

The Devil

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CHAPTER XI—(Continued.)

"My dear madame, I must tell you of a splendid remedy for getting thin." "I don't want to get thin!" the portly one replied indignantly as she glared away from him. "You waited impatiently for an opportunity to withdraw with Millar into a secluded place, where she might listen to him while he told her the things that she did not dare tell herself. The evening had grown late, however, and Karl had arrived before she could get away to a tete-a-tete with Olga, and she took the first opportunity of introducing him to Elsa. She rebelled in her soul now at the thought of their marriage, but her will drove her to the fulfillment of her purpose, to that extent at least. But it was with a heart torn with jealousy that she watched Karl and Elsa move off together and turned to meet Millar, standing beside her with his cynical, sinister smile."

CHAPTER XII.

ELSA BERG was a brilliant, vivacious girl, rarely beautiful, with lively blue eyes, chestnut hair and a tall, slender, willowy figure. The romance and excitement of her meeting with Karl made her seem doubly beautiful, and she gladdened the artist in him, but she helplessly confessed to himself that she made no impression on his heart. His thoughts were with Olga, and he was abstracted, almost to the point of rudeness, while Elsa tried to talk with him.

"Who is that terribly rude person who seems to be frightening every one?" she asked.

"He? Oh, that is Dr. Millar, a friend of mine," Karl replied.

"Poh! I don't see why every one seems so afraid of him," Elsa said, with a note of challenge in her tone. "I think I shall meet him just to see if he will make me run."

"No, no; don't go near him," Karl begged.

"And why not? Has he such a sharp tongue or an evil mind? I can take care of myself."

"I don't really think you ought to meet him," Karl said, but he spoke without conviction. He suddenly yielded to a curiosity to see what might come of a meeting between Elsa and Millar.

"I don't care; I'm going to hunt him up," she cried, jumping up and scampering off.

Millar had gone into an anteroom leading out into the beautiful gardens. A number of the company had assembled there as he entered, and it was obvious from the instant silence which ensued that he had been the subject of their discussion. This seemed to gratify his cynical humor, and he looked at the assembled men and women, society puppets, over with a cynical grin. Elsa was among them, and toward her Millar bowed as he said:

"I never knew this number of ladies could be so silent. I presume during my absence you have been discussing me kindly."

"The others did not speak, but Elsa turned boldly to Millar.

"Don't flatter yourself that I am afraid of you," she said. "I would say to your face what these people only dare think. Indeed, I was just going to look for you."

"It is just as well you are here. They might discuss you and your approaching betrothal with Karl," Millar said. "You know?" Elsa cried in astonishment.

ected to you to deliver a most impudent message to that crowd in there because you are so perfectly impolite."

"I am entirely at your disposal, mademoiselle."

"How can I be impudent, though, when you are so polite to me?" she cried petulantly.

"Shall we end the conversation, then?"

"Oh, no; not yet," Elsa cried, with determination. Then she went on, with embarrassment, "When you came in here you said I was the girl they were going to throw into Karl's arms."

"I did."

"But you did not say that I am the girl who permits herself to be thrown into Karl's arms. Am I right?"

"Yes."

"Please sit down," Elsa went on, recovering her self poise, which the baffling politeness of Millar had disturbed.

He declined the chair with a gesture, but she insisted.

"I feel much more commanding when I stand, and I want every advantage," she said. "I want to set you right, and it will be much easier when you sit down and I stand."

Smiling, Millar sat down and looked up at her expectantly. Slightly confused, she went on:

"I don't want people making fun of me before my face. I know every thing. Do I make myself clear? You were kind enough to mention the subject, and I shall delegate to you the mission of explaining the true facts to those dummies."

She grew quite vehement, and her cheeks flushed. Millar looked at her admiringly as he said:

"Your confidence does me great honor."

"As a rule, I don't take these people seriously," the girl hurried on. "I have no more interest in them or their opinions than I have in last week's newspapers. But I want them all to know that they have not fooled me into marrying Karl. And you all want me to marry him—you all want to throw me into his arms."

"Pardon me!" Millar interrupted. But she went on unheeding:

"Don't you think I can see through your transparent schemes? But I'll marry him just the same, if he'll have me. Do you understand? I'll marry him."

"I do not think you will," Millar said quietly.

"I tell you I am going to be Karl's wife!" Elsa cried, with emphasis.

