

EVERETT-GREEN EVELYN

**MONICA, VOLUME 1
(OF 3)**

Evelyn Everett-Green
Monica, Volume 1 (of 3)

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Monica, Volume 1 (of 3) / A Novel:

Содержание

CHAPTER THE FIRST.	4
CHAPTER THE SECOND.	15
CHAPTER THE THIRD.	25
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	31

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Monica, Volume

1 (of 3) / A Novel

CHAPTER THE FIRST.

THE TREVLYNS OF

CASTLE TREVLYN

“Good-bye, Monica. I will look in again to-morrow: but I assure you there is no cause for anxiety. He is not worse than usual, and will be better soon.”

The doctor was buttoning up his heavy driving-coat as he spoke, and at the conclusion of the sentence he opened the heavy oak door, letting in a blast of cold air and a sheet of fine, penetrating rain.

“Oh, Raymond, what weather! I ought not to have sent for you.”

“Nonsense! You know I am weather-proof. Old Jack will find his way home, if I cannot. Good-bye again.”

The door closed upon the stalwart figure, and Lady Monica Trevlyn was left standing alone upon the wide staircase, amid the gathering shadows of the great hall.

Castle Trevlyn was, in truth, a sufficiently grim and desolate place, both within and without. Tangled park, dense pine woods, and a rocky iron-bound coast surrounded it, cutting it off, at it were, from communication with the outside world. Within its walls lay a succession of vast, stately chambers, few of them now inhabited – regions where carved black oak, faded tapestry, rusty armour, and antique relics of bygone days seemed to reign in a sort of mournful grandeur, telling their own tale of past magnificence and of present poverty and decay.

Yes, the Trevlyns were a fallen race; for the past three generations the reigning earl had been poor, and the present Lord Trevlyn had failed to do anything towards restoring the decaying fortunes of his house. He too was very poor, hence the air of neglect that reigned around and within the castle.

Monica, however, his only child, was far too well used to the gloom and grimness of the old castle to be in the least oppressed by it. She loved her lonely, desolate home with a curious, passionate intensity, and could not picture anything more perfect than the utter silence and isolation that hemmed in her life. The idea of desiring a change had never so much as occurred to her.

Monica was very beautiful, with a beauty of a rare kind, that haunted the memory of those who saw her, as a strain of music sometimes haunts the ear. Her face was always pale and grave, and at first sight cold even to hardness, yet endued with an underlying depth and sweetness that often eluded observation,

though it never failed to make itself felt. It was a lovely face – like that of a pictured saint for purity of outline, of a Greek statue for perfection of feature – almost as calm and colourless as marble itself. Yet, behind the statuesque severity lay that strange, sad, wistful sweetness which could not quite be hidden away, and gave to the beholder the idea that some great trouble had overshadowed the girl's life. Let us go with her, and see what that trouble was.

When the door closed upon Raymond Pendrill, she stood for a moment or two silent and motionless, then turned and mounted the shallow stairs once more, and, passing down a long corridor, opened the door of a fire-lit room, and entered softly.

The room had two tenants: one, a great mastiff dog, who acknowledged Monica's entrance by gently flopping his tail against the floor; the other, a lad of seventeen, who lay upon an invalid couch, his face very white and his brows drawn with pain.

As Monica looked at him her face quivered, and a look of unspeakable tenderness swept over it, transfiguring it for the moment, and showing wonderful possibilities in every line and curve. She bent over him, laying one cool, strong hand upon his hot head.

“Better, Arthur?”

“Yes, getting better. That stuff Raymond gave me is taking the pain away. Stir up the fire, and sit where I can see you. I like that best.”

Arthur Pendrill, cousin to Raymond Pendrill, the young

doctor who had just left the castle, was the only child by a first marriage of Lord Trevlyn's second wife. Hoping for an heir, the earl had married again when Monica was seven years old, but his hopes had not been realised, and the second Lady Trevlyn had died only a few years after her union with him.

