

The Curse of the Morelands.

BY LEON LEWIS.

CHAPTER XIII. (Continued.)

"Why, what a change!" exclaimed Jesse, as a strange flush mantled her face. "One could hardly believe it is the same!"

"And here is the latest descendant of this long line of unfortunates," said the doctor, as he handed out a third photograph. "This sweet child is now in her third year. As you will see by her portrait there is nothing whatever the matter with her hands. It is a pleasant thing for me, ladies, as I recall the history of this family, and remember how the 'curse' of generations, to feel that I have put an end to this 'curse' forever!"

"It is indeed a glorious privilege to be able to do such things," Dr. Robinnett, said Mrs. Moreland, with an intense interest and wonder. "But do you really believe you can do for us what you have done for this poor lady?"

"I not only believe it, my dear madam," assured the doctor, "but I know it! From all your brother has told me, I am convinced that your case would be far less difficult than that of the lady now under consideration!"

"Oh, if it might be so!" breathed Jessie, with an intensity of feeling that brought a suspicious moisture to the eyes of the good doctor. "Oh, if it might!"

"But it can be and shall be, if you say the word," declared Dr. Robinnett, emphatically. "All you have to do is to place yourselves unreservedly in my hands and accept my conditions."

The mother and daughter consulted each other with earnest and yearning glances.

"Of course we would like to be cured," then declared Mrs. Moreland, with an almost tremulous eagerness. "It would be like a new lease of life."

"Yes, mamma, it would be a new birth itself," cried Jessie. "If I could be rid of this affliction, I should feel that I had never lived till now."

"The cure is knocking at your door, if you are ready to take it in," assured the old doctor, with a kindly air which had already endeared him to the mother and daughter, causing them to feel that they had in him a devoted friend. "You have only to accept my conditions."

"May I ask what those conditions are, Dr. Robinnett?" asked Mrs. Moreland, after again exchanging a few earnest glances with her daughter.

"They are four in number," returned the doctor, with a sigh of relief. "The first of them is that you will unreservedly accept my assurance that I can cure you."

"That we can certainly do, doctor," declared Mrs. Moreland, "after the proofs you have given us of your skill. Can we not, Jessie?"

"We can, mamma. I already believe and feel that Dr. Robinnett can cure us!"

"Then one of my four conditions is already accepted," commented the doctor, with a smile of encouragement. "The second is that you will obey my directions and conform to my instructions—in a word, that you will do as I tell you."

"This, too," declared Mrs. Moreland, without an instant's hesitation, "seems to me to be a very reasonable demand. Am I not right, Jessie?"

"You are, mother," was the girl's reply. "This obedience is tacitly recognized between every doctor and his patients, whether any especial mention is made of it or not."

"Then you will both accept this second condition?" demanded Dr. Robinnett, looking from one to the other.

"We will," replied Mrs. Moreland, and the promise was repeated by Jessie.

"Good," commented the doctor. "This brings us to the third condition, which is that I must be allowed to bring into the case another doctor, whose aid is absolutely necessary in the treatment. In other terms, I must be allowed to have an assistant."

The mother and daughter again consulted each other with their eyes.

"You say this assistant is absolutely necessary, Dr. Robinnett?" then asked Mrs. Moreland.

"He is," replied the doctor. "It takes two of us to give the treatment successfully."

"Then, of course, we must give our assent to this third condition," decided Mrs. Moreland. "Is it not so agreed and understood, Jessie?"

"It is, mother," replied Jessie. "But allow me to ask, Dr. Robinnett, who will be your assistant?"

"I have selected Dr. Weyville."

This announcement seemed to drive every trace of color from the girl's face.

"Oh, no, no!" she protested, with a voice and tone expressive of terror. "I can never permit Vance Weyville to learn my secret."

"Nonsense, my dear child," returned the doctor, energetically. "Vance is as well aware of your secret at this moment as I am, or as you are yourself. He and I have talked about it for hours since my arrival."

Jessie could only stare at the speaker with the dumbness of consternation.

"Can this really be so?" faltered the mother, who seemed at a loss, to decide whether to be pleased or angry.

"It is only true, madam," assured the doctor, emphatically. "Nor is that all. Vance has in his library a book by your humble servant in which your case is fully described."

"Our case?" gasped Mrs. Moreland, turning pale with surprise. "In a book, did you say?"

"In a volume I wrote years ago, my dear Mrs. Moreland."

"But how could you know anything about our case, doctor?" asked Jessie, in breathless wonder.

