

# **Neva's Three Lovers**

*A NOVEL*

BY  
MRS. HARRIET LEWIS

## **Table of Contents**

CHAPTER I. THE GAME WELL BEGUN.

CHAPTER II. A DECISIVE MOVE COMMANDED.

CHAPTER III. A FATEFUL MOVE DECIDED UPON.

CHAPTER IV. A DOOR OPENED TO WICKEDNESS.

CHAPTER V. SETTLING INTO HER PLACE.

CHAPTER VI. HER LADYSHIP'S ACCOMPLICE.

CHAPTER VII. NEVA'S FIRST LOVER.

CHAPTER VIII. THE SON OF THE HONORABLE CRAVEN BLACK.

CHAPTER IX. A KNOT SUMMARILY SEVERED.

CHAPTER X. NEVA AT HOME AGAIN.

CHAPTER XI. LADY WYNDE'S IDEA ACTED UPON.

CHAPTER XII. BLACK CONTINUES HIS CONSPIRACY.

CHAPTER XIII. HOW NEVA RECEIVED THE FORGERIES.

CHAPTER XIV. THE MEETING OF NEVA AND RUFUS.

CHAPTER XV. MR. BLACK GETS A NEW IDEA.

CHAPTER XVI. RUFUS ASKS THE MOMENTOUS QUESTION.

CHAPTER XVII. THE YOUNG WIFE'S DESOLATION.

CHAPTER XVIII. ONE OF NEVA'S LOVERS DISPOSED OF.

CHAPTER XIX. NEVA'S CHOICE FORESHADOWED.

CHAPTER XX. WAS IT A DREAM?

CHAPTER XXI. A SCENE IN INDIA.

CHAPTER XXII. BACK AS FROM THE DEAD.

CHAPTER XXIII. NEVA'S DECISION ABOUT RUFUS.

CHAPTER XXIV. LALLY FINDS A NEW HOME.

CHAPTER XXV. LALLY IN HER NEW SITUATION.

NEVA'S THREE LOVERS.

# CHAPTER I.

## THE GAME WELL BEGUN.

Sir Harold Wynde, Baronet, was standing upon the pier head at Brighton, looking idly seaward, and watching the play of the sunset rays on the waters, the tossing white-capped waves, and the white sails in the distance against the blue sky.

He was not yet fifty years of age, tall and handsome and stately, with fair complexion, fair hair, and keen blue eyes, which at times beamed with a warm and genial radiance that seemed to emanate from his soul. The rare nobility of that soul expressed itself in his features. His commanding intellect betrayed itself in his square, massive brows. His grand nature was patent in every look and smile. He was a widower with two children, the elder a son, who was a captain in a fine regiment in India, the younger a daughter still at boarding-school. He possessed a magnificent estate in Kent, a house in town, and a marine villa, and rejoiced in a clear income of seventy thousand pounds a year.

As might be expected from his rare personal and material advantages, he was a lion at Brighton, even though the season was at its height, and peers and peeresses abounded at that fashionable resort. Titled ladies—to use a well-worn phrase—“set their caps” for him; manœuvring mammas smiled upon him; portly papas with their “quivers full of daughters,” and with groaning purses, urged him to dine at their houses or hotels; and widows of every age looked sweetly at him, and thought how divine it would be to be chosen to reign as mistress over the baronet’s estate of Hawkhurst.

But Sir Harold went his ways quietly, seeming oblivious of the hopes and schemes of these manoeuvrers. He had had a good wife, and he had no intention of marrying again. And so, as he stood carelessly leaning against the railing on the pier head, under the gay awning, his thoughts were far away from the gaily dressed promenaders sauntering down the chain pier or pacing with slow steps to and fro behind him.

The sunset glow slowly faded. The long gray English twilight began to fall slowly upon promenaders, beach, chain pier, and waters. The music of the band swallowed up all other sounds, the murmur of waters, the hum of gay voices, the sweetness of laughter.

