

A Moorland Princess

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Author of "The Barn Stormers," "Fortune's Sport," "A Woman in Gray," "Queen Sweetheart," "Her Royal Highness," "The House by the Lock," Etc.

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CHAPTER VII.—Continued.

On St. Mark's Eve. Now was the time to make use of the slip of paper which destiny had put into her hands. The telegram had come to her on the day before the important date, therefore she had time enough left still to carry out the plan of campaign forming in her mind. In half an hour after receiving it (a half hour which was one of the bitterest of her life) she had wired to the one most interested, after herself. "Have important news for you. Must see you personally. Telegraph instantly you receive this that uncle is worse and I am wanted at home immediately. Will leave here after receiving your wire, at 8:14. Meet train Victoria."

The wished for answer came without delay. The news of the departure was broken to the hostess, Vivien saying that it would be better, as her uncle seemed so poorly, not to return for the present, but to consider the visit ended. He maid could stay and pack, following her by a later train, while she herself would take the first she could catch. This happened to be the 8:14, as Vivien had anticipated. So far, her plans worked very well. Her uncle and her host and hostess at Red Down hall were sorely acquainted, therefore she need not fear that the latter would discover her deception. Besides, her uncle really was suffering from a severe cold. Had he been much worse she would not have given up her pleasure to nurse him. But then, that was a detail, and the effect upon other people's minds would be the same. She was rather anxious lest she might see some one she knew in the train, some one who would be inconveniently observant at Victoria. But her fears proved unnecessary. So far as she could see, not even the most casual acquaintance witnessed the meeting between her and the man she had hidden from.

"We must have a talk," she said. "Let us take a four-wheeled cab and drive

mine. How could I harm you if I knew the whole truth about the black portmanteau and the Maltese cross? I should never dare to betray you, whatever the secret might be, for I am too completely in your power; we both know that. Tell me who is the girl in the photograph I saw on his table that night. Tell me what is the hold you have over her? Is it, by chance, of the same sort that binds me to you?"

The man smiled grimly. "Don't you wish it were? But it is not. I will tell you as much as that."

"This paper that you have lost—this appointment which you hope will put you in possession of jewels worth many thousands of pounds—is it with her?"

"Yes, it is with her. Now are you satisfied?"

"No, not half. I want more, much more. If I can get you the paper in time for you to keep that appointment, will you take me with you—O, I don't want to be seen or to interfere in any way. I only want to see her, to know what she is like, and to know what she has done that you are able to hold her in the hollow of your hand."

"I have told you that you must get me the paper in any case."

"And I tell you now that much of the old inducement to obey has gone. I am losing him. And unless I can regain what I have lost I am beginning to realize that nothing matters greatly. Remember, the I get you the paper, he will have seen it. Probably it is too late to keep him from going to the place appointed if he has half a normal man's curiosity. He will see her. Already he is in love with her photograph. Now do you understand? I want to know what I have to fight against and how to fight. Help me to that and I will help you in every way in my power. There may be more ways than you can see now. Give me her secret and I am with you heart and soul in this undertaking, while as for the paper you want, let come what will to me, you shall have it within the hour. What's your answer—yes or no?"

"Yes," said Eagle-face.

CHAPTER VIII.

Not Like Other Girls. There were uneasy dreams for Breakspear of being moved when he wished to be still; of frightful jolting over rough roads; of voices that talked and had no faces; then of red-hot probing pangs which gnawed their way to his vitals; and at last he awoke, spent and worn, to find himself lying in a room strange as surroundings in another world, yet awfully familiar as the toys of childhood discovered in a hiding place forgotten through long years.

That low, deep-set window like an eye under a white overhanging forehead. In some other state of existence he must

have lain in a bed, as now, looking thru such a window that framed a picture of brown foreground and blue, hilly distance like waves of the sea, in a storm. He began dazedly to wonder if he were not still a child who had been only dreaming the events of manhood—dreaming the years which were still unborn in the future. By-and-bye, that black oak door in the white wall would open, and somebody would come in to call him from his bed, and he would know the somebody by his Nurse Varcoe, of course. They were to go for a picnic together to-day, he and she, to Satan's Tor. Queer that he seemed already to have been there, and gone thru some strange experience which hovered like a ghost just outside his memory; but this impression was part of this dream of manhood in which there were battles, and glimpses of many countries, and visions of a woman's beautiful face—a very different face from Nurse Varcoe's—and he seemed to have been searching for it a long, long time.

So far had Breakspear gone—and to reach this point he had taken scarcely a minute counting by seconds, the time he fancied he had been waking and wondering for an hour—when the door, which he had been vaguely watching, did open, and in a flash the years he had forgotten were given back to him, up to the last moment of consciousness.

Something else was given to him also—the realization of an ardent wish; for the figure in the doorway was not that of the stout, elderly, apple-cheeked woman, whom his fancy had brought back alive across the broken bridge of years. It was that of a young girl, dressed in a simple white gown which seemed a part of her personality, and her face was the glorified face of his Lady of the Lilies.

Instinctively Breakspear strove to rise, but a sudden pain and the unwonted consciousness of weakness pressed him back upon the pillow.

"It is you!" he heard himself exclaim, too late to control the exclamation.

The girl came to him with light foot-falls as soundless as if she walked on flowers instead of an uncarpeted floor. She bent over him with kind, beautiful dark eyes, and a copper glory of hair lighted from the window behind her into a flaming crown.