Arthur, who had been only a mite of two years old when he first came to Castle Trevlyn, knew nothing, of course, of any other home; and he and Monica had grown up like brother and sister, and were tenderly attached, perhaps all the more so from radical differences of character and temperament. Their childhood had been uncloudedly happy; they had enjoyed a glorious liberty in their wild Cornish home that could hardly have been accorded to them anywhere else. Monica's had always been the leading spirit; physically as well as mentally, she had always been the stronger; but he adored her, and emulated her with the zeal and enthusiasm of youth. He followed her wherever she led like a veritable shadow, until that fatal day, five years ago, which had laid him upon a bed of sickness, and had turned Monica in a few hours' time from a child to a woman.

Upon that day there had been a terrible end to the mad-cap exploits in cliff-climbing in which the girl had always delighted, and Arthur had been carried back to the castle, as all believed, to die.

He did not die, however, but recovered to a suffering, helpless, invalid life; and Monica, who held herself sternly responsible for all, and who had nursed him with a devotion that no mother could

have surpassed, now vowed deep down in her heart that her own life should henceforth be devoted to him, that for him she would in future live, and that whatever she could do to lighten his load of pain and make his future happier should be done, at whatever cost to herself, as the one atonement possible for the rashness which had cost him so dear.

Five years ago that vow had been recorded, and Monica, from a gay, high-spirited girl, had grown into a pale, silent, thoughtful woman; but she had never wearied of her self-imposed charge – never faltered in her resolution. Arthur was her special, sacred charge. Anything that would conduce to his welfare and happiness was to be accomplished at whatever cost. So far, to tend and care for him had been her aim and object of life, and her deep love had made the office sweet. It had never occurred to her that any contingency could possibly arise by which separation from him should prove the truest test of her devotion.

Whilst Arthur and Monica were dreaming their own dreams upstairs, by the light of his dancing fire, no thought of coming changes clouding the horizon of their imagination, downstairs, in the earl's study, a consultation was being held between him and his sister which would have startled Monica not a little had she heard it.

Lord Trevlyn was a tall, stately, grey-headed man of sixty, with a finely-chiselled face and the true Trevlyn cast of countenance that his daughter had inherited. His countenance wore, however, a look of pallor and ill-health that, to a practised

eye, denoted weakness of the heart, and his figure had lost its old strength and elasticity, and had grown thin and a little bowed. His expression had much of gentleness mingling with its pride and austerity, as if, with the advance of years, his nature had softened and sweetened, as indeed had been the case.

Lady Diana, on the other hand, had grown more sharp and dictatorial with advancing age. She was a “modish” old lady, who, although quite innocent of such adornments, always suggested the idea of powder and patches, high-heeled shoes and hoops. She generally carried a fan in her hand, dressed richly and quaintly, and looked something like a human parrot, with her hooked nose, keen black eyes, and quick, sharp voice and movements. She had an independent and sufficient income of her own, and divided her time between her London house and her brother’s Cornish castle. She had always expressed it as her intention to provide for Monica, as her father could do little for his daughter, everything going with the entail in the male line; but there was a sort of instinctive hostility between aunt and niece, of which both were well aware, and Lady Diana was always deeply offended and annoyed by Monica’s quiet independence, and her devotion to Arthur.

It was of Monica they were talking this boisterous autumn evening.

“She has a sadly independent spirit,” remarked Lady Diana, sighing, and fanning herself slowly, although the big panelled room was by no means warm. “I often think of her future, and

wonder what will become of her.”

Lord Trevlyn made no immediate response, but by-and-by said slowly:

“I have been thinking of late very seriously of the future.”

“Why of late?” was the rather sharp question.

“I have not been feeling so well since my illness in the spring. Raymond Pendrill and his brother have both spoken seriously to me about the necessity for care. I know what that means – they think my state critical. If I am taken, what will become of Monica?”

“I shall, of course, provide for her.”