"Now that you have graced me with your confidence," Millar said, rising, "I feel that I may be quite frank with you. This marriage cannot take place."

He walked toward her, and as he did so Millar emerged from his place of concealment. Karl looked at him.

"Ah, now I understand," he said.

"Surely you do not mean to suspect that I am the cause of Miss Elsa's unhappiness," he said blandly.

Karl ignored him and turned to Elsa, looking at her in frank admiration.

"You are very pretty tonight," he said, going close to her. "It is because you are yourself—a sweet, pure, natural girl. I like you better this way, Elsa. I could take you in my arms and hug you."

"Oh, Karl!" Elsa exclaimed, blushing and hiding her face.

Millar's cynical smile overspread his face, and he turned away, well satisfied with the progress he was making.

"Excuse me," he murmured. "I must say good evening to our hostess." And he stole quietly out.

The two young people did not notice him. They sat down very close to each other, Karl leaning forward and looking into the big blue eyes of the girl. Elsa gave a glance at the disappearing figure of Millar.

"I am awfully glad to be alone with you, Elsa," Karl said. "You are the one natural thing in the field, artificial atmosphere. Don't you feel warm?"

"Yes, as if some hot breeze were blowing through this room. It stifles me."

"You never spoke like that before," Karl said.

His back was toward the ballroom door, and he did not see Millar usher Olga into the room. The man had brought Olga that she might witness the fulfillment of her plan and that he might triumph in her jealousy and further thwart them. Elsa saw them come in and seat themselves across the room.

"There is Olga," she said, and she, too, is jealous. "Don't you want to speak to her?"

"I have seen her," Karl replied, without turning around. "I would rather talk with you. It's far more interesting."

"They are talking about us," Elsa said warningly as she saw Olga and Millar look toward them.

"Oh, what of it?" Karl exclaimed impatiently. "Let us be glad we are together. I am just beginning to know you, Elsa."

"Why do you look around then?" Elsa said.

"Am I looking around?" Karl asked.

"I wasn't aware of it."

But even as he spoke he could not help but glance around to see

what Millar and Olga were doing. He remembered the man's declaration in the studio that afternoon, and he was beginning to hate him.

By a sheer effort of will he forced himself to turn to Elsa. He resolved that he would talk to her; that he would make love to her; that he would marry her and banish from his heart those hateful emotions which Millar had aroused. He leaned forward and spoke of love to the girl in low tones, while Elsa, with color coming and going in her face, listened and watched the woman she knew for her rival.

"Our first love usually is our last love—our last love always is the first," Karl said.

"I don't know," Elsa cried demurely. "I have never been in love, although I was disappointed twice," she added gayly.

Karl was beginning to find his task difficult. His attention wandered to Olga.

"Disappointments! Well, yes, who has not been disappointed?"

Elsa observed his growing inattention, his efforts to concentrate his thoughts on their talk, his futile love-making, and she turned from him coldly. Meanwhile Millar and Olga were having a conversation in which Olga was being torn on the rack of her jealous emotions.

Millar had brought her into the anteroom to show her Karl making love to Elsa. Every circumstance favored his design. Olga at first was disposed to withdraw when she saw them.

"Don't you think we should leave the young people together?" she said.

"You are too considerate," Millar replied cynically.

"They seem to be growing fond of each other," Olga said jealously.

"Yes. Do you dislike it?"

"No."

"Shall we leave now?"

"No. I rather enjoy watching my seed bear fruit."

Olga tried to speak lightly and smile. Millar, watching her closely, saw her lips twitch, and it was with difficulty that she controlled herself.

"They are an interesting couple," he said.

"Can't we discuss something besides these two?" Olga asked impatiently.

"Yes, certainly," Millar acquiesced. "I came here tonight to decide a wager."

"What was it?" Olga asked absently, looking with jealous eyes at Elsa and Karl.

"I made a wager that you would fall in love with me tonight."

Olga was startled by the declaration, but she treated it lightly as one of Millar's strange sayings.

"With whom did you make such a wager?" she asked.

"With Karl," Millar answered quickly.

"Karl. And what did he say?" Olga cried, almost rising from her seat.

"I must not tell you now. It might hurt you."

"Oh, no; it won't. Please tell me now," Olga pleaded, leaning over the table toward him.

