# Hollow Ash... Hall

BY MARGARET BLOUNT.

CHAPTER VI.

When the good ship "Port Philip" came sailing home from Australia to England many an anxious parent or lover or friend awaited her arrival upon the harbor pier, eager to welcome those who had been so long absent, and who were now returning to leave their native land no more.

Most of these wanderers had left their home and friends in search of gold. Some had been successful, and were returning in the first flush of victorious pride, some had failed and were coming back like the prodigal son of old, willing to work as hired servants, but might fall from the patriarch to die so that the effect of the empty husk in a far land should be theirs no more. Some were strong and happy, some were ill and sad, but for all alike a welcome was waiting the moment they should step the land.

For all did I say?

There was one on board for whom no friend was watching, one who came unnoticed and unknown to the land of his birth, one for whom no some more genial than an inn would open its doors to. Among the out- ward excited throng who talked to themselves and each other of the friends they hoped to see, he stood a silent listener, with no share of the mind to offer in return. When they ended at last, the same composure seemed to look to view, no expectations and no disappointment, and was understood not a soul was moved to welcome him. He was a few moments waiting the first flush of greetings, the prayers of thankful for them turned to the Giver of all good, and then he went on shore.

Shall I never be missed? I mourned over that that was being borne to the passed from the pale of his house-stress, and made the best of it was to a hotel, to which he had been recommended to the captain of the ship. There and there he stayed, and the world before me. That could sell, but when I know that the world contains no love, no home, no happiness that I may home its claim. Yet, never mind! I'm not going to cry a baby, and cry for the moon, so dien to sentiment of every kind. I will drop me there in this bustling town here is the 'Eagle' right before me, and for the sum of one guinea I can purchase smiles without number from the worthy host."

So saying, he entered the Eagle, and ordered his dinner. But sad thoughts still seemed to haunt him, and when the repast had been cleared away he sat brooding over the fire, biting rather than smoking his cigar, and pulling the ends of his moustache with a frown. At last some memories of the past touched him too keenly. He woke from a fitful slumber.

"The fool I was when I was young," he thought to himself. "How well I remember the wild dreams that beset me company when I began the race! What wonderful things I was to accomplish then. How I would be rich, build me fortune! How I was going bent doing good, comforting the sad, relieving the poor, raising up the oppressed. However I accomplished all those schemes? How much better the world must be today because I have lived in it!"

His face grew still more sad as he paused.

I laugh at these things now, and yet it makes me unhappy. That would have been a beautiful life if I could out have lived it. I would rather have, the heart of those days that could plan the scheme than this I have now. Yet that could only ridicule it! But the young romance has gone. It haunts me no longer. My nature is as barren and worldly as—as even she could desire."

There it was you see. That irrepressible "she" who is sure to be at the bottom of every perplexity and trouble a man can know.

He tugged at his moustache fiercely, and flung his cigar in the grate.

"I can see the place now as if in a dream," he groaned. "Those hills and distant mountains; that calm sky, so darkly, deeply beautiful; and the sloop upon the hill side, and the cattle in the pasture chewing the cud lazily, and lying still to feel the warmth! And that other day, a week later, when the sky was heavy with rain, A chill, raw wind blew from those hills, the roadway was deep in dew, so was the grass, through all its fallen leaves. Yet she stood there, bright and gay, and restless and happy. She let the wind blow through her curls, she lifted her face to catch the fallen rain. Great heaven! how beautiful she was! And I have lost her—I shall never see her again!"

He groaned, and covered his face with his hands. Five minutes passed—then he started from his seat.

"This won't do," he ejaculated. "Byron says—

"Man, being reasonable must get drunk."

I will agree with him; but one can't well get drunk before the orthodox hours of 10 or 11 p. m. Then no one minds it. It is now 6 o'clock—four hours before I can carry out the Byronic theory. I know what I'll do. I'll go to town and see my uncle and my little pet, Rose."

He rang the bell for a time-table—found that an express train started for London at half past 8. At that time to a minute he was on his way to Mr. Cowley's house in Mecklenburg Square.

CHAPTER VII

"Tea is ready, if you please, Mrs. Magnum."

At that announcement made in a very clear yet pleasant voice, Mrs. Magnum started out of her nap, which she had been enjoying in the depths of her velvet chair, rubbed her eyes, and looked up at a young lady who stood on the hearth-rug, a few paces from her.

"Eh? What did you say, Miss Marjorie?" she asked, sharply.

"Tea is ready," replied Miss Marjorie, taking her seat at the head of the table as she spoke.

"Humph," muttered Mrs. Magnum, eyeing her with a sour look of dissatisfaction. "Well," you may pour me out a cup. But where is Mr. Magnum, and Julius, and dear Kate? It is really extraordinary, that when I am so punctual myself everyone belonging to me is so far fand should be there no more. Some were strong and happy, some were ill and sad, but for all alike a welcome was waiting the moment they should step the land.

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