“I know you will do all that is kind and generous; but money is not everything. Monica is peculiar: she wants controlling, yet – ”

“Yet no one can control her: I know that well; or only Arthur and his whims. She has no companions but her dogs and horses. My blood runs cold every time I see her on that wild black thing she rides, with those great dogs bounding round her. There will be another shocking accident one of these days. She ought to be controlled – taken away from her extraordinary life. Yet she will not hear of coming to London with me even on a short visit; she will not even let me speak of it,” and Lady Diana’s face showed that she was much affronted.

“That is just it,” said Lord Trevlyn, slowly; “her life and Arthur’s both seem bound up in Trevlyn.”

Lady Diana made a significant gesture, which the earl understood.

“Just so; and yet – unless under most exceptional circumstances – unless what I hardly dare to hope should happen – she must, they must both leave it, at some not very distant date.”

The hesitation of Lord Trevlyn’s manner did not escape his sister.

“What do you mean?” she asked abruptly.

“I mean that I have been in correspondence lately with my heir, and that I expect him shortly at Trevlyn.”

“Your heir?”

“Yes, Randolph Trevlyn, one of the Warwickshire branch. The extinction of the Trevlyns at Drayton last year, you know, made him the next in succession. I made inquiries about him, and then entered into personal communication.”

Lady Diana looked keenly interested.

“What have you made out?”

“That he is very well spoken of everywhere as a young man of high character and excellent parts. He is wealthy – very wealthy, I believe, an only son, and enriched by a long minority. He is six or seven and twenty, and he is not married.”

Lady Diana’s eyes began to sparkle.

“And he is coming here?”

“Yes, next week. Of course I need not tell you what is in my thoughts. I object to match-making, as a rule. I shall put no pressure upon Monica of any kind, but if those two should by chance learn to love one another, I could say my ‘Nunc dimittis’ at any time.”

Lady Diana looked very thoughtful.

“Monica is undoubtedly beautiful,” she said, “and she is interesting, which perhaps is better.” Her brother, however, made no reply, and as he did not appear inclined to discuss the matter farther – they were seldom in entire accord in talking of Monica – she presently rose and quitted the room, saying softly to herself as she did so, “I should love to see that proud girl with a husband’s strong hand over her.”

That evening, when alone with his daughter, Lord Trevlyn introduced the topic most in his thoughts at that time.

“Monica, do you never want a little variety? What should you say to a visitor at Trevlyn?”

“I would try to make one comfortable. Are you expecting anyone, father?”

“Yes, a kinsman of ours: Mr. Trevlyn, whose acquaintance I wish to make.”

“Who is he? I never heard of him before.”

“No; I have not known much about him myself till lately, when circumstances made him my heir. Monica, have you ever thought what will happen at Trevlyn in the event of my death?”

A very troubled look crept into Monica’s dark, unfathomable eyes. Her face looked pained and strained.

“I think you ought to know, Monica,” said the earl, gently. “Perhaps you have thought that the estates would pass to you in due course of time.”

Monica pressed her hands closely together, but her voice was

steady, her words were quietly spoken.

"I do not know if I have ever thought about it; but I suppose I have fancied you would leave all to Arthur or to me."

"Exactly, you would naturally inherit all I have to leave; but Trevlyn is entailed in the male line, and goes with the title. At my death Mr. Randolph Trevlyn will be the next earl, and all will be his."

Monica sat very still, feeling as if she had received some sudden stunning blow; but she could not take in all in a moment the gist of such intelligence. A woman in some matters, she was a child in others.

"But, father," she said quietly, and without apparent emotion, "Arthur is surely much nearer to you than this Mr. Trevlyn, whom you have never seen?"

The earl smiled half-sadly, and shook his head.

"My dear, you do not understand these things; I feel towards Arthur as if he were my son, but he is not of my kindred. He is my wife's son, not mine; he is not a Trevlyn at all."

Monica's troubled gaze rested on her father's face.

"He cannot live anywhere but at Trevlyn," she said, slowly. "It would kill him to take him anywhere else;" and in her heart she added – a little jealous hostility rising up in her heart against the stranger and usurper who was coming – "He *ought* to have it. He is a son and a brother here. By every law of right Trevlyn should be his."