Millar, too, leaned forward, his face almost touching her white shoulder, his hand touching hers as it rested on the table. It was thus Karl saw them with one of those furtive glances, and the girl froze the pretty speech he was trying to make to Elsa. The girl, seeing his look, jumped to her feet, exclaiming angrily, and so that all three heard her:

"Take me to the ballroom immediately. I have promised the next dance."

Karl also, his face white with passion, had jumped to his feet. Elsa, almost in tears, stamped her foot at him.

"Why do you stand there? Take me away. Aren't you coming?"

She turned and started to the door, Karl following. They passed Millar and Olga, still seated at the table.

"I thought you were in the ballroom," Olga said sweetly to the girl.

"Oh, did you?"

"I hope you are enjoying the dancing."

"I hate dancing, but I shall dance every dance tonight," Elsa cried passionately.

She looked angrily at Karl, who arose and moved toward her. Karl stepped between them, giving his arm to Elsa. The two walked together, leaving Olga looking helplessly into the smiling face of Millar.

CHAPTER XIV.

OLGA looked angrily at the stony little Elsa as she floundered from the room into the ballroom, followed by the enraged Karl. Millar smiled more cynically than ever as he saw the play of emotion on Olga's face. His ruse had worked admirably. He had at least beaten down Olga's will, but he had yet to make certain of Karl.

"How dared she speak like that?" Olga demanded, turning to her cynical Millar. "Karl must love her."

"Let us not reach conclusions so hastily," Millar said. "First let me tell you how Karl answered me this afternoon."

"When you made the wager?" Olga asked quickly.

"Yes; when I promised to make you fall in love with me."

"What did he say?"

"He tried to kill me," Millar answered slowly.

The color rushed to Olga's cheeks. Her eyes sparkled as she turned them toward her tempter. It was delight she felt—mad, unreasoning joy that Karl's love for her had prompted him to kill another who threatened to win her from him. Still smiling, Millar went on, taking the shining revolver from his pocket and showing it to her.

"With his own hands, dear lady. I tried to kill me with this little pistol. I took it away from him."

"Who was that?" he demanded.

"Who?" Millar asked blandly.

"Did Olga run away from me?"

"No one ran from you that I know of, Karl. That is a pretty girl, my young friend, that little Elsa."

"Yes, she is pretty," Karl replied absently, sitting down at a table.

He was still tortured by the sight of Millar leaning over Olga, touching her hands, whispering in her ear. He was tormented by the insinuating words the man had uttered in the afternoon when he swore that Olga should love him, should be his. He would have liked to take Millar's throat in his two hands and throttle him.

Keenly aware of the inferno he had raised in Karl, Millar continued to chat affably, Karl not deigning to answer. Finally Millar said:

"You seem annoyed."

Karl lost control of himself and leaped to his feet. He went close to Millar, staring into his eyes.

"I am annoyed. Do you want to know why?" he demanded, putting all the insolence he could command into his tone.

"No," Millar replied, with a smile.

"I want to tell you why," Karl de-



HE DICTATED WHILE OLGA WROTE.

clared.

"Please don't," Millar said deprecatingly.

"Yes, I will," Karl went on belligerently. "I am amazed at the change which has come over you since this afternoon. Don't imagine that it is on account of Olga. We won't discuss her at all."

"Certainly not! She is out of the question," Millar assented warmly.

"Absolutely," Karl went on. "I came here this evening determined to ask Elsa to marry me."

"Fine! I am very glad to hear it. I wish you good luck, my boy!" Millar cried, with enthusiasm.

"You are glad?"

"Delighted!" Millar assured him.

"It does not take you long to change your mind," Karl continued, still with a truculent air. "This afternoon you trusted I should not marry Elsa. Tonight you are delighted at the prospect."

"Oh, yes. I see the matter now in a different light."

"Then it was Olga who ran away as I entered?" Karl almost shouted, glaring at him menacingly.

"Run away? Why should she run away?" Millar asked, pretending embarrassment.

"Don't act like a cad!" Karl cried threateningly.

"What do you mean, Karl?"

"I mean exactly what I say. Don't act like a cad. If you were a gentleman you would hide your pleasure."

Millar pretended to be shocked at the indignation of the young artist, which secretly delighted him.

"Don't talk that way, Karl," he urged. "As you seem to have penetrated my secret, I suppose I might as well—but have you made up your mind to marry Elsa?"

"Absolutely."

"And you will not change your mind. You promise?"

"I will not change my mind."

"Well, of course if that is the case I can tell you."

