

DOOR DOCUMENT

KATE VALLIANT.

With -- the -- Circus!

(Continued.)

During the long hours of that dreadful day, poor harmless Lucy's state continued precarious. Towards the end of it she suddenly sank, and died from the influence of some subtle poison which could not be characterized yet! And all the while, in addition to the reasonable and natural and accountable horror Mr. Valliant felt at his wife's quickly increasing dangerous illness, and then sudden death, he had the soul-shaking, crushing, maddening knowledge that he was suspected.

Not that suspicion was openly directed against him until after she died. But those words of her brother in which he had asked the cruel question, "What had she substituted for the draught he had thrown out of the window?" rang in his ears all day.

He knew that he had not given her another good, bad or indifferent—in his head. But how was he to impress this knowledge upon others. He and he only had been in the bed-room and dressing room with her, from the time he went upstairs and found her sleeping, till that awful hour when her struggles and convulsions and inarticulate cries had roused him. And a glass had been found empty by the side of her bed the slight moisture around which was even now being analyzed by his brother-in-law.

"What would it be found to contain? What could it be found to contain that could criminate him, an innocent man and stigmatize him in the eyes of all who heard of it as a cowardly murderer? These latter were his thoughts when he was told of her death first. Then the horror grew! Before he had time to fear it, or rather before he had time to shape his fear and contemplate it, he was arrested on the charge of having poisoned his wife arrested on the charge of man slaying.

Then the wretched man remembers that the day before, when poor Lucy had been alive and only a little invalided, he had begged that his daughter Kate might be sent to him the following day to help to nurse Lucy. The day had arrived, and was crammed to its utmost capacity with danger, misery degradation and terror; but no daughter had come to stand by his side, and mutely testify that she did not believe him to be guilty of this foul thing, of which he was accused.

He had been taken away and lodged at the police station for the night, then to await the result of the inquest on the morrow. Before the news of Mrs. Valliant's death reached Blanton, a few lines from poor harassed Dick to Nina Gover put her in possession of the leading facts of the case, and a line or two at the end of the note showed Nina that Dick, however things might go, would be stung as she had always felt he would be, however he were tried.

"Should the evidence be as damning as we fear it will be, help me to spare my poor Kate as much as we can. My duty in life clearly cut before me. I do take her away from all that, and remind her of this ghastly episode, and remember she can save of it."

"For having written those words of remorse, no man shall ever put you out of my heart," Nina thought, glancing in him and in her love for him, unappreciated though it always had been, and would be. Then, though she could not obliterate the recollection of the way Kate had wavered towards Charlie Glanville that very morning, she pledged herself to herself, at least, to do all that woman could do to guard, and save and spare Kate against insidious attacks from malice, scandal and love, and—herself.

"Poor papa! I'll go to him at once," Kate declared, when they told her of Mrs. Valliant's death. "He'll want me, I'm sure. He'll want one to be kind to him, kinder than servants can be. I may go, Mrs. Gover, may I not? Not to-night, my dear girl, not to-night. Wait till Mr. Dacres comes and fetches you to your father, Mrs. Gover said persuasively. But Kate pleaded the more vehemently, as soon as this slight opposition was made to her project.

Then Nina reasoned with her. "It must be kind and comforting at the cottage, Kate. Your poor father will need you more to-morrow than he does to-night." "I hope Dick and my father will stay together, and comfort each other to-night," Kate said thoughtfully. "Dick is so good. I should like to be with him now. He will grieve for poor Lucy very much. He is very fond of his sister; but his grief will be so mainly. Shall I go to-morrow morning, the very first thing? Do you promise that, Mrs. Gover?"

"Yes, Mrs. Gover promised that the first thing in the morning she would herself drive Kate in to see Miss Dacres and Dick."

"Why don't you say to see my father too?" Kate objected, and they had not the heart to tell her that if she should be allowed to see her father at all, it would be at a police station.

"Let her have one night of comparative peace and happiness, poor child!" Gaiety or not, Gaiety, as her father may be, the shame of such an accusation having been brought against her father, will put on the light of Kate's life, Mrs. Gover said to Nina, but Nina thought differently.

"No woman's life can be dark who has Dr. Dacres' love, mother, and he'll never take that from Kate."

"No, your father from him," Mrs. Gover thought despondently, for it was the one cloud on her horizon, that her beautiful daughter should be so soundly set against glorifying any other man's life, as Dr. Dacres had not wanted her to glorify his.

"Don't you think this, if it's brought home to Mrs. Valliant, will make a difference to Dr. Dacres about Kate?"

