

MY HALF SISTER

By ELTON HARRIS

CHAPTER III.—(Continued.)

"He is considered very handsome," Joyce called mischievously after Reggie's retreating figure; but whether he heard her was doubtful, and her own frank, plain face looked very grave, as she picked up her wools. "Madame is a clever woman," she argued to herself. "Henri is under her thumb—that is, he always seems to be afraid of her; and Mollie is inexperienced and impetuous. It is little more than a fortnight since she returned. Can Reggie mind already—Reggie, who does not care for girls?"

But personal experience, in connection with the naval lieutenant to whom she was engaged, called loudly that a fortnight might make or mar a life, and she could not disguise from herself that Reggie had shown more interest in beautiful Mollie L'Estrange than he had ever exhibited for any woman—save his mother and herself—before.

A fresh, matter-of-fact girl, of three-and-twenty, Joyce, though fond of Mollie, was inclined to look upon her as a child, and did not give her credit for half the sense and observation she possessed. For Mollie had learned a great deal in that past fortnight, though Reggie had not always been her teacher. She knew that the good country people round, who had been her parents' friends, while wishing to be pleasant to herself, looked askance at Madame Dubois, whose great object in life was to get into the charmed circle of their acquaintance. With this end she would drag the reluctant girl to any social gathering where she might meet them, and endeavor to force herself upon them until poor Mollie was bitterly ashamed of her; while her smothered exultation when Mrs. Anstruther did violence to her feelings by a stiff call showed Mollie more than words would have done how the residents of Chalfont House were regarded in Reverton.

Kate was a great trial to her sister; she was delicate, nervous and excitable to a degree; and, as her aunt never checked her, she was almost unbearable. All Mollie's efforts at friendship she regarded with suspicion, as made to the heiress of Chalfont, and she flew into a rage if her sister tried to reason with her, or attempted to take the part of the unfortunate daily governess who for a couple of hours each morning endeavored to teach her. Mollie was very forbearing with her, trying never to forget that she was the baby whom she had seen in her mother's arms. But she was firm also, declining to be driven about, or stand any rudeness; and Kate, finding her tempers disregarded, her imperious airs laughed at, began to treat her sister with sullen respect.

Mollie was thinking of Kate after Reggie had left her at the gate, and she walked briskly up the gravelled path, swinging her empty basket. She had promised some flowers for the church on Sunday, and wanted them also for wreaths for her parents' graves. Should she take them boldly from Chalfont, and incur her sister's wrath, or should she order them elsewhere? It seemed a shame that her mother's wreath should not be from the place she loved so well; and yet she could not bear that anything for her should be wrangled over.

There used to be a great clump of narcissi growing almost wild in a shady corner beside some laurels at the far side of the house. If Mr. Barlowe's vandal hand had spared them, she might surely have some from there; and, intent on finding out, she never paused until she suddenly found herself nearly opposite the window of that fatal study where her stepfather had met his death by an unknown hand nearly twelve months previously.

Since her return she had carefully avoided this spot; it had a nameless terror, yet fascination for her. Mrs. Barlowe's name was rarely mentioned in the house; no servant would go past the study door alone after dark. It was not only Madame's hard and mean rule that caused rarely a week to pass without some of them leaving—they frightened each other; tales of things seen and heard were rife among them, and it must be owned that Mollie was not proof against the general whispering, the unspoken fear, that seemed to hang over the place, especially after dark.

She was half inclined to turn back now, even though the sun was shining and a whole colony of rooks cawing noisily in the tall trees further on. Round this very path the assassin must have stolen that bitter March night after he had done the deed, leaving the window wide open; and—why the window was open now! Voices fell upon her ears. No one ever entered that room but Madame Dubois, though it was unlocked. Who could it be?

Taking an impetuous step forward, her eyes fell on Madame herself, standing erect with one hand on the table, her face haggard and white, her thin lips drawn away from her strong white teeth, her dark eyes gleaming under

their heavy brows with a strange wild gleam; while her voice, harsh and high, came clearly towards Mollie.