Foolish, irrational Monica! Where Arthur was concerned her

eyes were blinded, her reason was warped by her love. And the ways of the great outside world were so difficult to understand.

Presently she spoke in very low, measured tones, though not without a little falter in her voice now and then.

“You mean that if – if you were to die – Arthur and I should be turned out of Trevlyn.”

“You would neither of you have any right to remain,” answered Lord Trevlyn, choosing his words with care. “You would find a home with your aunt; and as for Arthur, I suppose he would go to his cousins – unless, indeed, if he seemed unable to live away from the place, some arrangement with my successor could be made. Everything would depend on him, but of course it would be a difficult arrangement.”

She drew a long breath, and passed her hand across her eyes.

“Mr. Trevlyn is coming here, you say?”

“Yes, next week. I think it is right that we should become acquainted with our kinsman, especially as so much may depend upon him in the future.”

“I think so too,” answered Monica; and then she quietly left him, without uttering another word.

CHAPTER THE SECOND.

MONICA'S RIDE

The next morning dawned fair and clear, as is often the case after a storm. Monica rose early, her first thought, as usual, for Arthur. She crept on tip-toe to his room, to find him as she had left him, sleeping calmly – as he was likely now to do for hours, after the attack of the previous day; and finding herself no longer required by him, the girl was not long in making up her mind how these early hours of glimmering daylight were to be spent.

Seven o'clock found her in the saddle, mounted on her glossy black thorough-bred, who, gentle under her hand, would brook no other rider, and showed his mettle in every graceful eager movement, and in the restless quivering of his shapely limbs. His coat shone like satin in the pale early sunlight; he pranced and curvetted as he felt his rider upon his back. Monica and her horse together made a picture that for beauty and grace could hardly meet its match in the length and breadth of the land.

The girl was perfectly at home in the saddle. She heeded no whit the pawing of her steed, or the delighted baying of the great hounds who formed her escort, and whose noise caused Guy's delicate nerves many a restive start. She gathered up her reins with practised hand, soothed him by a gentle caress, and rode quietly and absently out of the great grass-grown court-yard and

through a stretch of tangled park beyond. Once outside the gates, she turned to the right, and quickly gained a narrow grass-grown track, which led for miles along the edge of the great frowning cliffs that almost overhung at a giddy height the tossing ocean far below. It was a perilous-looking path enough – one false step would be enough to hurl both horse and rider to certain destruction, but Monica rode fearlessly onward; she and her horse were familiar with every step of the way, both knew the wild cliff path, and both loved it; and Guy stretched his delicate supple limbs in one of those silent gallops over the elastic turf in which his heart delighted.

Monica seldom passed more than a day without traversing that well-known track. She loved to feel the fresh salt wind as it blew off the sea and met her face. Sometimes it was warm and tender as a caress, sometimes fierce and boisterous, a wet, blinding blast, laden with spray from the tempest-tossed waves below; but to-day it was a keen, fresh wind, salt, and strong, and life-giving – a wind that brought the warm colour to her cheek, the light to her eye and gave a peculiar and indescribable radiance to her usually cold and statuesque beauty.

To-day she felt strangely restless and uneasy. A sort of haunting fear was upon her, a presentiment of coming trouble, that was perhaps all the harder to bear from its very vagueness. She had never before realised that the future would bring any change to the course of her life, save that of gradually increasing age. Not for an instant had it ever occurred to her that a possibility

such as that hinted at last night by her father could by any chance arise. That she and Arthur might ever have to leave Trevlyn seemed the wildest of all wild dreams, and yet that is what in all probability must happen in the event of her father's death. Monica shuddered at the bare idea. Her beautiful dark eyes glowed strangely. It must not, it should not be. It would be too cruel, too hard, too unjust!

