

TERRIBLE

The Curse of the Morelands.

BY LEON LEWIS.

CHAPTER IX.—(Continued.)

"You—you don't mean to ruin me!" he faltered, as wild of eye as ghastly of mien.

"Ruin you?" blurted Radd. "For whose benefit, I'd like to know! For Mrs. Moreland's? I hate her as I hate—well, I can't give you any equivalent! For the benefit of Colonel Barton Ridley? Not much, I assure you! The Colonel has never been of any more use to me than one of those rats in yonder hall! During all the time he has been in India, he has not written me a line or sent me a dollar. I was not at the wedding when his sister married my brother. In fact, I never saw him!"

"No?" returned Hillington, with a flush of intense relief. "How singular." "Not at all. The fact is, I was on bad terms with the sister, who rejected an offer of marriage from me long before she met Jessie's father!"

"Ah! I remember now!" cried Hillington, looking more and more relieved. "The Colonel gave me not long ago some idea of these bad relations, or rather this utter absence of all personal association!"

"Then there's no occasion for me to gabble on the subject," declared Radd. "The Colonel and his sister have left me to starve all these years, and I'd be a hard-bodded fool to care a tinker's single iota for what becomes of them or of their money! If some Thug gets hold of them, so much the better for the Thug, that's all! Their fate is nothing to me—nothing whatever! Oh! how I hate them!"

Radd hastened to produce his bottle of Quem, with a couple of tumblers, and drank freely, ostensibly to the health of the East Indian, but in reality to the tempering of his intense excitement.

"And now, Mr. Hillington," he resumed, after a pause, "let's get down to bed-rock, as we say in America. Did you write from Cape Town or elsewhere to my sister-in-law about the terrible fate which has overtaken her brother?"

"I did not, for several reasons. One was that I was very busy, and another that I hoped from one moment to another to have better news to send her. Finally, when my worst fears were verified, I concluded such bad news could be best told in person."

"That was well reasoned," commented Radd, who thought a great deal for himself while not losing a word his new acquaintance had to say. "But you are not in America merely to report to my relatives that Colonel Ridley is dead?"

"No, sir; I have left India and the East forever. I am here to remain. But one of the chief motives of my presence here remains to be told."

He produced a photograph of Jessie from one of his pockets, fixing an admiring glance upon it, after affording Radd a glimpse of it, and proceeded somewhat nervously:

"The Colonel has often spoken to me of his niece, suggesting that he would like to see me make a favorable impression upon her, as you have seen, in fact, by his latest letter to his sister. Curiously enough, I have fallen madly in love with Miss Jessie through this 'counterfeit presentment,' which Colonel Ridley was so good as to give me, and I have come here, Mr. Moreland, with an ardent, all-absorbing hope of being able to make her my wife. She seems to be very beautiful!"

"In her way—yes," admitted Radd. "I could give you a curious point or two about her, as also about the old girl herself, but I won't. You'll be wise, Hillington—very wise—if you seek to make a good impression upon that girl, and a very fortunate fellow indeed if you can win her."

"Then I may consider that you are in favor of my proposed wooing?" "Certainly—certainly!"

It must be from some stranger or new correspondent."

The letter was quickly opened, and Jessie bestowed a few rapid glances upon it.

"Why, it's from that famous Doctor Robinett, who has been so often mentioned in Uncle Barton's letters," she announced.

"And the Doctor is in America?" "Yes, mamma. The letter is post-marked Waukegan, and dated yesterday."

"How singular! Read, read!" Jessie hastened to obey.

"Why, Uncle Barton has engaged Dr. Robinett to come to America to treat us," she said, after a few swift glances at the letter. "We are to be his patients. He says he has no doubt, from what Uncle Barton has told him, that he can cure us."

Mrs. Moreland looked too startled to speak, while Jessie herself seemed to hang upon the communication precisely as a condemned prisoner would cling to a reprieve.

"And not only has Dr. Robinett come to America," continued Jessie, scanning the letter eagerly, "but he has purchased the Whitcomb property, at Uncle Barton's suggestion, and is going to take instant possession, so that he will be near us."

"But what does he say about your uncle?" Jessie's glances ran rapidly on to the conclusion.

"He says Uncle Barton may be looked for from one day to another," she then announced. "He even adds that uncle should have been here before now."

The joy this assurance gave Mrs. Moreland could have been read on her features.

"You see, now, what a glorious uncle you have got, my dear child," she murmured. "Not only is he coming home to spend the remainder of his days with us, but his kindly heart seeks to relieve us of the great shadow under which we were born. He has even a thought for your future, as is indicated by this reference to Agnes Hillington, his bookkeeper, whose photograph he has inclosed. You have not yet given it a glance."