"He hesitated as if embarrassed at his own question. Karl cried roughly:

"And did you succeed?"

"Well, I—"

"What of her husband?"

"Ah, Karl, he is deaf, dumb and blind," Millar cried feebly.

Stiffed with the pain at his heart, Karl turned away.

"This afternoon at my house you met her for the first time," he said.

"Ah, Karl, she is a clever woman, cleverer than I thought," Millar said, affecting tremendous enthusiasm. "She deceived me this afternoon about her true character; she has been deceiving all of you. I am sure of it. Oh, she is grand, fantastic, passionate, daring. Think of it, Karl. He went on, going close to the boy and leaning over him, bringing out his words so that every one seemed to penetrate his heart—

"think of it, tonight a kiss behind a door in front of which her husband was standing. Danger fascinates her. And just now, a moment before you came in, we agreed—"

"So it was she?" Karl interrupted.

"Oh, yes; it was she," Millar admitted. "I suggested a wild plan. Karl; almost too daring for the first day of our acquaintance. Her position, everything depends upon its success. Of course I did not dream she would carry it out. I suggested it merely to sound the depths of her passion. But she loved the idea and insisted upon doing it this very night. If it fails we are lost."

Karl trembled with apprehension for Olga, whom he believed in the devilish powers of this man.

"What is it?" he asked.

"She will be here in one minute, dressed in an opera cloak and nothing else. Think of it, Karl, the darling of it. She will walk through the ballroom on my arm among all those people, her friends, her husband, with no one in the secret but we two—and you, Ah, Karl, I told you she would be

mine," Millar concluded, with rapturous accents.

With a wild cry Karl sprang at Millar, hurling one word at him:

"Liar!"

"Karl, be careful," Millar protested, avoiding him.

"It's a damnably dirty lie!" Karl cried, trying blindly to reach him, to grasp his throat, to throttle him.

Millar deftly avoided him and laughed triumphantly.

"I have trapped you who tried to trap me," he cried. "You love Olga Hoffmann."

"Yes, I love her," Karl cried loudly. "I love her, and yet I will marry Elsa. Now, I have listened to your infernal lies. I have watched you glaze over them. Men like you steal a woman's reputation and boast of it and call it success. But you shall pay for it now, this minute. When I kick you out of the house, out with you, like a sneak thief that you are."

He advanced determinedly on Millar, who quietly faced him.

"Remember, Karl, that I have the pistol now," he said coolly.

"Out with you, you sneak thief. I am not afraid of you," Karl cried again.

He was about to seize Millar by the throat when he started back in amazement at what seemed to be the fulfillment of the other's sinister promise. Olga stepped through the door into the room. She was clothed from head to foot in a beautiful, shimmering, fur-trimmed cloak.

Above the top button gleamed her bare throat. Her white arms projected from the short sleeves. The hem of the skirt fell to the tips of her white satin shoes.

CHAPTER XV.

AS Olga entered she gave one glance at Karl and then moved away from him and stood beside the table at which she and Millar had been seated. She saw the wild rage stamped on his face, and her woman's intuition made her know that Millar had told him what she had divined he meant. The situation frightened her, and she felt on the point of fleeing from the room or casting aside the cloak, but she resolved to see the game through.

Karl stared at her, rage giving place to amazement, then to despair. For full a minute no one spoke. The music floated in softly from the ballroom, mingled with the hum of voices and laughter. Olga was the first to break the stillness, but she did not look at him as she spoke.

"Karl, this is the first time I have had a chance to talk with you tonight," she said.

"What is that?" Karl absently asked. He had not heard. His mind was confused, bewildered. Millar, cynically misunderstanding his question, said quickly:

"Why, that is an opera cloak."

Olga turned quickly, fearful that the remark might cause an eruption which she could not control. She cried impulsively, seeking to divert the threatening train of conversation:

"The ball is a great success. Every one is merry; every one dances as if it were the first affair of the season. The girls are all as happy as young widows who have just taken off mourning."

"I have observed it," Millar agreed, with enthusiasm. "It is splendid. But why is Karl so sad amid all this merrymaking?" he added.

"Why are you sad, Karl?" Olga asked, turning to him.

"I sad? You are silly," Karl cried, with forced gaiety. "I never felt happier in all my life."

There was a touch of hysteria in his voice that made Olga's heart go out to him.

"I am glad you are having such a good time," she said.

(Continued Next Week.)