In deep abstraction, Monica rode along the cliff for some three miles, then turning her horse's head inland, she crossed an open space of wind-swept down, leaped a low stone wall, and found herself in a road, which she followed for some considerable distance. It led at length to the quaint little town of St. Maws, a pretty little place, nestling down in a wooded hollow, and intersected by a narrow inlet from the sea, which was spanned by a many-arched bridge. All the trees in the neighbourhood seemed to have collected round St. Maws, and its inhabitants were justly proud of their stately oaks and graceful beeches.

Monica rode quietly through the empty streets, returning now and again a salutation from some tradesman or rustic. It was still early – only eight o'clock – and the sleepy little place was slowly awaking from its night's repose. At the far end of the town stood a good-sized house, well hidden from view behind a high brick wall. Guy turned in at the gate of his own accord, and, following a short, winding carriage drive, halted before the front door. The house was of warm red brick, mellowed by age; there was an indescribable air of comfort and hospitality hanging over it. It

was mantled by glossy ivy, and its gables, steep pitched roof, and twisted chimneys were charmingly picturesque. The door stood wide open as if to invite entrance. Monica's hounds had already announced her approach, and a tall, wiry-looking man of some thirty summers was standing upon the threshold. He was not much like his brother, the blue-eyed, brown-bearded Raymond, having a thin, sharp, closely-shaved face, very keen penetrating eyes, and a cynical mouth. Tom Pendrill was himself a doctor, like his brother; but he did not practise on his own account, being a man of scientific predilections, with a taste for authorship. His college fellowship rendered him independent of lucrative employment, and, save for assisting his brother with critical cases, his time was spent in study and research.

"Well, Monica, you are abroad early to-day," was his greeting. Arthur's cousins had been like cousins to Monica almost ever since she could remember. "You have come to breakfast, of course?"

"I came to tell Raymond not to trouble to call at Trevlyn to-day, if he is busy. Arthur is much better. I want to see Aunt Elizabeth; but I should like some breakfast very much."

"I will take your horse," said Tom, as the girl slipped from the saddle. "You will find Aunt Elizabeth in the breakfast-room."

The "Aunt Elizabeth" thus alluded to was the widow of the Pendrills' uncle, and she had lived with them for many years, keeping their house, and bringing into it that element of womanly refinement and comfort which can never be found

in a purely bachelor establishment. The young men were both warmly attached to her, as was her other nephew, Arthur, at the Castle. As for Monica, "Aunt Elizabeth" had been to her almost like a mother, supplying that great want in the girl's life of which she was only vaguely conscious – the want of tender womanly comprehension and sympathy in the trials and troubles of childhood and youth.

It had been her habit for many years to bring all her troubles to Mrs. Pendrill. She did not discuss them with Arthur. Her mission was to soothe and cheer him, not to infect him with any fears or sorrows. He was her boy, her charge, her dearly-loved brother, but Aunt Elizabeth was her confidant and friend.

She was a very sweet-looking old lady, with snow-white hair, and a gentle, placid, earnest face. She greeted Monica with a peculiarly tender smile, and asked after Arthur with the air of one who loved him.

"He is better," said Monica, "much better, or I could not have come. He is asleep; he will most likely sleep till noon. I want to talk to you, Aunt Elizabeth. I felt I must come to you. When breakfast is over, please let us go somewhere together. There is so much I want to say."

When they found themselves at length secure from interruption in Mrs. Pendrill's pretty little parlour, Monica stood very quiet for a minute or two, and then turning abruptly to her aunt, she asked:

"Is my father very much out of health?"

Mrs. Pendrill was a little startled.

“What makes you ask that, my love?”

“I can hardly say – I think it is the way he looked, the way he spoke. Please tell me the truth, dear Aunt Elizabeth. I have nobody but you to turn to,” and there was a pathetic quiver in the voice as well as in the pale, sweet face.

Mrs. Pendrill did not try to deceive her. She knew from both her nephews that Lord Trevlyn’s health was in a very precarious state, and she loved Monica too well not to wish to see her somewhat prepared for a change that must inevitably fall upon her sooner or later. She had always shrunk from thinking of this trouble, she shrank from bringing it home to Monica now; but a plain question had been asked, and her answer must not be too ambiguous.