"The facts were given me by your old doctor, the predecessor of Vance Weyville," explained Dr. Robinnett.

"I do not intend it to go to my professional brethren and to the cause of humanity to publish a resume of the case in my volume. We doctors are blamed occasionally for doing these things, but we think that all fair-minded persons will excuse us."

"And Vance knows all?" queried Jessie, as the warm tide of life in her veins surged tumultuously back to her features.

"Everything!" declared Dr. Robinnett. "And what does he think?"

"His one thought is to cure you!"

"He—doesn't despise me?"

"Despise you? Why should he?" and the tone of the old doctor, like the light in his eyes, grew almost tender. "His heart is so full of love for you that there is no room in it for any other sentiment."

"A glorious doctor and a splendid young fellow is that Weyville! He'll yet reach the top of the ladder, especially if you will be his assistant in the race of life, my dear Miss Jessie. Let me hope, therefore, that you will allow me to call this young man to my aid, and that my third condition is fully and heartily accepted."

"What do you say, mamma?" asked Jessie, as red as a peony, turning excitedly to Mrs. Moreland.

"I leave the whole matter to you, my dear child!"

"Well, it seems to me that our sensitive has been a little overdone, if our 'case' has been figuring in medical works for years past! Let's have the game as well as the name, and get cured as soon as possible!"

"All right, Jessie," said the mother, with a profound sigh of relief. "We will accept the doctor's third condition. And now for the fourth and last!"

"The fourth and last," announced Dr. Robinnett, with a smile of contentment, "will not worry you in the least. It is simply that you will allow us to put you to sleep under our operations when it is wise to do so. Some of these operations are painful and prolonged, and it is better for you to know nothing about them until they are over!"

"Of course we will accept your views in this respect, as in all the others," replied Jessie, after receiving a little nod of assent from her mother. "From this moment, therefore, Dr. Robinnett, you will please consider that we are your patients!"

"And Dr. Weyville's also, remember; that being an essential feature of our agreement!" queried the doctor.

"Well, yes—Dr. Weyville's also," replied Jessie, a tender glow appearing in her eyes and on her features.

"Then permit me."

The doctor arose briskly and placed a light in one of the windows, after raising the curtain and opening the blinds.

"What's that for?" asked Mrs. Moreland.

"That's a hint to my young assistant to come," was the answer.

"What! he is near us?" cried Jessie.

"He has been near us for hours," replied the doctor, "busying himself with very important matters, of which I will speak to you later. I think he's absent just now on a trip to Port Norris, but I'll leave the light in the window so that he will come to us as soon as he gets back."

A sound of footsteps was heard at this moment, rapidly approaching.

"Ah, there he comes, you see," added the doctor, hastening toward the entrance. "I will give him admittance."

CHAPTER XIV. THE ENEMY IN POSSESSION.

Dr. Robinnett reached the door, which had been locked, as a precautionary measure against Hillington, there came a hasty and energetic tug at it.

"One moment!" he called, smiling at what he supposed to be the lover's impatience.

Unlocking the door and drawing it open, the doctor was surprised to see Radd Moreland press quickly past him into the presence of the mother and daughter.

"Ah, here you are, my dear relatives," was Radd's greeting, with a nod of recognition as he threw himself into a chair.

"Glad to see you again! Hope you're quite well, and must say you look it. Did you not receive my recent letters, in which I announced that I would soon do myself the honor of calling upon you? But I see by your welcoming smiles that such is indeed the case. How do you do?"

He approached each of the ladies in turn, extending his hand, but they shrank from him as from an embodied pestilence.

"What! You decline to shake hands with me or extend to me the welcome due a long absent and esteemed uncle and brother-in-law?" he cried, as a flush of anger overspread his face. "You're too good to speak to me? What in the world are we coming to when human affection and brotherly love are at such a discount? Such conduct is calculated to bring the 'briny' to my eyes, although I'm by no means addicted to weeping. Once more, how do you do?"

He again moved abruptly toward the mother and daughter, extending his hand, but again they avoided him, Jessie taking refuge in an adjacent pantry while her mother retreated behind the stove.

"Come, come, Mr. Moreland," exclaimed Dr. Robinnett, sternly, in response to an appealing glance he had received from his new patients. "This sort of conduct cannot be tolerated another moment. You must comprehend at a glance that you are an intruder and that the ladies do not wish to say a word to you!"