But suddenly, in one of the interludes of the music, and in the midst of Sir Harold's reverie, an incident occurred which was the beginning of a chain of events destined to change the whole future course of the baronet's life, and to exercise no slight degree of influence upon the lives of others.

Yet the incident was simple. A little pleasure-boat, occupied by two ladies and a boatman, had been sailing leisurely about the pier head for some time. The boatman, one of the ordinary pleasure boatmen who make a living at Brighton, as at other maritime resorts, by letting their crafts and services to chance customers, had been busy with his sail. One of the ladies, a hired companion apparently, sat at one side of the boat, with a parasol on her knee. The other lady, as evidently the employer, half reclined upon the plush cushions, and an Indian shawl of vivid scarlet lavishly embroidered with gold was thrown carelessly about her figure. One cheek of this lady rested upon her jewelled hand, and her eyes

were fixed with a singular intentness, a peculiar speculativeness, upon the tall and stalwart figure of Sir Harold Wynde.

There was a world of meaning in that long furtive gaze, and had the baronet been able to read and comprehend it, the tragical history we are about to narrate would never have happened. But he, wrapped in his own thoughts, saw neither the boat nor its occupants.

The little craft crept in quite near to the pier head—so near as to be but a few rods distant—when the boatman shifted his helm to go about and stand upon the other tack. The small vessel gave a lurch, the wind blowing freshly; the lady with the Indian shawl started up, with a shriek; there was an instant of terrible confusion; and then the sail-boat had capsized, and her late occupants were struggling in the waters.

In a moment the promenaders of the chain pier had thronged upon the pier head. Cries and ejaculations filled the air. No one could comprehend how the accident had occurred, but one man who had been watching the boat averred that the lady with the shawl had deliberately and purposely capsized it. *And this was the actual fact!*

Sir Harold Wynde was startled from the trance-like musings by the lady's shriek. He looked down upon the waters and beheld the result of the catastrophe. The boat's sail lay half under water. The boatman had seized the lady's companion and was clinging to the upturned boat. The companion had fainted in his arms, and he could not loosen his hold upon her unless he would have her drown before his eyes. The lady, at a little distance from her companions in peril, tangled in her mass of scarlet and gold drapery, her hat lost, her long hair trailing on the waves, seemed drowning.

Her peril was imminent. No other boats were near, although one or two were coming up swiftly from a distance.

The lady threw up her white arms with an anguished cry. Her glance sought the thronged pier head in wild appealing. Who, looking at her, would have dreamed that the disaster was part of a well-contrived plan—a trap to catch the unwary baronet?

As she had expected from his well-known chivalrous character, he fell into the trap. His keen eyes flashed a rapid glance over beach and waters. The lady was likely to drown before help could come from the speeding boats. Sir Harold pulled off his coat and made a dive into the sea. He was an expert swimmer, and reached the lady as she was sinking. He caught her in his arms and struck out for the boat. The lady became a dead weight, and when he reached the capsized craft her head lay back on his breast, her long wet tresses of hair coiled around him like Medusean locks, and her pale face was like the face of a dead woman.

Sir Harold clung to the side of the boat opposite that on which the boatman supported his burden. And thus he awaited the coming of the boats.

Among the eager thronging watchers on the pier head above was a tall, fair-faced man, with a long, waxed mustache, sinister eyes and a cynical smile. He alone of the throng seemed unmoved by the tragic incident.

“It was pretty well done,” he muttered, under his breath—“a little transparent, perhaps, and a trifle awkward as well, but pretty well done! The baronet fell into the trap too, exactly as was hoped. Your campaign opens finely, my beautiful Octavia. Let us see if



the result is to be what we desire. In short, will the baronet be as unsuspecting all the way through?”

Sir Harold certainly was unsuspecting at that moment. The helpless woman in his arms aroused into activity all the chivalry of his chivalric nature. He held her head above the creeping waves until the foremost boat had reached him. His burden was the first to be lifted into the rescuing craft; the lady's companion followed; the baronet and the boatman climbing into the boat last, in the order in which they are named.