Monica listened very quietly, as was her wont, not betraying any emotion save in the strained look of pain in her great dark eyes. Then very quietly, too, she told Mrs. Pendrill what her father had said the previous evening about his heir, and about the prospective visit.

“Aunt Elizabeth,” said Monica suddenly after a long pause, betraying for the first time the emotion she felt, “Aunt Elizabeth, I do not wish to be wicked or ungenerous, but I *hate* that man! He has no right to be at Trevlyn, yet he will some day come and turn out Arthur and me. I cannot help hating him for it; but oh, if only he would be good to Arthur, if only he would let him stay, I could bear anything else I think. *Do* you think he would

be generous, and would let him keep his own little corner of the Castle? It does not seem much to ask, yet father thought it might be difficult. Arthur is so patient, so good, he might learn to love him – he might even adopt him, so to speak. Am I very foolish to hope such things, Aunt Elizabeth? – they do not seem impossible to me.”

Mrs. Pendrill mused a little while.

“Has this Mr. Trevlyn any family?”

“I do not know. Father did not speak of a wife. I fancy he is an old bachelor.”

“He is old, then?”

“I fancy he is elderly, or at any rate middle-aged, or father would hardly care to have him on a visit. He must be younger than father, of course, but I do not know anything more about him. Oh, it will be very hard; but if he will only be good to Arthur, I will try to bear the rest.”

“I am sure you will, my Monica,” said Mrs. Pendrill tenderly. “I am sure you will never be ungenerous or act unworthily. A dark cloud seems hanging over your life, but there is light behind, though we cannot always see it. And, remember, my darling, that gold shines all the brighter for having been tried in the furnace.”

“I know the fellow,” said Tom Pendrill, an hour later, when Monica had gone, and he had heard from his aunt part of what had passed between them. “Monica is out about his age; he can’t be more than six or seven and twenty, and a right good fellow he is too, and would make my lady a capital husband, if he is not

married already. Randolph Trevlyn was at Oxford; I knew him there pretty well, though he was only an undergraduate when I had taken my degree. The name sounded home-like, and I made friends with him. He wasn't anywhere near the title then, but I suppose there have been deaths in the family since. Well, well, the earl is quite right to have him down, and if he could manage to fall in love with Monica and marry her, it would simplify matters wonderfully; but that wild bird will need a good deal of training before she will come at a husband's call, and there is such a thing as spreading the snare too much in the sight of the quarry."

No thought of this kind, however, entered into Monica's head. She was far too unversed in the ways of the world to entertain the smallest suspicion of the hopes entertained on her account. She thought a good deal of the coming guest as the days went by – thought of him with bitterness, with aversion, with mistrust, but in the light of a possible husband – never for a single instant.

It was the day before the stranger was expected, and Monica, as the sun was sinking in the sky, was riding alone in the pine wood that surrounded the Castle. She was grave and pre-occupied, as she had been for the week past, haunted by the presage of coming sorrow and change. Her face was pale and sad, yet there was a wonderful depth of sweetness in its expression of wistful melancholy. The setting sun, slanting through the ruddy trunks of the tall pines, shone full upon her, lighting her golden hair, and making an aureole of glory round her head, showing off with peculiar clear distinctness the graceful outline of her supple

figure and the beauty of the horse she rode.

She was in a very thoughtful mood, so absent and pre-occupied as to be quite lost to outside impressions, when Guy suddenly swerved and reared, with a violence that would have unseated a less practised rider. Monica was not in the least alarmed, but the movement aroused her from her reverie, and she was quickly made aware of what had frightened the horse.

A tall, broad-shouldered young man stepped forward, and laid a hand upon Guy's bridle, lifting his hat at the same time, and disclosing a broad brow, with a sweeping wave of dark hair lying across it.

"I beg a thousand pardons; I believe I frightened your horse. He is evidently unused to the sight of trespassers. I trust you have not been alarmed."

Monica smiled at the notion; her face had been somewhat set and cold till the apology had been made. The stranger had no right to be there, certainly, but his frank admission of the fact went far to palliate the crime. She allowed herself to smile, and the smile was in itself a revelation.