The photograph in question now came in for an earnest examination, and such was the impression it made upon Jessie that she shrank from expressing it, preferring to get her mother's opinion before making known her own.

"Well, I don't like it," avowed Mrs. Moreland, frankly, with an air of pain and disappointment, in response to Jessie's inquiring glance. "How unlike this dark, mask-like countenance is to the sunny, noble face of Vance Wyeville. What do you think about it?"

"It certainly seems to represent a strange type of man," replied Jessie. "But we must not condemn him lightly, the more especially as uncle's idea of any sort of relation between the man and me is entirely out of the question. I'm not at all taken with him. The impression the photograph makes on me is a disagreeable one."

Nodding approvingly, Mrs. Moreland passed a third letter to Jessie, with the remark:

"This also seems to be from a stranger. What can it be?" Jessie hastened to break the seal and glance at the signature.

"Why, it's from Mr. Hillington himself," she announced, with a sudden change of countenance. "He has arrived! He has been to the Elms to find us gone. He has had news for us and will be here by the morning train from Milwaukee."

"And nothing about my brother—his friend and employer?" cried Mrs. Moreland, as the blood receded from her face. "Not a word, mamma—not a word!"

The brief silence that followed the reading of this letter was as profound as that of the grave.

"Read that again," then came in a husky whisper from Mrs. Moreland.

The daughter complied. "Thank heaven for its merciless!" commented Mrs. Moreland, with a sigh of relief. "I comprehend it all. My brother has been in some dreadful peril at the hands of this Hillington. He may even have been robbed of his yacht and his two millions. But he is still alive and well—and near us. He's working in secret to unearth an 'infamous conspiracy' and bring a 'daring criminal' to justice. He is busy in his own way for the detection and confounding of his enemies, but he's safe."

She opened her arms to Jessie, who threw herself, sobbing, upon her breast, and for a few minutes they mingled their tears in a joy and relief for which words had no expression.

"But here is a postscript I did not read, mamma," at length said Jessie, as her glances came back to the Doctor's letter. "And as it always the case with postscripts, it has its importance."

The postscript was as follows: "N. B. It will be well to give Mr. Hillington and his baggage a room at your cottage, and to treat him in such a way that he will not suspect that you have received these present advices concerning him."

"But why this allusion to his baggage, Jessie?" asked Mrs. Moreland. "Oh, it's probably because, as is the case with so many people, the baggage of Mr. Hillington is the best part of him," answered Jessie, with an arch smile, which attested how rapidly her usual good spirits were coming back to her. "In any case, we must take good care to follow the Doctor's injunctions."

"Of course; but what is that other letter? See what it is."

The remaining letter was opened, and Jessie scanned it hastily until she reached the signature.

"It's from Mr. Wyeville, as I supposed," she announced. "He writes to say that Uncle Radd turned up there almost as soon as we vanished. In fact, he has taken possession of The Elms, effecting an entrance by breaking a glass, and is making himself quite at home there. Mr. Wyeville wants to know if the intruder is to be left in undisturbed possession!"

"And that's all, Jessie?" "All of a business nature, mamma. The rest is merely a hope that we are well and enjoying this beautiful weather."

Mrs. Moreland extended her hand for the letter, and read it from beginning to end, sighing profoundly when she had reached the signature.

"There is not the least reference to his recent proposal of marriage," she commented, while the light faded from her eyes and the color from her cheeks, "nor does he so much as express a desire to ever see me again!"

"Well, he at least writes you, which is more than I can say of Vance," returned Jessie, with a somber countenance and eyes in which had gathered a flood of tears. "But why should either of them write us, after all the care we have taken to thrust them out of our hearts and our lives? Men of that sort are not to be trifled with and they probably accept their dismissal as final."

She gave way to the violent grief which had flashed upon her soul, as such grief will come, at even the slightest provocation, and her example seemed contagious.

At least Mrs. Moreland could not refrain from following it.

The rumble of wheels suddenly fell upon their hearing, and they had only to turn their heads to see that a two-horse carriage was approaching at a furious pace, and that it was occupied by their expected visitor.

"Yes, there he is—this Agnes Hillington, baggage and all!" cried Jessie, who recognized him from the photograph which had been sent her. "What a task it will be to meet him!"

"But let us do our duty, as pointed out by Doctor Robinett," returned Mrs. Moreland, as she arose and led the way into the house. "The very life and fortunes of my brother may depend upon discretion. The fellow may be as dangerous as a tiger of his native jungles!"

OUR BUDGET OF FUN.

HUMOROUS SAYINGS AND DOINGS HERE AND THERE.