"I won't make him love her more—it can't do that, nothing can—but it will

make him more tender, if that's possible, to her, and he will be more fearful of her being hurt by other people."

"I suppose you know him better than I do, Nina, but your father and I said to each other directly we heard it, that it might be the means of raising the poor child's prospects with both these men who want to marry her, in fact, I should think him perfectly justified in breaking with Kate, if her father is convinced of this awful crime."

"I know him well—though to know that after all, Kate will be dearer to him than ever. He couldn't change for an explicit out-conviction from—away from a girl he loves as he loves her."

"Then he must be very noble."

"But he is, mother, don't you know that yet? Could I hold the love I had for him to be such a sacred thing that another shall never follow it if he were not?"

"You still nurse the feeling—the mistaken feeling, my poor child!" Mrs. Gover said, sadly and reproachfully.

"I don't nurse it, but God keeps it alive," Nina said quietly. "We won't speak of it any more, mother, I only spoke of it now that you might understand how it is I can be so sure of him—so certain that he will stand firm as a rock by Kate now."

"We had better leave the task of telling her the worst to him, I think," Mrs. Gover said wearily.

"No, I'll spare him that agony," Nina declared. "I've been thinking it over, and I've come to the conclusion that the one thing I can do for her now is to spare him the pain of telling her. When she has heard it from me she shall comfort her."

"Dear Miss Dacres will never like the match now, however things go," Mrs. Gover remarked, and Nina said:

"If this trouble makes Kate turn to him entirely, he will be able to bear disapproval from other people."

"But supposing she has turned to the other man? She has written to him. Who knows?"

"She wouldn't have spoken of Dick if she had gone back to the other one. You shall suggest any other possibility or hindrance, mother dear. I have borne for myself what I couldn't bear for Dick and Kate."

The next was a wild day for them all—a day full of stormy feeling, of sorrow, of dismal forebodings, and (to Kate's) of unspeakable horror.

How Nina Gover executed her self-imposed task, and made Kate acquainted with the sickening truth, that her father had been arrested in a charge of being the murderer of his unfortunate wife, need not be told here. All that need be said is that Nina told the tale briefly, sensibly, mercifully, and Kate listened to it motionlessly and speechlessly.

This was while the cobs were being wrecked up, just before they were brought round.

With an amount of nerve and self-control that was heroic in the eyes of Mrs. Gover and Nina, Kate put on her hat and cloak. Then she pressed her hands tightly over her face for a few moments, and still in silence walked to the door.

"Kate, dear, the cobs are round. Can you start, or (with a sudden sympathetic thought of the pain it would be to Kate to drive through the town in an open carriage), or would you rather leave the 'rough,' as mamma suggested?"

"No, no!" Kate answered sharply, under the influence of the new pain. "People could think I believed that my father had done this, and that I was ashamed. I'm really."

She read downstairs, and was in the pony-carriage in a moment, realizing agonizingly that the pitying glance the room was bestowing upon her, was only the forerunner of hundreds that would be showered upon her presently. And Kate was proud and hated pity.

This was the first result of her resolve to conquer herself—to put consideration for herself out of court altogether. In her endeavor to show that she did not think her father guilty, she exposed herself to the pity of the crowd.

So Nina with her head in the air, with her heart strung up to the utmost tension in its determination, to back up Kate to the utmost, drove rapidly but steadily through the snow streets along which she had once driven to help and rescue the injured circus-rider.

As for Kate, she stood—rather sat—on the steps and nursing, and half-suppressed interjections that pressed her on her way, pallidly.

That they had contemplated him already before he had been tried, that they were less eager for his innocence to be proved and his acquittal guaranteed than for some further revelation of a startling character, was patent to his daughter, as she was driven through the thronged street, white with injured faces. That their pity for her was dashed with contempt for her pusillanimity in going near him now, was also patent to her. And as the tone of the multitude made itself more manifest against him, so did her loyalty and love towards him grow.

There was a little difficulty it seemed at first about finding a seat for him. But Mr. Gover's address as a magistrate, and an appeal from Dick (of which she was not yet made aware) finally opened the doors to her, and Kate at last stood in the presence of all that was real in her father.

"Of all that was real! For with the loss of his liberty, and the falling of the shadow of suspicion of a ghastly crime upon him, all that was gritty and mercenary, unclean and ridiculously juvenile and fantastic, had been seen off like a plague-infected garment. Mr. Valliant, stripped of all his showy frotnities, humbled, broken, contrite, yet without neither abject nor guilty, was a father to whom Kate could turn, and did turn, without fear or hesitation."

