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PRINCE LUCIFER

By ETTA W. PIERCE.

CHAPTER XVII.

In a private parlor of the most elegant hotel in Whithaven, Mademoiselle Zephyr, the famous young equestrienne, lay curled up in a deep fauteuil, with her cheek pressed, like a day lily, against the dull, soft blue of the chair. She wore a trailing tea-gown of delicate fabric, garnished with exquisite lace. Her little head was rough with a mass of gathered yellow curls that no pins seemed quite able to confine. She looked unexpectably fair and pensive, unexpectably childlike and innocent—not in the least like a woman who could throw vitriol or play the hypocrite. Against the wall near her leaned a man, with his hands buried in his pockets, and his eyes fixed attentively on the young rider.

"So you've broken your engagement, ma'm'zell?" she said, quietly. "You're bound not to ride any more at present? What new whim is this?"

In the rich folds of her tea-gown nestled a tiny lap dog, wearing a collar of silver bells. She stroked him with snowflake fingers, weighed down with diamond rings, and answered:

"How can you ask, you stupid old Jasper? Did I not fall in the ring a few nights ago, and sustain injuries that were thought, at first, to be fatal? I am too ill to ride for weeks, perhaps months, to come. Do I not look ill, Jasper?"

Jasper Hatton's shrewd eyes rested for a moment on the exquisite figure on the dazzling face, in its halo of yellow hair, and he shrugged his square shoulders expressively.

"Not in the least, ma'm'zell."

"Well," she pouted, "let me then say that I do not want to leave Whithaven just now, Jasper; that I have particular business in this vicinity. Cannot you understand? I abandon my dear circle; I drive the manager mad with disappointment; I throw money to the winds; I quarrel with everybody, and swear that I am disabled, dying, all for the privilege of remaining a few days longer in a horrid Yankee town where, under ordinary circumstances, life would be quite unendurable."

Mr. Hatton smiled grimly. He was still flashy in regard to pantaloons, and loud as to neckties. His eyes were still small and black, and all alert, and his manners suggestive of the stable-yard.

"You had a rattling fight with the manager, did you? Yes, yes, I understand it all, Zephyr, and I wonder at you! You've carried the world by storm; you've made your pile, as these blamed Yankees say—in short, you've had your fling without hindrance; now, what more can you want?"

"I want revenge, Jasper—I've had everything but that."

"Pooh! why bother yourself further about Basil Hawkstone? You threw him over long ago; you're free of him and he of you. What made you faint at sight of him the other night? Fought? I thought you had more pluck, ma'm'zell!"

The jeweled hand that caressed the lap-dog trembled.

"Jasper," she said, sweetly, "you are dull, you are heavy, you are often exasperating; but I have always got on better with you than with other men, because you never thwart or worry me, you let me have my own way in all things—that is why we remain friends. Now tell me, am I still beautiful? Do you see any crow's-feet about my eyes, any gray in my hair? Am I fading? Have I lost, in the smallest degree, my power to charm?"

The square-shouldered Englishman surveyed her with a curious sidelong look.

"Your beauty, ma'm'zell, is as it always was—without a flaw; and it's good, I should say, for a professional wear and tear of ten or more years, at least when you are as young as you are."

"Well, you see what I am Jasper—you know how I have been adored in all lands. I cast myself at that man's feet—I implored him to love me again, and he repulsed me with scorn. Do you wonder that I tried to throw vitriol in the face that mocked me? Do you wonder that I vowed to be revenged, and that I mean to keep that vow at any cost?"

Mr. Hatton shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know how any man living could repulse you, Zephyr—she must be something more than human. As for the vitriol business, my little lady, you look like a saint—a right down angel, minus the wings, but I always knew you had the very device of a temper. Did you go down to Tempest Island, a day or two ago, to finish the work begun in the circle?"

She laughed.

"How do you know that I have been down to the island? Don't watch me too closely, Jasper, or I shall hate you, as I do the rest of your kind."

"Somebody has got to watch you," he answered, sulkily. "God knows you need it—and I am the man for the work. You may quarrel with me as much as you like—you cannot shake me off. I'm not like the others, as you ought to know."

"I went down to Tempest Island to see my child, Jasper—how long would it stay? But another woman felled me—the Ravenel girl. But for her, I should have succeeded. I carried a stiletto with me—I tried to use it, too; but she was like a lioness—I found myself disarmed at once. Jasper, I swear to you that I must get possession of Bee—I must tear her from Basil Hawkstone, or die!"

"So the little kid just escaped the clutches of her fond mamma, eh? Lucky for her, say! How long would you be bothered with a law that makes that? The material instinct was never developed in you, Zephyr. Humph! What's the Ravenel girl like?"