"Are there no other apartments in the house but that you must come here—here—here?" she screamed. "Why do you torture me like this? Have I not enough to bear for you? Ah, me! How many mothers would have done as much?"

"Calm yourself, mother," cried a thin, reedy voice. "I had merely a fancy to view the chamber where my so tender-hearted relative shuffled off this mortal coil last Easter Sunday. Where is the harm?"

"No, no, my beloved!" she answered, in a gasping voice, evidently struggling hard to recover her self-command; "but coming in suddenly and seeing a man—so near the time—!" And she clasped her hands as a visible tremor shook her from head to foot.

"Every one was out; I wanted amusing," he said. "How dusty the place is. Why not use the room?"

"Impossible!" panted she. "How can you expect it, Henri—you, who saw—I have it cleaned sometimes, but no one will do it alone, nor will they come near it until after Sunday."

"My uncle seems as much loved in death as in life." And there was a fine sneer in the young man's voice. "Now, why did you send for me in such a hurry, mother? I was having a good time in Paris—music, pretty girls!—and then you insist that I must return to this dull hole. 'Tis absolutely cruel!"

"You have no thought for your own interests. You are incorrigible!" she cried angrily. "I told you the reason plainly enough; and you spend so much money, the sooner you fall in with my intentions the better for you; then your future is assured."

"So you have dragged me away from a thousand engagements and pleasures just for this!" Mollie heard him explain grumblingly. "What is she?"

"Oh, Henri, my adored!" cried Madame Dubois, her voice vibrating with intense feeling, her eyes fixed with deep, passionate love on the other unoccupied of the room; "I feel that at this time I must have you with me—that I must see you—to feel that my sacrifices have not been in vain—that through them you are prosperous. Is it nothing to you to be with your mother?"

What reply the son made Mollie did not hear, for, recovering from her astonishment, she stole quietly away, thankful that Madame's keen glance had not fallen upon her. That Monsieur Henri Dubois had arrived before he was expected—that he had come, not because he loved his home and wished to make her acquaintance, as Madame had repeatedly declared, but because she had sent him an imperative summons—was clear; but why had she done so? Nor could Mollie, having seen the mother's hard face, softened and beautiful with feeling, doubt that this invisible son, with the thin, sneering voice, was the passion of her life, the being for whom she would go through fire and water.

CHAPTER IV.

It was with conflicting feelings that Mollie brushed out her sunny hair before luncheon, staring absently the while into the glass with a perplexed frown.

They were strange people, these Dubois, and she uneasily felt that she could not fathom them.

Henri's cynical tone she considered unfeeling, for Leonard Barlowe had been his uncle after all; while Madame never showed the least respect for her dead brother, though any allusion to him would visibly upset her self-control. And Mollie shrewdly guessed that the extravagant affection she heaped on Kate was but on the surface.

Evidently Madame had sent for her son, and there was a "she" in the case—did they mean Kate?

Already Mollie had not a very high idea of their probity, and wondered how much power they had over the child's fortune.

But she did not think of herself at the moment, except to be glad that she was no relation of theirs. And then her thoughts drifted off to Reggie, and there was a smile on her face as she flung open the door, nearly running over Kate, who was advancing consequentially down the corridor, a huge box of distinctly Parisian bonbons in her arms.

"I shall not give you one because you would not take me to get moas," she said, with solemn spitefulness, as she displayed them.

"You should have gone with pleasure had you asked nicely," returned Mollie, unruffled. "But I will not take you anywhere when you are unpleasant."

And before the frail mistress of the house could find anything bitter enough for her poor little tongue to utter, the elder girl had passed her, and, descending the stairs, entered the dining room, where Madame Dubois and her son were standing by the fire.

There they stood, those aliens and strangers, giving themselves all the airs of proprietorship in the house that ought to have been quite as much her's as Kate's. Standing, too, right

under the painting of her father in full uniform that hung over the mantelpiece. It would have been removed long ago but that it had cost some hundreds of pounds, and Mr. Barlowe secretly thought, added distinction to the room.