Jim could not yet believe his eyes; nor his ears when she spoke to him. It must be that he was dreaming of her, and he said so, the she seemed human, and even made him drink greedily from a cup which she had brought.

"You have been dreaming for a few hours," she answered, softly. "Now, at last, you are awake."

"But you," he persisted. "That it should be you, of all others, who comes to me!"

The girl looked startled. "I'll see, echoed. "You are dreaming a little still,

perhaps, for we are strangers. You never saw me before."

Jim Breakspear still had the primitive candor of his dreams and his physical weakness upon him. "I have seen you—nothing but you for days—weeks, perhaps," he said, "for time is all confused for me now. You are my Lady of the Lilies."

A bright color rushed to the girl's face, "I don't know what you mean," she answered. "But it doesn't matter. Don't try to think. You had an accident, and—"

"I was shot," Jim calmly finished the sentence when she hesitated. "I remember it very well now, the after that—"

"Don't!" she cried, putting up a warning hand. "Don't try yet to remember after that. I will tell you all that you need to know. After the accident I happened to—learn that you had been hurt, and we brought you here, to take care of you and make you well. The farmer's sister and I will nurse you back to strength again, and there is a doctor in the house—at least, a man who has studied to be a surgeon, and he is clever enough to do not think you need fear to trust yourself to him. The farmer will bring any medicines that may be necessary here from the nearest village."

"Where is here?" abruptly asked Breakspear. "I seem to know this room so well. I seem to have lain, long ago, in a bed placed exactly like this, looking out thru that window."

For an instant the girl left his question unanswered, as if she were debating whether to be frank or evasive. Then she chose frankness, according to her nature, not the custom to which circumstance held her a slave.

"Here is a place called New-Take Farm," she said. "It is on Dartmoor."

"New-Take Farm?" repeated Breakspear. "A strange thing, indeed. I visited New-Take Farm when I was a child. This must have been the very room where I slept—it is so familiar. And I shall know my way downstairs, and all about the house—I'm sure I shall. Isn't there an old ruined well that was partly buried down when this was a manor house, and never repaired? Of course there is! I wanted to explore it then, but my nurse wouldn't let me—said it wasn't safe. Now, perhaps you—"

He stopped suddenly, for the girl's face had gone white and red. She bit her lip, and her eyes, having darted at him one questioning, half-reproachful look, were turned away.

"Have I said anything wrong?" Breakspear asked.

"No," said the girl. "Only—that wing is no safer now than it was then. It is rather ruinous. The farmer with whom we lodge does not like people to go there, and you must be very obedient if you are to be well again soon. It is quite true,

as your memory tells you, that you were shot, but—but it was an accident, in a way; at least, it was a mistake, the cannot explain—"

A flash of enlightenment lit up Jim's handsome face. "You need not," he broke in. "If it was a mistake, it was because the man who shot me thought that I was some one else, whom he wished to kill—who deserved killing, most likely, if it was the man I think."

The girl was very pale now. "You should not talk of these things," she said. "You will excite yourself and bring on fever, perhaps, just when you are doing so well. The man who made the mistake is very, very sorry for it now. He is the doctor of whom I spoke, and he does not wish for your death. He has done all for you he could—extracted the bullet, and dressed the wound—and he sat up with you last night—"

"I have been here for a night, then?"

"Yes, it is early morning now. When we first brought you to the house, you were delirious; but Mr.—but the doctor gave you a sleeping draught when it was safe to do so, and you slept all night. He thinks that, tho' you are weak because you have lost a great deal of blood, you are not hurt seriously, thank heaven. In a few days you will be almost well, if—"

"I feel almost well now," cried Jim. "And it was true, for this sweet Moorland Princess seemed to have brought healing in her presence. He even imagined that he could feel his strength flowing back to him thru his veins, as if there were a tonic in his blood. 'Oh, believe me, it will do me no harm to talk with you—rather the contrary. There are so many questions I long to ask.'"

"About yourself?" she faltered, a look of anxiety dawning again on her face.

"Partly, I want to begin again about that mistake—which I forgive a thousand times over, if that's any satisfaction to the one who made it. If he thought I was—"

Jim stopped suddenly, for he had just remembered with a shock that the man of whom he was about to speak with bitter contempt had sworn himself this girl's father. He was burning to know the truth of this statement, and there was no patience for waiting left in him.

"You said 'we,' when you spoke of living here at New-Take Farm," he began again, stammering. "Don't think me impertinent if I ask; you have been so good to me, that I—"

"If you think we have been good to you, ask nothing," the girl broke in. "But we have not been good. We have nearly killed you. There is no goodness in trying to atone."

"I would gladly have gone down nearer to death than I have," said Jim, "for the sake of being where I am now. Besides, it was my own fault that the mistake came to be made. I recognize that, and I didn't mind running a risk or two, be-

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cause—but perhaps you will let me tell you frankly the whole story of how I came to be at Satan's Tor yesterday. I owe you that, now I am under your roof; indeed, your guest. Will you listen?"

"I think I ought not to let you talk so much," said Meya, not understanding his words, yet wishing to understand, and shivering as she remembered just how near death he had been—nearer, she hoped, that he would ever come to know.

"It does me good. I shall be better when I have it off my mind," urged Jim, still hardly daring to believe that this vision existed outside his brain. Then, beginning by the mention of his own name, he went on with the story of his adventures since the luggage sale at Victoria Station, only leaving out such details as were connected with Vivien Oakley.

(To be continued to-morrow.)

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