged a word with Miss Wycherly during the evening. The colonel's daughter had been beset with partners in her own sphere, and Lionel Leigh had stood aside, feeling that for him this gay and brilliant ball was but a pageant, of which he was merely a spectator.

Ella had given him one smile. Lionel was in a misanthropic mood that night. He dashed into the yellow drawing room. Was Dr. Dundas there? No. On a couch lay Arthur Calthorpe, white as death, but with open eyes, in which gleamed consciousness.

Dr. Tufton was bathing the wound at the back of his head. Dr. Richards was feeling his pulse.

The crowd had been banished from this room. There were only a few visitors present: chiefly young men, friends of the earl's heir, one or two ladies, three servants, the poor old earl crouching in an armchair, and suffering tortures from mingled gout and grief.

"I cannot find Dr. Dundas," said Lionel to the earl respectfully.

"Very selfish to go off at a time like this!" cried the earl, striking his ivory headed cane on the carpet. "I suppose that woman—that Mrs. Wycherly—has nerves which must not be upset by the sight of blood. Dundas is clever.

"Our poor boy can't last till morning, Tufton thinks."

Then Lionel heard murmurs of detection having been telegraphed for, and he left the room, and resolved to leave the house. Very angry he felt—very much outraged; but with whom or by whom he could not tell.

Passing down a long, lighted corridor, he saw approaching him a slight, rounded form draped in white lace, and with rubies sparkling on the neck and arms. It was Ella Wycherly, in the costly dress and jewels which she despised. Under a lamp, held by a marble goddess, she paused and looked at Lionel.

"What has happened, Mr. Leigh?"

In his delight at meeting her, in all the excitement of a love, rapturous and passionate as his, the tutor forgot the tragedy, forgot that rumor popularly associated the names of Mr. Calthorpe and Miss Wycherly, he answered:

"Mr. Calthorpe has been wounded in the head by somebody unknown, and his life is in danger."

Ella turned white, then put her hands before her eyes.

"I—I knew nothing of it!" she said vehemently. "I have been watching the whist players, and listening to the band. Mamma said I must not dance any more. Miss Worthington was with me. All at once mamma came into the room and called her away; they told me not to come out until they returned. I waited and waited. I had nobody to speak to; all my partners had been kept away by Miss Worthington; then other people came in and whispered, and the whist players went out, and I—I ran out here; and now I shall be lectured, scolded so for stirring!"

She looked at him; her eyes gleamed, her red lips parted in a maddening smile; she held out a small, white hand toward him. Lionel seized it, and, intoxicated with his passion, he began to devour it with kisses.

"Don't—don't—don't!" she cried, drawing it away from him, and looking at it as if it had received some injury. "You think?" she looked at him scornfully—*that because I am poor, ill-used girl, whose mother is cruel, and whose governess is hateful, that I am a little idiot, do you?*"

"Oh, no, Miss Wycherly."

"But I tell you you do!" she said: "and you will find out your mistake. I am no idiot, whatever else I am!"

"Miss Wycherly, if my life could atone for my fault—"

"Hold your tongue!" she said, stamping again. "Who wants your life? Your life, indeed! If you were dead, they would bury you. I suppose, and your mother would cry. Most likely she loves you; mine hates me! Ah! it is a cruel thing to feed a young heart on scorn and severity; it withers it. Mr. Leigh—nips it in the bud."

"Good evening, Mr. Leigh," and she held out her hand.

"Ella—Ella!"

But, in spite of the sharp tone of the governess, Lionel took her hand, held it a moment, and bowed. Another moment and Ella had departed with her governess.

Information.

The visitor to New York was in search of information.

"Do you know anything about the copper corner?" he asked his host.

"No," was the reply, "but I know the corner copper."—Philadelphia Public Ledger.

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