"It does not matter," she said quietly. "I know the wood is perplexing; but if you keep bearing to the west you will find the road before long. No, I was not frightened, thank you. Good afternoon."

She bent her head slightly, and the stranger uncovered again. He was smiling now, and she could not deny that he was very good-looking, and every inch the gentleman.

She had not an idea who he was nor what he could be doing there; but it was no business of hers. He was probably some tourist who had lost his way exploring the beauties of the coast. She was just a little puzzled by the look his face had worn as he turned away: there was a sort of subdued amusement in the dark blue eyes, and his long brown moustache had quivered as if with the effort to subdue a smile. Yet there had been nothing in the least impertinent in his manner; on the contrary, he had been particularly courtly and polished in his bearing. Monica dismissed the subject from her mind, and rode home as the sun dipped beneath the far horizon.

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

LORD TREVLYN'S HEIR

Lord Trevlyn sat in his study in the slowly waning daylight, waiting the arrival of his expected guest. Now that the moment had come, he shrank from the meeting a good deal more than he had once believed he should do. It was so long since he had seen a strange face, and his relations with this unknown heir would perhaps be difficult: undoubtedly the situation was somewhat strained. Would the young man think a trap was being set for him in the person of the beautiful Monica? Was he acting a wise or fatherly part in scheming to give her to this stranger, if it should be possible to do so?

He had liked the tone of Randolph Trevlyn's courteously-worded acceptance of his invitation. He had liked all that he heard of the man himself. He had a sort of presentiment that his wish would in time be realised, that this visit would not be fruitless; but his child's happiness: would that be secured in securing to her the possession of a well-loved home?

Randolph Trevlyn would hardly be likely to spend any great part of his life at this lonely sea-bound castle. He might pass a few months there, perhaps; but where would the bulk of his time be spent?

Lord Trevlyn tried to picture his beautiful, wayward, freedom-

loving daughter mixing in the giddy whirl of London life, learning its ways and following its fashions, and he utterly failed to do so. She seemed indissolubly connected with the wild sea-coast, with the gloomy pine-woods, with the rugged independence of her sea-girt home. Monica a fashionable young countess, leading a gay life of social distraction! The thing seemed impossible.

But he had no time to indulge his imaginings farther. The door opened, and his guest was ushered in. The old earl rose and bade him welcome with his customary simple, stately courtesy. It was growing somewhat dark in that oak-panelled room, and for a minute or two he hardly distinguished the features of the stranger, but the voice and the words in which the young man answered his greeting pleased his fastidious taste, and a haunting dread of which he had scarcely been fully aware faded from his mind at once and for ever in the first moment of introduction.

Lord Trevlyn heaved an unconscious sigh of relief when he resumed his seat, and was able to give a closer scrutiny to his guest. One glance at his face, figure, and dress, together with the pleasant sound of his voice, convinced Lord Trevlyn that this young man was a gentleman in the rather restricted sense in which he employed that elastic term.

He was a handsome, broad-shouldered, powerful man, with a fine figure, dark hair and moustache, dark blue eyes, frank and well-opened, a quiet, commanding air and carriage, and that cast of countenance which plainly showed that the blood of the

Trevlyns ran in his veins.

Lord Trevlyn eyed him with quiet satisfaction, and from the conversation that ensued he had no reason to rescind his favourable impression. Randolph Trevlyn was evidently a man of culture and refinement, with a mental capacity distinctly above the average. He was, moreover, emphatically a man of the world in its truest and widest sense – a man who has lived in the world, and studied it closely, learning thereby from its silent teaching the good and the evil thereof.

The two men talked for a time of the family to which they belonged, and the deaths that had lately taken place, bringing this young man so near to the title.

“The Trevlyns seem to be a dying race,” said the old earl, half sadly. “Our family is slowly dying out. I suppose it has done its work in the world, and is not needed any longer in these stirring times. You and my daughter are now the sole representatives of the Trevlyns in your generation, as my sister and I are in ours.”

