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# The Spanish Treasure.

A NOVEL.

By Mrs. Elizabeth C. Winter.

(ISABELLA CASTELLAR.)

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

CONTINUED.

"She is a singular girl," at last she said, "and if the man is so completely infatuated with her as you say, an alliance of any sort between them might be dangerous to our plans. I dislike her, and have no confidence in her airs of superiority and virtue; but she will inevitably find out from Van Tassel the whole story of your pretended identity with Lord Clarence Stanley, and our only safety in regard to him lies in the fact that we are on guard against him and we can more easily prove him to be a dangerous lunatic than he can prove you to be other than the man whose name you bear. I do not think we need to be alarmed on this subject. But I must find out whether that Mendoza girl has left the Hamilton family. I cannot go there personally, for Polly dislikes and mistrusts me, and I don't like her. To confess the truth, Lord Clarence, I am inclined to be jealous of her. In your inmost heart, my dear Clarence, or what passes for that organ, I believe that you are more than half in love with Polly Hamilton, and you are sorry now that you have lost the chance of marrying her."

"What, when I have the choice of you instead?" exclaimed Stanley. "My dearest girl! How can you do yourself such injustice?"

Olive Gaye felt her cheek redden angrily. There was an insolent freedom in the man's tone which she resented with suppressed but bitter fury.

"The man is not a gentleman," she thought, "not even in outward seeming. How could the Hamiltons have been deceived in him all these years? But how handsome! I suppose Polly was quite made about him, and, of course, that would blind her father and mother. But I must get some hold on him even stronger than my knowledge of his early life; for when I have married him, it will be as much to my interest as to his own to preserve his secret; and, devil that he is, he knows that as well as I do."

While these thoughts were passing through the shrewd mind of Miss Gaye, she was looking up into her lover's face with the ingenuous and childlike smile which deceived most men and was not wholly without effect even in the keen eyes now observing her; while the glowing crimson of her cheek might well enough pass for the blush of pleasure in listening to a compliment from the lips of the man whom she loved.

Despite his admiration for Olive Gaye's particular kind of cleverness and her quite extraordinary executive ability, Stanley could never rid himself of the feeling that he had been captured and was held, like any other captive animal, with a chain long enough for apparent freedom, it is true, and loose enough to make him almost unconscious of its presence, but when he sought to evade it he was made to feel, in an unmistakable manner, that it was there.

"But I shall marry her," he thought. "That or the wild West and free life is now my only alternative, and I am afraid I am spoiled for the prairies and canyons. Too much civilization and luxury have made the necessity for their continuance imperative. In order to possess them I must marry her; and when I do——"

Stanley did not complete the sentence; and could Miss Gaye have seen his face at that moment, the expression of it might have robbed the coronet of the prospective countess of much of its luster.

Outside her own family, no one knew or remotely suspected the engagement of Olive to Clarence Stanley, with the single exception of Bertha Sefton; and Miss Gaye had only taken her friend into her confidence when she realized the danger of not confiding in her. Bertha had already ascertained all that had been required in regard to Dolores having absented herself suddenly, and, as it seemed, mysteriously, from the Hamilton family; and in that way Olive and Stanley knew that she had never returned there after her meeting with Van Tassel.

"They have gone to California together," said Stanley. "I feel they have done so in quest of the Santiago Canyon, of which he knows the locality; and by this time they have arrived there and are doubtless searching for the treasure."

"Have patience, Clarence; they will not find it," said Olive. "You alone possess the secret, and as that girl's father lost his life in the search for it, you may be quite certain she is in no haste to risk hers—no—no! I learn through Bertha that she has left the Hamiltons for entirely different reasons—in which Polly believes, but in which Mrs. Hamilton does not put the least faith. The dear mother, on the contrary, has lost all confidence in the wonderful Spanish senorita, in the belief that her sudden and mysterious disappearance is explained by the equally sudden and mysterious disappearance of Lord Clarence Stanley—in short, Mrs. Hamilton is firmly convinced that Polly's late sweetheart and recently acquired sister have eloped together."

"Then they do not suspect that I am still in New York?" said Stanley, eagerly.