"Dear father," she began at once as she went in. "Aren't you glad I'm here? I am?"

"Kate, my daughter!"

"Yes, your real daughter at last," she cried, laughing a little hysterically. "I thought it wouldn't matter so much what people said if you and I were together now. You won't mind the others while you have me, will you, father? and I can't care for anything that doesn't hurt you. Do I comfort you?—let me tell you, I'm not a bit better."

"The worst will be waiting," he resolved, "and if once I can see her, it won't be the worst—she'll check that doctor fellow when I tell her how I've loved her through it all!"

As soon as he had made up his mind to go to all he was prompt and decided enough. He started by a train that enabled him to catch a train on the Great Eastern, and he was traveling all night he reached Blanton on the day after Mrs. Valliant's death—the morning on which poor Kate visited her father at Dacres' in his prison, and was causing a fitting tribute to his style and bearing.

Ordering breakfast at once, he sat down to write a note to Kate, and in the meantime he had been thinking that he would call at Blanton and try to blot out from her mind the ugly material that had passed between their parting and what he prayed might be a happy meeting. Having sent off this letter to Blanton by a messenger, he turned his attention to the breakfast spread before him on a round table in the corner of the coffee-room, and the remarks that fell from the lips of the men who came in and out, and chatted with the waiter, and one another.

Hearing a burly farmer say to a little girl around him that "it was the ugliest looking case he'd heard of since that poor young Bravo died," Charlie Glanville scented murder, and pricked up his ears.

"To my mind it falls harder on the doctor than on anyone else. He was going to marry the daughter, you know, but he'll be stuck to Miss Valliant through this," the first speaker said vehemently; and then a murmur rose that the corner had come, and the group of men, to whose disjointed conversation Charlie Glanville had been listening with aching ears, broke up and dispersed hurriedly.

"Had anything unusual happened in the town?" Charlie asked nervously as the waiter stammered near enough to his table to flick a fly off with the serviette he was upon his arms and head of a minute.

"Unusual sir, most unusual sir; thought that you knew about it sir, and had come upon the business probably sir, seeing you are a stranger. Quite an unprecedented event in Blanton—a lady known and respected throughout the neighborhood murdered by her own husband, a gentleman who had won golden opinions since he came among us sir. Miss Valliant's father, the father of the young lady who is—was, that is to be married to Dr. Dacres."

"Good heavens! Kate's father?" Charlie dropped his knife and fork, and let his hands fall prone to his knees.

His exclamation was not intended for the waiter or for anyone; it was simply forced out of his mouth, by the horror in his mind.

To be continued.

impatient; trust me, she won't punish you for that; if you loiter and hesitate, the other man, being on the spot, may persuade her to marry him without further delay. If you want her, take my advice, and go after her to-day."

"There's no doubt my wanting her, but I don't want to do anything that would look rough."

"Your going after her might look masterful, and women like a man the better for being that—but they're married! but it wouldn't look rough. Now go—I won't have you waste your time here."

Her impatience to get rid of him was not so much to the desire she had that he should straightway secure Kate as it was to the fact that he was in the way of the preparations that were being made for her reception at luncheon of the house-party from Lord Marlepit's. A Royal and a Serene Highness (both young) were included in this party. But one of them, youthful as he was, would soon be omnipotent in fashion's gay world, and Blanche longed for the hint, Mrs. Godfrey Wyndham about Kate, to the effect that she had beautiful presence was desired at court.

One who had the gracious power of giving this hint, was coming with the rest of Lord Marlepit's guests; therefore it is not surprising that Blanche graciously sped Charlie Glanville on his way to seek Kate.

When he got himself away from her presence he felt that he had no anchorage ground. While he could sit and talk to Mrs. Godfrey Wyndham about Kate, he had a grateful sense of security, and while her sanguine words soothed him, he felt as if he were not losing time, and running the risk of losing Kate.

But as soon as he left Mrs. Godfrey, and was cast upon himself, he felt like a drifting vessel. There was no one to whom he could go and speak about her, and his hopes and fears concerning her. His own family laughed at him, and they might as well have been laughing at him for her, for her, and was much to be pitied. He had had a rough sea of security, and while her sanguine words soothed him, he felt as if he were not losing time, and running the risk of losing Kate.

As soon as he had made up his mind to go to all he was prompt and decided enough. He started by a train that enabled him to catch a train on the Great Eastern, and he was traveling all night he reached Blanton on the day after Mrs. Valliant's death—the morning on which poor Kate visited her father at Dacres' in his prison, and was causing a fitting tribute to his style and bearing.

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