MY HALF SISTER

By ELTON HARRIS

(CHAPTER II.—(Continued.)

"That I cannot say," she returned hesitatingly. "I suppose they thought it wise not to inform you. As for how your stepfather died they can only conjecture, nor can any motive be given for the crime. He was found by the servants in the morning when they went to open the body, and was lying on the floor near the window which was wide open. You know how bitterly cold it was last Easter? Well, it had been snowing hard all night, and it had drifted in and was lying thickly on his shoulders. But any trace of his assailant had vanished in the hard ground the snow had covered it, and this shows that the deed must have been done early in the night before it began. There were no signs of any struggle, nor was anything taken, and they think he must have been asleep in his chair, for he died of a blow caused by falling heavily on the back of their head. Now, Mollie, I have told you all, but I don't want to let the paper [illegible] all that most horrible affair. It was so dreadfully shocking, and the Times emphasized it so much. Let us talk of happier things."

She and Mrs. Dupuis had been left widows about the same time, but while one had made the early marriage that had ruined her life, the other had devoted herself to her two children and their interests.

Mollie had seen little of them. She had been at school for years, when she was at home for the holidays they had been away, but she had happy recollections of a white-frocked little girl who was dower, and a tall boy who used to send them flying to and fro in a swing under some great trees.

"Thank you very much," she said, straightening herself and sitting up. "It is nice to think that I should have kind friends near me. I, I, it feels rather lonely coming home like this, you see. And though I hated that I disliked Mr. Harlowe, still it is a terrible thing to have happened, and there is my half-sister Kate."

"Yes, yes, of course. Well, Mollie, your mother and I were true friends, though Mr. Harlowe prevented us seeing too much of each other in later years. Come to me whenever you like, my child."

"Oh, I will," responded Mollie more cheerfully. "Tell me, Mrs. Anstruther, shall I like Madame Dubois; do you know her?"

Mrs. Anstruther moved uneasily and drew out her watch.

"We shall be at Riverton in a few minutes now," she exclaimed, almost in a tone of relief, "for, you see, having been friendly with Mr. Harlowe, I do not know her sister well, but we meet on certain terms, and Henri Dubois comes to my house with his wife and young people, and I am at home. Now, here's a train forced that we are to change at Whitecroft."

With the unconscious tact she prided herself on, Mrs. Anstruther contrived to make the best of things. Mollie was relieved, and the next moment the train stopped at the dear, old, country station she remembered so well, and she was in Riverton once more.

There was only one person on the platform, a tall and rather stalwart handsome woman, with a dark, almost masculine face, and piercing black eyes under heavy brows, and these same eyes fell upon the unconscious Mollie as the train slowly glided into the station, and she noted every detail of the sweet face with a strange, quick intensity. She was most elegantly dressed in half mourning, that allowed off her splendidly powerful figure to the excellent advantage, and as Mollie sprang out and looked round she came up quickly with a smile on her wide, thin-lipped mouth.

"Miss L'Estrange, I think," she said in a loud, deep voice. "I am your aunt, Madame Dubois, and I have been greatly looking forward to your arrival. Ah, Mrs. Anstruther, how are you?"

Her aunt? Leonard Harlowe's sister, her aunt? Mollie's brain reeled at the notion, while her hand was shaken with a firm, nervous grip that almost made her scream out with pain.

Then she was conscious that Mrs. Anstruther had kissed her kindly at parting while responding very distantly to Madame Dubois' greeting, and then they were bowling through Reverton in a high mail phaeton behind a pair of fine horses, which madame drove with consummate skill.

In spite of her desire to look out for old landmarks, the girl was furtively studying the hard face by her side as they dashed along. Instinctively she distrusted it, somehow, though it would have been difficult to have put her thoughts into words; and her feelings were of the gloomiest as the chimneys of Chafont came in sight.

It was a large, ugly, red-brick house, standing in well-kept grounds. It looked very much as she had pictured it all her life; but she could not repress a shudder as she thought of what had happened there, and in imagination saw her stepfather's tall form at the hall-door as they drew up before it.

"Where is my half-sister, Kate?" she inquired, as she followed madame, who was talking volubly, into the drawing-room.

"I will send for her. Poor child, she is not strong; she makes me very anxious," she replied, sweeping over to the table, and pouring out tea in the majestic manner that seemed habitual to her. "You will hardly know her, of course, after the place. My brother-in-law so much improved."

"It did not exactly improve, exclaimed Mollie, [illegible] "Why, I should be no more [illegible] Mr. Harlowe."

"Madame Dubois," [illegible] "Though you [illegible] had many French [illegible] peculiarities, and [illegible] I [illegible] [illegible]

"You are [illegible] Mr. Harlowe [illegible] Mrs. Anstruther [illegible] Madame Dubois [illegible] Mollie [illegible] Mr. Harlowe [illegible] Mollie [illegible] Mr. Harlowe [illegible] Mollie [illegible] Mr. Harlowe