"Well, what have you to do with that, sir?" demanded Radd, furiously, as he turned and confronted the doctor. "Do you wish to come between me and my dear relatives? Is it any part of your trade to promote family broils? Attend to your own business, sir, and leave me to my peace!"

"Enough of all this, Radd," spoke up Mrs. Moreland, in a very firm voice, although she was deathly pale. "You do not need to be told that we have done with you forever, and that you must refrain from intruding upon us, or we shall invoke the law against you. Leave us on the instant!"

"I shan't do anything of the kind, thank you," retorted Radd. "I am here to stay."

At this moment Dr. Robinnett took the intruder by the arm with no gentle fervor.

"You have heard all Mrs. Moreland has to say to you," he observed, with a gesture toward the door. "You must go."

"I'll go when I get ready," returned Radd, more furious than ever, "and I'll fix a date as soon as I have taken a little refreshment."

He produced a flask of whisky and inverted the same between his lips, allowing nearly half of its contents to gurgle down his throat.

"Now, then," he exclaimed, with a sullen gleam in his eyes, as he returned his flask to his pocket, "take notice that I am on the warpath, and that I am going for a choice collection of scalps!"

By a quick, unexpected movement, as he ceased speaking, he swung a chair violently, bringing it down upon the head of Dr. Robinnett with such force as to leave his victim stretched apparently lifeless at his feet.

The shrieks of terror which Mrs. Moreland and Jessie flew to the doctor's side did not deter the intruder from brandishing his chair above their heads.

"Silence, both of you," he enjoined, menacing them. "The least noise from you and I'll kill all three of you! If you want war, you shall have it to your heart's content! Silence!"

His men was so terrible that the mother and daughter did not dare offer a word of response, but busied themselves with stanching the blood which flowed from an ugly cut over the doctor's right ear.

"There! that's more like it!" cried Radd, lowering his chair and bounding to the door, which he opened. "Come in, boys! We're already in full possession of the field, just as I promised you we would be! Come in!"

As he came back into the sitting-room, the mother and daughter were horrified to see that he was followed by Agnus Hillington and Walt Hutchley.

They arose in terror, retreating into their most distant corner of the apartment.

"The first step is to bind the doctor's hands behind him," suggested Radd, with a gesture toward the motionless figure on the carpet. "He is not seriously injured—merely stunned—and he'll be on his feet again in a minute if you do not bind him."

"Leave him to me," proposed the East Indian, with a gleam of vengeance at the unconscious physician. "I'll soon put it out of his power to interfere with our little performance!"

He suited the action to the word, and then turned his burning and venomous gaze upon Mrs. Moreland and Jessie.

Until now they had stood as if paralyzed, as indeed they were, by the intention of the three plotters, but now Jessie caught up a chair and hurled it into the window nearest her, dashing out half of its sash and glass, while she uttered a wild scream for assistance.

"Enough of that!" cried Hillington, seizing her by the throat and reducing her to instant helplessness. "Another cry like that and I'll strangle you! Quick, Radd! We must bind them!"

The task was quickly accomplished, despite the desperate resistance of the mother and daughter, and the three conspirators remained entirely the masters of the situation.

"There!" proposed Hillington, as he turned away from the helpless trio on the floor, "let us ransack the house in quest of the treasure, and get away with it as soon as we find it, taking the mother and daughter with us! Live! The game is now all our own!"

In another moment the trio were busy with their search for the missing treasure, scattering to every part of the house.

At least half an hour was consumed in this quest, but not the least hint of eventual success rewarded their efforts. The savage and disgusted mood in which they at length returned to the sitting-room can be imagined.

"It would take us all night to search the walls and floors thoroughly," declared Hillington, with a curse, "and it would be a fool's game to leave the prisoners here longer. We had better take them to that sleep in the cove without another moment's delay."

"The doctor, too?" queried Hutchley.

"Especially the doctor," returned the East Indian, his eyes flashing vengefully. "He certainly knows what has become of that money, and I'll extract the secret from him, even if I have to build a fire under him to get it. Let us take all three of them to the woods. Do you know Moreland, where that horse and wagon are kept?"

Radd hastily assented.

"Then get them here as soon as you can," enjoined Hillington. "Hutchley will go with you. Hurry!"

CHAPTER XV. CALLED TO ACCOUNT.—CONCLUSION.

THE another movement could be made, however, or another word uttered, the door of the sitting-room was thrown violently open from without, and a commanding figure bounded into the midst of the conspirators, with a revolver in one hand and a lighted lantern in the other.