"Nothing short of meeting you face to face would convince Mrs. Hamilton of that fact," said Olive, in answer. "Mary does not believe that Dolores has gone off with you; and in order to keep her from learning the true state of affairs I have been obliged to take Bertha Sefton into my confidence. But Bertha is a fool and couldn't be made to keep any secret very long—therefore the sooner we start on our wedding-journey the better, and I have arranged to have the ceremony take place to-morrow evening. Bertha will be our only witness, and the minister of the church to which she belongs will perform the ceremony at his own house. She has arranged the matter for me, and my people have all agreed to be secret about the marriage for the present on account of your recent bereavement—poor boy!"

"You are a trump, Olive!" exclaimed Stanley. "I begin to think I shall end by falling in love with you, my dear. You really are worth a dozen of the ordinary sort of women!"

"Oh, thanks!" exclaimed Miss Gaye, with a slight flush, half pleased, half angry. "But that isn't much of a compliment. Now, I want you to explain to me once more the secret of the cryptograph, and also to go over, in detail, every point of the Mendoza story, in so far as it has any bearing whatever on this concealed treasure."

Stanley gave a hurried glance about the room and then toward the door, which was closed, but not locked.

Olive rose and, with a low, gurgling laugh, like that of a playful child, locked the door.

"Just to satisfy your suspicious mind, dear," she said, coming back to her chair that was drawn up close beside him. "It is quite unnecessary, for we are alone in the house; even the servants are out, and my uncle and his family will not return before midnight. I arranged that to-day on purpose, that we might suffer no interruption."

He drew from his pocketbook—the same old one, marked with the arms of the Wiederstrom family, that he had carried for so many years—all the papers relating to the cryptograph, both the original parchment and the various translations and cuttings of the separate pieces of the picture forming the figure of the Indian princess.

These he spread out on the table, and for hours this man and the girl who had determined to be his wife pored over the mysterious script, studying it word for word, letter by letter, and finding many new and hidden meanings in it, until both felt that it was engraved on heart and brain forever.

It was late when they ceased to pore over the secret of the cryptograph, but both felt that they thoroughly understood it, and each longed for the hour when he or she could set out in search for the hidden treasure.

She accompanied her lover to the door, and as she raised her face to his for the good-night kiss, which he pressed with all a lover's fervor on her small red mouth, a great, old-fashioned clock in the upper hall struck the hour in deep, sonorous peals of sound.

"Eleven o'clock, Clarence. I had no thought it was so late. Uncle Gaye and the girls will soon be home. Good-night, good-night, dear boy; but come very early in the morning. There is much to be arranged yet, and then we will appoint where and when to meet Bertha in the evening."

She hastily closed the door as her lover turned to wave his hand in adieu; and then she drew a sigh of mingled relief, pain and anger.

"I love that man!" she muttered to herself; "but that won't last, because I hate him, too. Heigh-ho! I wonder, as the French say, if the game is worth the candle. But it is too late now for moralizing, and fate will help me through, as usual."

"You are early, dear," said Miss Gaye to Lord Clarence, when, on the following morning, she ran down stairs to meet him. "Come here! Let me look at you. As I live, I don't believe you have read the news this morning, Clarence."

"Well, I have not," said Stanley, carelessly. "There is nothing that can happen of any particular interest to me any more. Or is there? What has happened? Anything that concerns me, pray?"

"Read and judge for yourself," said Olive; and, taking a sheet of paper from an envelope—a strange thing for her carefully out from the morning news—she placed it in Stanley's hand.

And thus was the earthly announcement that met his eyes:

SECOND ACTS IN COMEDIES.

"The attempt at a tragedy in our town two days ago in the house of Baron von Helmholtz was, last night, successfully carried out. The beautiful young baroness was found, at about eleven o'clock, dead, lying on a lounge in her room. The baron, who had just entered, was the one to make the discovery; and notwithstanding the madness of his grief, he has so far controlled it as to give valuable suggestions to the police in regard to this most terrible tragedy. The young baroness, it appears, neither received nor wrote to any such attorneys who had served her nobly, and who was supposed to have been killed, years ago, in a quarrel at a gaming-table; but only a few night since, or thereabouts, the baron received anonymous intelligence of the reappearance of the first husband, whose name was Carlos Mendoza. The baron was murdered by means of a long, slender dagger driven through the heart, and which had been left in the fatal wound by the murderer—who had probably fled in trepidation at some approaching sound—and this dagger, taken possession of immediately by the police, bears on its blade the name of 'Carlos Mendoza,' the letters deeply engraved in the steel—