The capsized boat was righted and its owner took possession of her. The rescuing craft transported the baronet and the two ladies to the beach. The lady companion had recovered her senses and self-possession, but the lady employer lay on the cushions pale and motionless.

On reaching the landing, a cab was found to be in waiting, having been summoned by some sympathizing spectator. The companion, uttering protestations of gratitude, entered the vehicle, and her mistress was assisted in after her. The former gathered her employer in her arms, crying out:

“She is dead! She is dead! I have lost my best friend—”

“Not so, madam,” said Sir Harold, in kindly sympathy. “The lady has only fainted, I think. To what place shall I tell the cabman to drive?”

“To the Albion Hotel. Oh, my poor, poor lady! To die so young! It is terrible!”

Sir Harold made some soothing response, but being chilled and wet, did not find it necessary to accompany to their hotel the

heroines of the adventure. He gave their address to the cabman, watched the cab as it rolled away, and then breaking loose from the crowd of friends who gathered around him with anxious interrogatories, he secured his coat and procured a cab for himself and proceeded to his own hotel.

It was not until he had had a comfortable bath, and was seated in dry attire in his private parlor, that Sir Harold remembered that he did not know the name of the lady he had served, or that he had not even seen her face distinctly.

“She is as ignorant of my name and identity,” he thought, “as I am of hers. If the incident could be kept out of the papers, I need never be troubled with the thanks of her husband, father, or brother.”

But the incident was not kept out of the papers. Sir Harold Wynde, being a lion, had to bear the penalty of popularity. The next morning’s paper, brought in to him as he sat at his solitary breakfast, contained a glowing account of the previous evening’s adventure, under the flaming head line of “Heroic Action by a Baronet,” with the sub-lines: “Sir Harold Wynde saves a lady’s life at the risk of his own. Chivalry not yet dead in our commonplace England.” And there followed a highly imaginative description of the lady’s adventure, her name being as yet unknown, and a warm eulogy upon Sir Harold’s bravery and presence of mind.

The baronet’s lip curled as he read impatiently the fulsome article. He had scarcely finished it when a waiter entered, bringing in upon a silver tray a large squarely enveloped letter. It was addressed to Sir Harold Wynde, was stamped with an unintelligible monogram, and sealed with a dainty device in pale green wax. As the baronet’s only lady correspondent was his daughter at school, and this

missive was clearly not from her, he experienced a slight surprise at its reception.

The waiter having departed, Sir Harold cut open the letter with his pocket knife, and glanced over its contents.

They were written upon the daintiest, thickest vellum paper unlined, and duly tinted and monogrammed, and were as follows:

ALBION HOTEL, Tuesday Morning.

“SIR HAROLD WYNDE: The lady who writes this letter is the lady whom you so gallantly rescued from a death by drowning last evening. I have read the accounts of your daring bravery in the morning’s papers, and hasten to offer my grateful thanks for your noble and gallant kindness to an utter stranger. Life has not been so sweet to me that I cling to it, but yet it is very horrible to go in one moment from the glow and heartiness of health and life down to the very gates of death. It was your hand that drew me back at the moment when those gates opened to admit me, and again I bless you—a thousand thousand times, I bless you. Alas, that I have to write to you myself. I have neither father, lover, nor husband, to rejoice in the life you have saved. I am a widow, and alone in the wide world. Will you not call upon me at my hotel and permit me to thank you far more effectively in person? I shall be waiting for your coming in my private parlor at eleven this morning.

“Gratefully yours,  
“OCTAVIA HATHAWAY.”

The baronet read the letter again and again. His generous soul was touched by its sorrowful tone.

“A widow and alone in the world!” he thought. “Poor woman! What sentence could be sadder than that? She is elderly, I am sure, and has lost all her children. I do not want to hear her expressions of gratitude, but if I can make the poor soul happier by calling on her I will go.”