At the sight of the new comer, Radd Moreland tumbled backward upon a lounge which came opportunely in his way, clasping his hands to his head and writhing in horror.

"Curse the luck, I've got 'em again!" he shrieked, glaring at the figure which had so unexpectedly appeared to his gaze. "It's that infernal phantom. It's 'The Chapman!'"

His cry was succeeded by a still wilder

The third night subsequent to these events, while Radd, Hillington, and Hutchley were having a carousal in the humble cabin of the latter, near the water's edge, there arose one of the most terrible storms known to the annals of Lake Michigan, and the next morning not a single board or timber of the building was visible. It had been swept away, with its occupants, of whom no trace was ever discovered.

But Perry and his friends knew nothing of this catastrophe, and indeed they had a great deal to think about without it. For, at that night, the presence of Colonel Ridley and Dr. Robinnett Vance became the husband of Jessie Moreland, while her mother became the wife of Mr. Weyville.

And just a year later, in the elegant parlors of The Elms, which had been newly refurbished, the fair Jessie sat holding a sweet daughter, while Vance stroked her hair tenderly and contemplated that miniature image of his bride and of himself.

"You see," he said, with a smile as proud as gentle, as he lifted and patted one of the chubby hands of the baby, "that there is no 'curse' resting upon you, as you once told me. I knew then, as I know now, that there was no occasion for your haunting fears, and here is the proof. Dr. Robinnett says that your hands and those of my dear mother-in-law will be sufficiently restored in another month to admit of laying aside all those gloves and bandages forever. What more do we feed, darling, to fill the cup of our happiness to overflowing?"

"Nothing more, my own dear Vance—nothing whatever," assured Jessie, in all the radiance of her beauty and gladness, as she raised her lips to the handsome face bending over her. "We are indeed very happy."

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 MORE people try to put down liquor the more it seems to go to the head.—Yonkers Statesman.

POLICE JUSTICE.—"What's your business?" Culpit—"Machinist." Police Justice—"What precinct?"—Town Topics.

PEOPLE who thrust their private sorrow upon the world by using mourning envelopes should be arrested for blackmail.—Sittings.

PEOPLE who go to grand hotels have who to put up with; and they who ride in crowded street cars have to stand a great deal.—Picayune.

ISN'T it about time to answer that letter of Uncle John's from Squeentecute Corners that he wrote you last December?—Philadelphia Call.

THIS marrying of rich American heiresses by foreign noblemen has a kind of longing for the dollar of the daddies in it.—Philadelphia Times.

BUB—"I hear they are going to call his royal niblets Gotham, Jr." Cub—"How's that?" Bub—"Because he's another new York."—Boston Herald.

HUSBAND (very late from the club)—Hum! I told you not to sit up for me. Wife (sweetly)—I didn't. I got up to see the sun rise.—New York Weekly.

"We have caught our defaulting book-keeper," said one merchant to another. "Then he is now a spotted adder," replied the latter.—Pittsburg Chronicle.

GUIDE—Now, you will have to be careful; many a tourist has broken his neck at this spot. Gent (to his wife)—Augusta, you go first.—Spare Moments.

MRS. POWELL—I have such an indignant husband! Mrs. Cameron (spitefully)—Yes, so Justin tells me; but he sometimes indulges too much, doesn't he?—Fun.

TEACHER—"Define 'unsophisticated.'" Bright Boy—"Unsophisticated" means a boy wot thinks circus season raises the price of lemons.—Street and Smith's.

JILSON says he thinks a good many women are demanding the ballot with the idea that they are going to get curl-papers at the expense of the State.—Buffalo Courier.

"THE first thing a man does when he finds that a counterfeit dollar has been passed on him is to study out something to spend it for immediately.—Arkansas Traveler.

"EFFIE (to-auntie, who has been reading aloud stories from the Old Testament)—"Yes, auntie, it's a very nice book, but I think it's more fit for boys."—Fall Mail Gazette.

"How," writes a distracted parent to this office, "shall I convince my daughter that the young man she goes with is a worthless rake?" Have her marry him.—Atchison Globe.

"THIS seems to be a genuine case of buoyant spirits," remarked the wreck-er, as he hauled in the basket of champagne which had floated to shore from the sinking ship.—Buffalo Courier.

"WHAT does a Welsh rabbit look like?" "On a plate it is a symphony in A gold, but when you are asleep it is a five-eyed elephant with eight feet, all planted on your chest."—Tid-Bits.