A hot wave of indignation and wounded pride swept over Mollie. What business had these people at Chalfont using everything as their own, while she herself was but a guest; and it was a very frigid and haughty bow that she gave in the direction of Monsieur Henri Dubois when his mother introduced him.

"What am I to call you?" exclaimed Madame playfully. "Is it to be cousins?"

"Certainly not, madame," she broke in quickly, with a polite smile. "I am a L'Estrange, and the only relation I have in my father's house is my half-sister Kate." And her tone clearly implied that no other would be allowed.

The elder woman's face darkened visibly; but before she could speak Henri said, with a graceful, sweeping bow:

"Mademoiselle is cruel; but I trust in time to win and deserve her friendship."

With some murmured words of assent Mollie sank into her seat, and during luncheon took as complete a survey of the young man as the fact that he was covertly trying to do the same thing of her would allow. Small, slight, dapper, with sharp, well-cut features, a sallow complexion, and quick, black eyes, he was indeed a contrast to the young officer who already held a large place in her heart.

A thorough Frenchman was Henri Dubois, both in thought and appearance, though his English was very good; and as he sat at the foot of the table caressing his small, black mustache and endeavoring to make himself agreeable, Mollie privately came to the conclusion that she disliked and distrusted him only a little less than she did his mother, and that might only be because she did not know him so well. Indeed his high voice and cynical air contrasted badly with Reggie Anstruther's hearty tones and easy, well-bred manner, though it was plain that his mother thought him perfect, and rarely took her eyes from his face.

"Where have you been this morning, Mollie?" she demanded at length, when there came a break in the conversation.

"She has been for a country walk with Mr. Anstruther. I saw her," broke in Kate's little voice, maliciously. "And she would not take me."

Did a swift glance of meaning pass between mother and son? Mollie could not be quite sure, for this unprovoked attack was disconcerting enough to make her blush furiously. It was very annoying, and Madame's eyes were turned upon her crimson visage with unmerciful scrutiny.

"Kate knows why I would not take her," she said, breaking the pause with a somewhat haughty ring in her young voice.

"But this Mr. Anstruther—" began Madame coldly.

"I met him when I was going to gather moss, and he accompanied me"—rather defiantly.

Madame's lips went into the thin line that gave such a very unpleasant expression to her face, and Mollie continued her luncheon with but a hazy notion of what was on her plate, and a vague, uncomfortable presentiment that picking moss in the bright sunshine with Reggie for a companion would not be allowed to occur again. Two or three times already, when her opinion had not agreed with Madame's, she had been obliged to yield, and as the scene of the fragrant earthy moss, the flickering light through the budding branches in the shady lane, and Reggie's laughing brown face rose before her, so also did a feeling of her own helplessness in Madame Dubois' strong, shapely hands.

(To be Continued.)

Taxpayers Squeezed by Austria.

The taxpayers of Galicia have many grievances against the Austrian government, says Michael Henry Dzielicki in the Chicago Record. The chief complaint is that the assessors of taxes will not admit the declaration of income drawn up by the taxpayer as what he really gets, but substitute a sum which they say he ought to get. This is flagrantly unfair and contrary to law, and makes the taxpayer liable to rates for what does not exist. When challenged as to this arbitrary proceeding the assessors answered that they had merely raised the taxes, and maintained that in order to raise an action against them the complainant would require to prove a false statement. This deprives the taxpayer of any legal remedy, except going before the commission of complaints; but, as the commission is supposed to deal with 12,000 appeals within a few weeks it can be readily seen that it cannot possibly go into the details of any case.

Second-Story Fleas.

The "second-story flea" has been discovered at St. Joseph. Heretofore the Michigan fleas have been all ground floor fleas and there is no record until this summer of fleas which inhabited people on the second stories of houses. William G. Haberkorn of Benton Harbor, has been bitten by one of the second story fleas, and he shows the bite to prove it. It puts him to considerable trouble to do this, but he is willing to go to that trouble when he finds doubting people. The question which puzzles him is how do the fleas get to the second story? Do they jump, walk upstairs, take the elevator, or are they carried up on people's clothing?