Randolph Trevlyn looked into his kinsman’s face with a great deal of reverence and admiration. He liked to meet a man who was a genuine specimen of the “old school.” He felt a natural reverence for the head of his house, and his liking showed itself in voice and manner. Lord Trevlyn saw this, and was gratified, whilst the younger man was pleased to feel himself in accord with his host. The interview ended with mutual satisfaction on both sides, and Randolph was taken up the great oak staircase, down one or two dim, ghostly corridors, and landed finally in a couple

of large panelled rooms, most antiquely and quaintly furnished, in both of which, however, great fires of pine logs were blazing cheerily.

“We dine at eight,” Lord Trevlyn had said, in parting with his guest. “I shall hope then to have the pleasure of introducing you to my sister and my daughter.”

Left alone in his comfortable but rather grim-looking quarters, Randolph broke into a low laugh.

“And so this sombre old place, full of ghosts and phantoms of departed days – this enchanted castle between sea and forest – is the home of the lovely girl I saw yesterday! Incongruous, and yet so entirely appropriate! She wants a setting of her own, different from anything else. It must have been Lady Monica I encountered, the lady of the pine-wood. What a sad, proud, lovely face it was, with its frame of golden hair, and soft eyes like a deer’s; and her voice was as sweet as her face, low, and rich, and full of music. What has been the secret of her life? Some sorrow, I am certain, has overshadowed it. Who will be the happy man to bring the sunshine back to that lovely troubled face? Randolph Trevlyn, do not run on so fast. You are no longer a boy. You must not judge by first impressions; you will know more of her soon.”

Randolph’s encounter with Monica the previous day had been purely accidental. The young man had reached St. Maws one day earlier than he had expected, one day earlier than he had been invited to arrive at the Castle. Some business in Plymouth which he had expected would detain him some days had been

despatched with greater speed than he had anticipated, and he had gone on to St. Maws to renew acquaintance with his old friend Pendrill, who lived, as he remembered, in that place.

When he descended to the drawing room it was to find the earl and Lady Diana there before him, and he made as favourable an impression upon the vivacious old lady as he had done before upon her brother. Yet he found his attention straying sometimes from the animated talk of his companion, and his eyes would wander to the door by which Monica must enter.

She came at last, stately, beautiful, statuesque, her dress an antique cream-coloured brocade, that had, without doubt, belonged to some remote ancestress; her golden hair coiled like a crown upon her graceful head. She had that same indescribable air of isolation and remoteness that had struck him so much when he had seen her riding in the wood. She did not lift her eyes when her father presented the stranger to her, but only bent her head very slightly, and sat down by herself, somewhat apart.

But when dinner was announced, and Randolph gave her his arm to lead her in, she raised her eyes, and their glances met. He saw that she recognised him, and yet she gave not the slightest sign of having done so, and her face settled into lines of even more severe gravity than before. He felt that she was annoyed at his having met and addressed her previously, and that she would brook no allusion to the encounter.

His talk with the Pendrills had prepared him somewhat for Monica's coldness towards himself. It was natural enough, he

thought, and perhaps a little interesting, especially as he meant to set himself to win her good-will at last.

He did not make much way during dinner. Monica was very silent, and Lady Diana engrossed almost all his attention; but he was content to bide his time, conscious of the charm of her presence, and of the haunting, pathetic character of her beauty, and deeply touched by the story of her devotion to the crippled, suffering Arthur, which was told him by the earl when they were alone together, with more of detail than he had heard it before.

When he returned to the drawing-room, he went straight up to Monica, and said:

“I am going to ask a favour of you, Lady Monica. I want to know if you will be good enough to introduce me to your brother?”

Her face softened slightly as she raised her eyes to his. It was a happy instinct that had led Randolph to call Arthur by the name she most loved to hear, “your brother.”

“You would like to see him to-night?”

“If it is not too late to intrude upon an invalid, I should very much.”

“I think he would be pleased,” said Monica. “It is so seldom he has any one to talk to.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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