"An Eastern princess—a Cleopatra," answered mademoiselle, with a short, mirthless laugh; "she is far handsomer than I am, Jasper. My white-and-gold

inlet, in answer to my letter, but she did not fetch the child—she suspects mischief."

Mademoiselle's blue eyes flashed. "Oh, does she, indeed? But for her, I should be holding Bee in my empty arms at this very moment. She suspects you, her brother?—she knows, perhaps, that you are my friend?"

"Your lover!" he corrected. "Did you tell her, stupid?" she blazed.

"No, she guessed the truth."

He was haggard with disappointment and chagrin. The beautiful circus rider had never held in her toils a more helpless victim than this young southerner with great expectations—this raven-haired Apollo, who, betrothed to a woman, was spending all his spare time and money in making love to another.

"It is plain that we shall receive no help, directly or indirectly, from Jetta," he muttered.

She put on a grievous air.

"Ah," she sighed, "your sister always hated me—she now begrudges me your friendship, and I have so few friends, too!" clasping her little hands pathetically. Hatton, behind the curtain, indulged in a curious smile. "She will not help us, then?" she cannot coax, persuade, or threaten her."

"No," she said painfully loyal to the Hawkstones—deuce take her! Better not count on Jetta!"

The ready tears began to roll softly down her face.

"Fate is against me!" she sobbed. "All my plans go awry! Basil Hawkstone triumphs over me at every turn. Her emotion was too much for Ravenel. Instantly he was on his knees before her, covering her hands with hot kisses."

"Do not weep!" he implored, wildly. "It kills me to see your tears! Have you no friends? Look at me! I would die for you gladly. If that silly Jetta dares to stand in your way I will crush her without mercy. What is a sister compared with you? I love you, Vera; I love you, and you know it, and yet you return no answer to the devotion I offer you. You prolong my suspense cruelly; you seem to reject even while you accept my service. Why do you hold me so long in abeyance? Why are you so cold, so pitiless to me?"

She drew her little hands gently from his grasp. With her pale, tear-wet cheek and innocent eyes she looked, indeed, like a suffering angel.

"Gabriel," she answered, softly, "you must not talk like this to me till you bring my child. I will listen to no love-making till I hold my little one to my heart—till you prove your devotion by accomplishing the task which I have set you. Your reward does not precede the service—it follows it. If you really love me, Gabriel, you will help me, first of all, to take vengeance on my foes."

Vengeance is an ugly word, but it slipped sweetly over her red lips, and Gabriel Ravenel's dark eyes flashed. Her tongue, her look, her vague promises, sent the blood racing, like liquid fire, through his veins.

"Oh, my beautiful sorcerer, if I tear her from Hawkstone's very arms—if I make common cause with you against that man—if I do your bidding in all things—if I fling all things away for your sweet sake—will you listen to me then? Will you accept my love then? Will you swear to be my wife? Will you have fed me on my husks. I must have your sacred promise, Vera, before I undertake more."

Verily, he was a willing tool in her hands! Like the wary little spider that she was, she glanced once toward the curtain, and finding everything quiet there, she bent forward till the yellow curls touched Ravenel's shoulder, and said:

"As surely as you bring my darling from Hawkstone, and tear her safely to me; as surely as you help me to torment, yes, and if possible, destroy him, so surely will I accept your love and become your wife!"

"There was certainly a movement behind the curtain now, but Ravenel did not hear it—the voice of the siren had drowned all other sounds in his ear.

"Vera, I am yours, body and soul. My darling, oh, my darling!"

"Hush!" she interrupted. "I cannot listen to you till your work is done, remember. You failed last night—you may fail again. I shall exact complete success before I make payment. And now you must go, Gabriel. I am ill to-day, my troubles have quite prostrated me—I wish to rest."

"Go! I have but just come," he answered, reproachfully. "How cruel you are! Will you not permit me to remain a few moments at least?"

"Not today, dear friend," purred Vera; "I wish to be alone. Ah, I fear I shall yet involve you in no end of trouble with that dreadful rich old man whose help you are to be. Does he never ask what it is that takes you from his own often?"

Ravenel hung his head—that handsome, foolish head which an artful woman had completely turned.

"Yes," he acknowledged, sulkily; "and I am tired of inventing excuses. I think I go to Tempest Island to see my sister."

"Very good. And the blonde heiress to whom you are betrothed—what does she think?"

"I do not know—I do not care!—probably she suspects the truth—I cannot conceal it longer. The role of hypocrite is growing distasteful to me, Vera. I must cancel my engagement with Miss Rokewood!"