WHEN THE CIRCUIT RIDER CAME

In the backwoods of Ohio, in the days of long ago, When religion was religion, not a dressy fashion show, When the spirit of the Master fell as flames of living fire, And the people did the singing, not a trained artistic choir, There was scarcely seen a ripple in life's gently flowing tide, No events to draw the people from their daily toil aside, Naught to set the pious spirit of the pioneers aflame Save upon the rare occasions when the circuit rider came.

He was usually mounted on the sorriest of nags, All his outfit for the journey packed in leather saddle bags, And he'd travel with the Bible or the hymn book in his hand Reading sacred word or singing of the happy Promised Land, How the tolling wives would glory in the diners they would spread, And how many a hapless chicken or a By the gleaming chopper welded by the hand of sturdy dame, For it wasn't very often that the circuit rider came.

All the settlement around us would be ringing with the news That there'd be a meetin' Sunday, and we'd "taller" up our shoes, And we'd brush our homespun dress suits, pride of every country youth, And we'd grease our hair with marrow till it shone like golden truth, And with heated old fire pokers they would make their corkscrew curls; They were scarcely queens of fashion, but were lovely just the same, And they always looked their sweetest when the circuit rider came.

As a preacher, holy Moses! Low he'd swing the living word, How he'd draw the pious "bretherin" yet closer to the Lord, And he'd raise the hair of sinners sitting on the backmost seat With his fiery, lurid pictures of the everlasting heat! We have sat in grand cathedrals, triumphs of the builder's skill, And in great palatial churches 'neath the organ's mellow thrill, But they never roused within us such a reverential flame. As would burn in that old schoolhouse when the circuit rider came. —James Barton Adams in Denver Post.

A TALE OF MISTRESS MARGARET

"The young forget their fancies, the old forget their cares. When pretty Mistress Marget comes smiling down the stairs."

Nobody who once looked upon Mistress Marget—pretty Mistress Marget—could help loving her. I, Thomas Dawtry, a plain and simple squire of the realm, loved her better than all the world. But pretty Mistress Marget was not for me, or so, at least, her father had informed me. As for me, I had long since decided to abide by this decision only so long as circumstances compelled me. Whenever fate offered me the shadow of an opportunity I meant to steal Mistress Marget and run away with her. Mistress Marget, as I had every reason—save spoken words—to believe, would be by no means unwilling.

The opportunity came when my sweet lady's father was called away to fight for his king and country, King Charles and Bonnie England. I, who longed to fight for king and country also, dared the laughter and the jeers of my comrades to stay behind a little and steal my lovely lady, if it so pleased fate. And no sooner had her father ridden away, at the head of his men, then I made for the hall and sought out old Simeon, the gardener.



Sir Reginald had never forbidden my visits—he was too wise a man to tempt fate in such a manner; he had merely taken care that I had no chance of solitary speech with my dear lady. I knew now that the Lady Eleanor Blewett, who filled, as best she might, the place of the dead lady of the manor to her daughter, Mistress Marget, favored not my suit, so I sought not to have speech with her or with my lady. Old Simeon I had been friends with ever since, as a child, I had played in the gardens with sweet Mistress Marget. I knew he was my friend and would help me. I knew also that he might speak with his lady when I might not be watched and unguarded. To old Simeon I told my story, and trusted him for his aid.

And there was the chink of gold between us when we parted, albeit my lack of gold was the reason why Sir Reginald had said me nay, upon my asking for his daughter's hand. And for gold—next to his love for pretty Mistress Marget—old Simeon would do more than most of us would do for the sake of life.

That evening I happened to be walking in the lane just as old Simeon also came out to take the air. And a note passed between us. Old Simeon also instructed me as to where I could find certain implements and tools—a ladder and a stout stave among them—which I might need later on, perchance. And I gave to Simeon the package of a certain drug, which my friend, the chirogeon, had given me. Mistress Marget was to see that this drug was dropped into the flagon of ale sent up for the Lady Eleanor's supper. Then, later, she was to lean out of her casement and signal to me, waiting outside in the lane. And later still Parson Dabney, who loved us both and sympathized with us rather than with Sir Reginald, was to make pretty Mistress Marget my wife.