"'This is Van's work!' exclaimed Stanley, in a low tone, as he turned to Olive Gaye, who stood beside him, her gaze fastened on the words which he read them, 'without doubt this is Van's work, but what infernal stupidity about the dagger—the one I gave him bore his own name—I did not even know he had the other one! This might be infernally awkward if I should ever—that is to say, if Carlos Mendoza does live. It might be devoid unpleasant for him; but he may be lucky enough to be able to prove an alibi——'

Olive laughed merrily.

"The unlucky Carlos may be fortunate enough to prove an alibi; though, if he were in your place, Clarence, he couldn't."

"Why not?" said Stanley, sharply, and glancing at the paper in his hand. "According to the newspaper report this woman must have met her death some time between ten o'clock, when her maid left her, perfectly well, and eleven o'clock, when my husband, entering her room, found her dead. Now, I was with you, here in this room the entire evening, and when I parted from you it struck eleven o'clock, and you remarked upon the hour.

"Oh, yes, dear Clarence, but I am the only living person who can help you to prove an alibi—and to-night I shall be your wife. In such a case a wife's evidence would not be received either for or against a suspected criminal. So you see, dearest, you would be quite helpless, if you were Carlos Mendoza, and if you should, by chance, be arrested on circumstantial evidence—because if I am not your wife then I shall hate you, and in that case I would remain silent, while if I am your wife my evidence would have no value. Poor Carlos! How glad you should be that you are Clarence now and not Carlos."

Stanley felt a cold chill run over him from head to foot as he met the mocking, smiling eyes of his future wife—and from that moment he felt that he was a doomed man, for, whether he married her now, or fled from her, either way he was at the mercy of this heartless, unscrupulous, cruel girl; for she held his life and future safety in the hollow of her hand.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

DOLORES IS VINDICATED.

As day followed day, and her lover neither returned, nor made any effort, by letter or otherwise, to obtain the forgiveness she would so gladly have bestowed on him, the conviction forced itself upon Polly Hamilton that Clarence Stanley was gone forever.

Neither did any word come from Dolores, and, unconscious to herself, the reiterated suspicions of Mrs. Hamilton were beginning to tell upon her. She, who had always been bright and cheerful as the morning, radiant as June sunshine and happy and sweet of temper as all young, healthy, untrammeled life should be, was now the embodiment of irritability, melancholy, timid, bitter, derisive mirthment, or else irrepressible, unconquerable grief.

"Don't speak to me of Rita's treachery," she said one day to her mother, turning upon her almost furiously. "She is incapable of treachery. Besides which, it is unnecessary. I gave him to her. Yes, madly as I have loved Clarence Stanley, I would not owe him to any woman's pity, not even to Rita. I told her that if she really loved him, I gave them to her rather freely, and I would have died rather than come between them."

Mrs. Hamilton looked at the pale and now tearless face of her suffering child, and began to realize that she had never before understood the almost tragic possibilities of her once gay, heart-hearted, happy daughter. She folded her in her arms and held her close to her heart, and then she whispered a thought which came to her suddenly,

"Love, real love, can never die, Polly, dear. It is a great misfortune to have wasted such a love as yours, even for a short time, on the wrong man; but the world is wide, and you are but a child yet. Pray for your lover, if you will, darling—the sooner the better; but you will yet meet the true lover, and then you will have the dead love in your heart to only sharpen waiting for the right man to awaken it to new and stronger life than it has yet known."

Polly started and looked strangely. There was surely some great force in that thought. She could not yet understand it, and it recalled to her her pain, and yet, what had her mother said? The world was wide, and she was yet but a young man girl!

"Oh, mamma!" the mourner cried, "it does not seem to me that I can ever hate the whole race of men as I now—all except papa—but the whole world is dreary, dreary, dreary—simply this part of it—and I wish I could leave New York—leave—today—this—hour—for—"

"And so you shall, darling!" exclaimed Mrs. Hamilton, half smiling in the midst of her tears, and rounded by the sudden, [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]