Accordingly, at eleven o’clock that morning, attired in a gentleman’s unexceptionable morning dress, Sir Harold Wynde, having sent up his card, presented himself at the door of Mrs. Hathaway’s private parlor at the Albion Hotel, and knocked for admittance.

The door was opened to him by the lady’s companion, who greeted him with effusiveness, and begged him to be seated.

She was a tall, angular woman, with sharp features, whose characteristic expression was one of peculiar hardness and severity. Her lips were thin, and were usually compressed. Her eyes were a light gray, furtive and sly, like a cat’s eyes. Her pointed chin gave a treacherous cast to her countenance. Her complexion was of a pale, opaque gray; her hair, of a fawn color, was worn in three puffs on each side of her face, and her dress was of a tint to match her hair. Sir Harold conceived an instinctive aversion to her.

“Mrs. Hathaway?” he said politely, with interrogative accent.

“No, I am not Mrs. Hathaway,” was the reply, in a subdued voice, and the furtive eyes scanned the visitor’s face. “I am only Mrs.

Hathaway's companion—Mrs. Artress. Mrs. Hathaway has just received your card. She will be out directly.”

The words were scarcely spoken when the door of an inner room opened, and Mrs. Hathaway made her appearance.

Sir Harold stood up, bowing.

The lady was by no means the elderly, melancholy personage he had expected to see. She was about thirty years of age, and looked younger. She had a tall, statuesque figure, well-rounded and inclined to *embonpoint*. She carried her head with a certain stateliness. Her hair was dressed with the inevitable chignon, crimped waves, and long, floating curl, and despite the monstrosity of the fashion, it was decidedly and undeniably picturesque. Her face, with its clear brunette complexion, liquid black eyes, Grecian nose, low brows, and faultless mouth, was very handsome. There was a fascination in her manners that was felt by the baronet even before she had spoken.

She was not dressed in mourning, and it was probable, therefore, that her widowhood was not of recent beginning. She was clothed in an exquisitely embroidered morning dress of white, which trailed on the floor, and was relieved with ornaments of pale pink coral, and a broad coral-colored sash at her waist.

“*This* is Mrs. Hathaway, Sir Harold,” said the gray looking lady's companion.

The lady sprang forward after an impulsive fashion, and clasped the baronet's hands in both her own. Her black eyes flooded with tears. And then, in a broken voice, she thanked her preserver for his gallant conduct on the previous evening assuring him that her

gratitude would outlast her life. Her protestations and gratitude were not overdone, and unsuspecting Sir Harold accepted them as genuine, even while they embarrassed him.

He remained an hour, finding Mrs. Hathaway charming company and thoroughly fascinating. The companion sat apart, silent, busy with embroidery, a mere gray shadow; but her presence gave an easy unconstraint to both the baronet and the lady. When Sir Harold took his departure, sauntering down to the German Spa, he carried with him the abiding memory of Mrs. Hathaway's handsome brunette face and liquid black eyes, and thought himself that she was the most charming woman he had met for years.

From that day, throughout the season, the baronet was a frequent visitor at Mrs. Hathaway's private parlor. The gray companion was always at hand to play propriety, and the tongues of gossips, though busy, had no malevolence in them. Sir Harold had his own horses at Brighton, and placed one at Mrs. Hathaway's disposal. The widow accepted it, procured a bewitching costume from town, and had daily rides with the baronet. She also drove with him in his open, low carriage, and bowed right and left to her acquaintances upon such occasions with the gracious condescension of a princess. She sailed with him in his graceful yacht, upon day's excursions, her companion always accompanying, and rumor at length declared that the pair were engaged to be married.

Sir Harold heard the reports, and they set him thinking. The society of Mrs. Hathaway had become necessary to him. She understood his tastes, studying them with a flattery so delicate that he was pleased without understanding it. She read his favorite books, played his favorite music, and displayed talents of no mean order. She was fitted to adorn any position, however high, and Sir Harold

thought with a pleasant thrill at his heart, how royally she would reign over his beautiful home.