And so it all happened, without let or hindrance, save when my body servant's horse was nitred in the slough back of the lane. He should have waited in the lane proper, but he thought he heard voices and sounds of houses' doors creaking, and knowing that he must not be found there, he leaped his own steed over the hedge and into the slough. We had to wait

some minutes for him, when we would fain have hurried onward. But this was after I had placed the ladder underneath my lady's window, mounted it, pried off the guarding bars with the stout stave which old Simeon had furnished me, and received my darling in my arms. My heart beat so in going down the ladder that I feared she would hear it and think me timid. Yet had I courage to claim a kiss as we neared the bottom, insisting that she pay it me before I set her down; and I do not think she noticed the rapid beating of my heart after that, even had she noticed it before. Her own heart beat rapidly then, as the bright color coming and going in the face which looked so fair and sweet in the moonlight testified clearly.

At the foot of the ladder I set her down, and hand in hand we raced across the greensward, over the foot-bridge old Simeon had managed to leave open and unguarded for us, and out into the lane. There, lifting her dear form in my arms, I swung her up before me, and away we galloped, after the short interval of waiting for my servant, of which I have spoken. Half an hour later we stood before Parson Dabney in the gray old vicarage, and a few moments afterward I had the right to call pretty Mistress Marget my wife. Then, a hurried kiss, a tear or two on Mistress Marget's part, and we were on our way back to the hall, where Mistress Marget was to live on, the same as ever in all things save that slender gold band on her finger, until my return from the wars. And then—ah! sad for a man to leave his wife on the wedding eve—my body servant had summoned my varlets and they waited for me outside in the lane. I could but kiss my darling once more, ah me! but so tenderly and lovingly, see her safely up the ladder, withdraw it from beneath her window, wave her a last tender farewell—and now, beshrew me! but mine own eyes were wet—and take my departure. But before I crossed the foot-bridge once more I threw the stout stave that had served our turn so well far from me into the thick of the hedge, and I once more clinked gold with old Simeon in order that he might be properly forgetful of all that had happened that night. Then the soft darkness of the lane, with the moon well under a kindly cloud, a sharp command to the waiting varlets, a tearing gallop until morning, and we were well up with Sir Reginald and his men, and nothing but wars and fighting before us for many long months.

But my heart was brave and light-some within me, even though I had left my dear wife of an hour behind me. For it is easier, perhaps, to leave one's wife than one's sweetheart, especially when the sweetheart's father favors a richer man, and I knew, also, that I was a brave and skillful fighter, and I hoped that before Sir Reginald or I saw pretty Mistress Marget again his heart would have warmed toward me on this account. For Sir Reginald loves a brave man and a good fighter always. And in the end it all turned out even as I had hoped. —Chicago Tribune.

On the Writing of Comedy.

Bouccault, quite at the beginning of his career (and he wrote plays almost as a body), used to get £300 for a five-act comedy. He stated the fact on oath in a court of justice, and the sum was considered so immense that the counsel who was examining him exclaimed:

"Do you mean to tell me, sir, that if I were to write a comedy for the Haymarket theater the manager would give me £300 for it?"

"I think it most improbable," replied Bouccault.—From "Personal Recollections," by Sutherland Edwards.

Exports from United States.

Exports from the United States during the past fiscal year increased to every section of the globe. Next to European exports, the largest increase was in exports to other parts of North America.

No Word for Patriotism.

There is no word in the Chinese language that conveys an intimation of what we term public opinion; nor is there a synonym for patriotism.

AMONG THE BANKS.

Three Chicago Concerns Consolidate—New York Gets New One.