Jokes and Jokelets that Are Supposed to Have Been Recently Born—Sayings and Doings that Are Odd, Curious, and Laughable—The Week's Humor.

Let Us All Laugh.

The Undertaker Never prides himself on building up a live business.—Inter Ocean.

About the only chance for a poor gas consumer is to burn with indignation.—Plain Dealer.

Those who start out for a lark are apt to take many a swallow on the road.—Lowell Courier.

The fool is a man who goes up to a blockhead and implores him to be sensible.—Galveston News.

There is often a close relationship between crooked actions and desperate straits.—Lowell Courier.

It is true that doctors disagree, but then they don't disagree half as much as their medicines do.—Life.

After all it is only right that the bill collector should treat his victims with due respect.—Buffalo Courier.

Uncle George—Are you good at guessing? Little Dick—Yes, indeed, I'm head in the spelling class.—Good News.

The Western rivers are quoted considerably higher than the Western railroads just at present.—Boston Herald.

ER man kin run inter debt," said Uncle Eben, "but when it comes ter gettin' out he's gotter crawl."—Washington Star.

It is not alone the inebriate who takes a drop too much; the balloonist often suffers the same penalty.—Yonkers Statesman.

A YOUTH visiting a girl six or seven times a week also proves time is money. He uses it to pay his addresses.—Philadelphia Times.

GRANDPA's birthday: "Many happy returns of the day, grandpa; and mamma says if you give us each 50 cents, we mustn't lose it."—Brooklyn Life.

GILHOOLY—I wonder why wars are not as prolonged now as they were in ancient times? Mrs. Gilhooly—It must be because divorces come easier.—Detroit Tribune.

THAT new bullet-proof cloth may keep out bullets, but has any one tried it in a pair of knickerbockers for a small boy? That should be the final test.—Buffalo Express.

SOME of the New York policemen have not been in a hurry to clean out the saloons, but they have done their best, it would seem, to clean out the proprietors.—Yonkers Statesman.

MISS GUSHEY—"Mr. Dewdrop, when you were introduced last night you certainly looked familiar. Mr. Dewdrop—"Don't be alarmed. I am very reserved, as a matter of fact."—Truth.

HE—"They are not on speaking terms, you know." She—"Why, they are dead in love with each other. He—"For that reason they don't speak; they just sit and gaze at each other."—Boston Transcript.

SIR," said the indignant constituent, "I am compelled to say that you have acted the part of a knave." "Great Jonah!" replied the astonished Congressman, "would you have me be a fool?"—Indianapolis Journal.

"WHEN I look into your eyes, Jennie, dear," he said, "it surprises me to remember that you are a member of a primary class." "Why, Jennie?"

CHAPTER X. FOREWARNED AGAINST HIM.

W E will now proceed in advance of the conspirators to the retreat to which Mrs. Moreland and Jessie had gone—to Egg Island.

It contains a dozen square miles, and is one of the loveliest gems off the shore of Wisconsin, in the midst of Lake Michigan.

Near its southern end, at some distance from any other residence, stood a large stone cottage, which was almost lost in a wilderness of wood and verdure.

Mrs. Moreland had bought the place of the heirs of the original owner and occupant, who had been a misanthrope of the most pronounced type.

On the front veranda of this dwelling sat the mother and daughter, eagerly watching a boat that was approaching from the nearest point of the mainland.

"How slow he is!" cried Jessie. "I'll run down to the landing and take the mail from him."

She did so, returning in due course. "Five letters," she reported, "and one of them is from Uncle Barton."

CHAPTER XI. A BAD SITUATION.

IN a lonely grove on the shore of Egg Island sat Radd Moreland, a number of hours later, or just as night was falling. He was as uneasy as a fish out of water, as could have been seen by the manner with which he kept raising himself out of the grass and bushes, and looking in the direction of the Moreland cottage, which was not far from a mile distant.

"Can he have fooled me?" he asked, after looking at his watch again. "He told me, when he separated at the landing, that he would come to me in an hour."

He was interrupted by footsteps behind him, and had only to turn on his heel to find himself face to face with Agnes Hillington.

"You can't imagine, Mr. Moreland, how anxious I have been to come to you," exclaimed the East-Indian abruptly.

"There's something wrong, then?" returned Radd. "Yes, everything."

"Didn't the ladies hear what you had to say, and give you a room, baggage and all?" "Oh, yes."

"Then what's the trouble?" "The trouble is they're playing a game, Mr. Moreland; repeating some lesson which has been taught them; watching and waiting; hearing and seeing all they can and saying as little as possible. Oh, they are sharp and critical, as you warned me they would be!"