In short, questioning his own heart, he found that he had worshiped his dead wife, who would be to him always young, as when he had buried her—but with the passion of later manhood, an exacting, jealous yearning affection, which gives all and demands all. With his children far from him, his life had been lonely, and he had known many desolate hours, when he would have given half his wealth for sympathy and love.

“I shall find both in Octavia,” he thought, his noble face brightening. “I shall not wrong my children in marrying her. My son will be my heir. My daughter’s fortune will not be imperilled by my second marriage. Neva is sixteen, and in two years more will come home. How can I do better for her than to give her a beautiful mother, young enough to win her confidence, old enough to be her guide? Octavia would love my girl, and would be her best chaperon in society, to which Neva must be by and by introduced. I should find in Octavia then a mother for my daughter, and a gentle loving wife and companion for myself. But will she accept me?”

He put the question to the test that very evening. He found the handsome widow alone in her parlor, the gray companion being for once absent, and he told her his love with a tremulous ardor and passion that it would have been the glory of a good woman to have evoked from a nature so grand as Sir Harold’s.

The fascinating widow blushed and smiled assent, and her black-tressed head drooped to his shoulder, and Sir Harold clasped her in his arms as his betrothed wife.

With a lover's impetuosity he begged her to marry him at an early day. She hesitated coyly, as if for months she had not been striving and praying for this hour, and then was won to consent to marry him a month thence.

"I am alone in the world, and have no one to consult," she sighed. "I have an old aunt, a perfect miser, who lives in Bloomsbury Square, in London. She will permit me to be married from her house, as I was before. The marriage will have to be very quiet, for she is averse to display and expense. However, what she saves will come to me some day, so I need not complain. I shall want to keep Artress with me, Sir Harold. I can see that you don't like her, but she has been a faithful friend to me in all my troubles, and I cannot abandon her when prosperity smiles so splendidly upon me. I may keep her, may I not?"

Thus appealed to, Sir Harold smothered his dislike of the gray companion, and consented that she should become an inmate of his house.

Mrs. Hathaway proceeded to explain the causes of her friendlessness. She was an orphan, and had early married the Honorable Charles Hathaway, the younger son of a Viscount, who had died five years before. The Honorable Charles had been a dissipated spendthrift, and had left his wife the meagre income of some three hundred pounds a year. Her elegant clothing was, for the most part, relics of better days. As to the expensive style in which she lived, keeping a companion and maid, no one knew, save herself and one other, how she managed to support it. Her name and reputation were unblemished, and the most censorious tongue had nothing to say against her.



And yet she was none the less an unscrupulous, unprincipled adventuress.

This was the woman, the noble, gallant baronet proposed to take to his bosom as his wife, to endow with his name and wealth, to make the mother and guide of his pure young daughter. Would the sacrifice of the generous, unsuspected lover be permitted?

It *was* permitted. A month later their modest bridal train swept beneath the portals of St. George's Church, Hanover Square. The bride, radiant in pearl-colored moire, with point lace overdress, wore a magnificent parure of diamonds, presented to her by Sir Harold. The baronet looked the picture of happiness. The miserly aunt of Mrs. Hathaway, a skinny old lady in a low-necked and short-sleeved dress of pink silk, that, by its unsuitability, made her seem absolutely hideous, attended by a male friend, who gave away the bride, was prominent among the group that surrounded the altar.

Sir Harold's son and heir was in India, and his daughter had not been summoned from her boarding-school in Paris. The baronet's tender father soul yearned for his daughter's presence at his second marriage; but Lady Wynde had urged that Neva's studies should not be interrupted, and had begged, as a personal favor, that her meeting with her young step-daughter might be delayed until her ladyship had become used to her new position. She professed to be timid and shrinking in regard to the meeting with Neva, and Sir Harold, in his passionate love for Octavia, put aside his own wishes, yielding to her request. But he had written to his daughter, announcing his intended second marriage, and had received in reply a tender, loving letter full of earnest prayers for his happiness,

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