The directors of the Continental National bank of Chicago have voted unanimously in favor of increasing the capital stock of \$1,000,000, making it \$3,000,000. Three of Chicago's oldest and largest banking institutions are to be consolidated. The Corn Exchange National, the American National and the Northwestern National are to pool issues and reorganize under the charter of the Corn Exchange, retaining its title. President Ernest A. Hamill, of the Corn Exchange bank, will be president of the consolidated corporation. The new Corn Exchange National bank will have a capital stock of \$2,600,000, a surplus of \$1,000,000 and undivided profits of \$500,000. The Federal National bank of New York city is the proposed title of an institution for which the application has been approved by Acting Comptroller Kane. The proposed capital is \$500,000, and the responsible applicant who has conducted the correspondence is Joseph T. Hall, the real estate man at 35 Nassau street. The other four incorporators required by law are Walter D. Johnson, broker; Charles A. O'Donohue, merchant; Percy B. O'Sullivan, and Jason C. Moore. It is announced that the United States treasury's third call for \$5,000,000 from government depositors will be the last. The remaining \$10,000,000 needed for the retirement of the \$25,000,000 old 2 per cent bonds, it is stated, will be made up from the growing treasury surplus. The three calls have been prorated among the banks all over the country having government deposits, and the eight depositaries in Philadelphia, after responding to the last call, which was payable July 16, contributed something like \$750,000 in all.

BEAUTIFUL FEET RARE.

Present-Day Footwear Distorts the Extremities Abominably.

A man who denies that he is prejudiced, but claims that he is a good judge of feminine beauty, declares that there is scarcely a beautiful foot to be found among the women of today. The high heels, the exaggerated curve at the ball of the foot, the stiff heel stays and the pointed toes, he declares, have distorted the foot in a painful and ugly manner. The ankles are misshapen. In some cases the bones are enlarged until they bulge out so that every bone is perceptible. The weight of the body thrown upon the toes has caused them to spread out. Crowded into pointed toes, they stick up in clusters of knotty corns. The foot should be as shapely as the hand. Footwear should fit as a glove fits the hand. The perfect foot is slender, with an arched instep and toes that lie smoothly and easily. The first step toward acquiring a pretty foot is to wear shoes that fit it comfortably. The next is to take exercises that will render the toes strong and supple. Begin by spreading out the toes to the utmost extent; then hold four toes still and attempt to move the remaining one. Every toe should be straighter and shorter than the next one and the arch should be shapely and plant. The feminine foot of today renders a graceful carriage an impossibility. And all because Dame Fashion has decreed that a short, high-heeled, pointed-toe shoe is the correct thing in dressy footwear, forgetting that there never was a human foot built that way.

Does Electricity Kill Trees?

New Haven (Conn.) Special to Philadelphia Inquirer: Indignant citizens who desire to save the noble elms that are the pride of New Haven have threatened to bring suit against the trolley car companies of the city for alleged damages to the trees. The assertion is made that the trolley wires charged with electricity are in some streets held in place by connecting wires fastened to the trees, and that charges of electric fluid are sent into the trees, which are thus killed. The trolley companies have sought to stave off damage suits by an offer to test the scientific correctness of these assertions. Permission has been obtained from the department of public works and police supervision assured for the interesting experiment within the week of charging the big tree in front of City Hall with the full voltage of the trolley system. If the tree dies a score of suits will be filed by property owners, who have been compelled to cut down trees, some of them 150 years old, since the trolley ran through the avenues.

Boy's Spartan Courage.

Altoona (Pa.) correspondence Philadelphia Record: Fifteen-year-old William Van Allman, while picking berries west of the city, was nipped by a rattlesnake, which he failed to observe under a bush. The fangs of the reptile caught one of the boy's fingers near the end. First killing the snake, the lad drew his pocketknife, and, with Spartan courage, cut off the injured finger at the second joint. He bound the wound with his handkerchief and hastened to Altoona, where the injury was dressed. The physicians say he is in no danger.

Mechanism of the Carp.

People marvel at the mechanism of the human body, with its 432 bones and 60 arteries. But man is simple in this respect compared with the carp. That remarkable fish moves no fewer than 436 bones and muscles every time it breathes. It has 4,320 veins, to say nothing of its 99 muscles.

Honorary Degree from Austria.

Simon Newcomb, the American astronomer, has had an honorary degree conferred on him by one of the leading Austrian universities.