"Do nothing rash, you tiresome boy!" she yawned. "If you break with Miss Rokewood, you will surely invite a crisis in your affairs."

"What, then," he queried, wildly, "would you throw me over, Vera, if old Sutton should blot my name from his will?"

"It is better to be rich than poor," she answered, evasively. "I adore wealth myself, and all that wealth brings."

Perhaps he detected a false ring in her tone—he looked at her sharply.

"Yes, I do not want a woman that will pass—pass—if the day ever comes when I find that you have deceived me—when you dare to break your solemn promise—mark you, it will be time for one or both of us to die!"

She drew back, growing pale and uncomfortable.

"How can you say such dreadful things?" she answered, petulantly. "I wish you were not such a fire-brand! There! you may kiss my hand; and

now farewell—I positively cannot endure you longer."

He pressed his lips to one loose tress of her hair; then he went, and Jasper Hatton flung back the curtain, and stalked, grim as Fate, out of his hiding place.

"Do you mean to destroy that young idiot?" he demanded, sternly. "Come, Zephyr, I tell you frankly, I don't like this!"

She laughed softly, defiantly.

"Yesterday, Jasper, that young idiot, as you truthfully call him, sent me a bracelet of emeralds, every stone as big as the eye of a sea-god. And the day previous, his offering at the shrine of my beauty was a fan of ostrich feathers, a half-yard long, mounted on sticks of solid amber, encrusted with diamonds. Ha! ha! I am a terrible creature, am I not, and you are dreadfully angry with me, eh?"

He looked at her from under bent brows.

"By my soul! I wish the simpleton knew you as well as I do, mademoiselle! whither are you leading him? You have the face of an angel, you carry all hearts by storm, and at bottom you are nothing more nor less than a little fiend!"

CHAPTER XIX.

Dishonored.

"Deadly dull day! Nobody on the avenues—life at a standstill! Hope to Heaven old Hypo won't persist in burying his household much longer at Newport. For my part, I find the place detestable."

Doris Rokewood opened a pair of fearless blue eyes.

"Newport detestable?—Newport dull? What has come over you, Gabriel, that you can say such things? You have a diseased mind, I am sure, that ought to be administered unto, and at once."

She was what is called a fine girl, and she had plenty of firm muscles and healthy white flesh. She had shot game in the Adirondacks, she could fence and ride and row; she loved yachting and lawn tennis, and her especial pets were dogs and horses, and an ugly monkey full of mischievous tricks. An heiress, too, was Miss Rokewood, adored by her guardian, feared by some young men, admired by others, and betrothed to George Sutton's handsome secretary and heir-presumptive, Gabriel Ravenel.

The two were standing in the drawing-room of Sutton's Newport house—called a cottage, but, in point of fact, a palace. Outside, the rain fell vehemently. Bellevue and Ocean avenues were deserted. The wilderness of costly plants on the deep piazza glistened with wet. Gabriel Ravenel, with a vexed and depressed countenance, stared out into the gloomy day without seeing it.

"One would suppose," said Miss Rokewood, as she toyed with some cream-white lilies in a red porcelain vase, "that you would find any place as gay as Newport, so long as you are here to be together!"

"Of course," he muttered; "oh, certainly!"

A noise at the door—it opened, and in paced Miss Rokewood's pet monkey, Juno, who knew the trick of turning knobs without human aid. The creature was one of the ugliest of its kind, tricked out in a little cap and jacket of scarlet silk, and a short skirt of spangled gauze. It saluted Ravenel and its mistress with ludicrous grins to Gabriel—kept on bowing and howling, in fact, with satirical deference.

"How can you tolerate that wretched little beast, Doris?" cried Ravenel, in a disgusted tone. "And why, in Heaven's name, do you bedizen it in that abominable manner?"

"Is it possible that you do not like Juno's costume?" answered Doris Rokewood, innocently. "I fancied you would find it to your taste. I am fond of Juno because she was sent to me from Cairo by a particular friend."

"There is a great deal to be said for your dogs and horses, Doris, but this African simian is too much for ordinary forbearance."

"Not today, dear friend," purred Vera; "I wish to be alone. Ah, I fear I shall yet involve you in no end of trouble with that dreadful rich old man whose help you are to be. Does he never ask what it is that takes you from his own often?"

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Miscellaneous Reading.

SOUTH CAROLINA LIBEL LAW.

State Press Association Desires Some Things Defined.

The law in regard to libel in South Carolina is alleged to be against the newspaper. It is said that the statute makes it difficult for the newspaper to make its position clear. The law is said to be in conflict with the public interest. The law is said to be in conflict with the public interest. The law is said to be in conflict with the public interest.

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