

"My boys," said Lady de Salis distinctly. "They are coming, mother—oh, mother, they are coming!" cried Cynthia wildly.

"And Jane Appuldurcombe," said Lady de Salis more faintly; "send for her." She lay, taking no notice after that, and seemed lapsing into unconsciousness, but when Lady Appuldurcombe came in she opened her eyes and said:

"Jane, dear old friend, take care of Cynthia. Ronny will—not—mind—Her eyes closed, and by a greater effort she said, "Lesley."

Lady Appuldurcombe stooped down and kissed the waxlike face that she had known from childhood, and solemnly she said:

"I promise, Mary. I will take care of Cynthia as if she were my own."

Lady de Salis smiled. Suddenly a bright light broke over her face, and for the last time her eyes opened wide and fixed themselves on the door. "The boys!" she said, and as two of them entered (the third was too late) she stretched out her arms toward them, and as they came close to her kissed their faces and drew their heads lovingly down to her breast.

Then silence, and in that warm haven where as little children their heads had cuddled so they rested now, the bitter tears of strong men falling on her neck. She was not fat or old or ridiculous to them. She was now and always—mother.

#### CHAPTER XXI.

Ronny had left before Lady Appuldurcombe was summoned to Grosvenor place, consequently knew nothing of what went forward there, and with Yelverton ran down to Dover and duly crossed to France that night.

Neither of the men was in particularly good spirits, Ronny being anxious on his mother's account and Yelverton on Lesley's, for he thought he understood that young woman better than Ronny did and infinitely better than she did herself.

And in Yelverton's opinion the whole thing was a blunder from beginning to end, and all the exigencies of the case would have been met by a sound horse-whipping in public of Dashwood, as it was now impossible to keep Miss Malincourt's name out of the affair.

The man who in the park had witnessed the whole affair and refused to be Dashwood's second had talked, the other men who had also declined to back up a man of Dashwood's character against a man of Kilmurray's had talked, and no earthly good could come of this encounter with a notoriously successful duelist, even if Ronny winged his man—which seemed unlikely.

Dashwood had found his second at last, a man of life not more notoriously evil than his own, but of lower social status, and Yelverton's spirit kicked at the whole business, although this had not hindered his carrying out all arrangements with great skill and secrecy, so that when they had dined and were about to separate for the night, there was little more to do than to receive Ronny's final instructions in case the worst happened.

"This is for my mother," said Ronny, giving Yelverton a letter, "and this"—he paused and colored, for love letters had not been in his line—"for Miss Malincourt."

Yelverton took both letters and put them away in his breast pocket.

"And Miss Coquette?" he said. "You wish her sent down to your cousin?"

Ronny started.

"Of course," he said. "What a brute I was to forget it! And if"—he paused, "perhaps in that case you'll take the mare down yourself, Yelverton, and—tell her. My mother will be hard upon her—poor mother, poor little girl! She didn't want to come to town—and none of this is her fault. Because she was true to herself, because she was not facile as the other women are, she made a deadly enemy of that reptile."

Yelverton nodded. He felt about as bad as a man can feel, and without the relief of expression, but now he blurted out:

"And if I had the remotest chance of winning such a girl as Miss Malincourt, I'd take jolly good care of my life—not throw it away as you are doing now."

"It's odd," said Ronny—"and though I've seen lots of fighting, I've never been before—but I don't feel as if I were destined to die by that scoundrel's hand somehow. My luck has brought me through a good bit of it."

"Pluck, you mean," said Yelverton, growling, "but pluck and dash and simply never knowing when you are beaten won't help you much here. The man is a dead shot, and you have had next to no pistol practice—and remember that this is Dashwood's last chance. His final hold as a bully in society is lost if you come successfully out of the encounter."

"And now to bed," said Ronny cheerily, and with as little personal concern as if he looked on at a drama that did not in the least concern him.

"And to think," said Yelverton when he turned in, "that the man who almost single handed kept a savage army at bay, who has come through such hairbreadth scrapes, has perhaps come home to be potted by a blackguard like Dashwood!"

If, when Lesley woke very early that morning, she had been a clairvoyant, she would have seen in one of those exquisite green dells to be found in the Bois de Boulogne two men facing each other, resolute eyed, composed, lost to all thought and emotion, and intent save one—that of taking each other's lives.

As Yelverton let the handkerchief fall two shots rang out simultaneously, and Ronny stood unharmed, while Dashwood with a wild beast cry, and putting one hand to his face, fell to the ground, his jaw shattered and partly blown away.

"Gentlemen," said Yelverton, hurrying forward, "honour is satisfied, and the

the affair is at an end." Then, as the doctor bent over Dashwood, and Ronny turned aside, the wounded man, lifting himself on his elbow and swift as lightning, took aim and fired, the bullet lodging in Ronny's back.

Sheer on his face fell Ronny, the hero, and none by the cañon of a man who had always hated him for his bravery, for his clean life, for the hundred and one things that go to make up the man of character, honored by all, as that absence of them makes such pests to society as Graham Dashwood.

With a cry of horror all rushed to raise Kilmurray, and Dashwood, knowing that the game was up, repudiated by his friends, pursued by creditors, with his last belonging, the reckless beauty that had distinguished him, irretrievably ruined, placed the nozzle of the pistol against his breast and fired.

So that it was one dead and one apparently dying man that presently formed a part of a melancholy cavalcade back to the Hotel Bristol, while Yelverton racked his brains as to how he should let the two poor women for whom he held those two yet undelivered packets know what had happened.

#### CHAPTER XXII.

Lady Appuldurcombe, driving home that Tuesday about noon from Grosvenor place, thought with a sigh of relief and gladness that Ronny would be home tomorrow, her own Ronny, who could not have cared so much for Lesley after all or he would have gone after her instead of devoting himself to horses, but then he had a stern way of nipping any feeling of that sort in the bud, so determined was he that no woman's influence should come seriously into his life.

But what would he say when he saw Cynthia installed in Park lane? For when the funeral was over, and all arrangements made, Lady Appuldurcombe had begged the girl to come to her for as long as she liked.

And at that very moment, almost within earshot, the newsboys were shouting out in Piccadilly:

"Duel in 'high life'—baronet knight killed, Major Kilmurray shot in the back!" And men crowded to the club windows and rushed out bareheaded to buy papers, doubting the evidence of their ears—Ronny, Ronny Kilmurray, who had never run away in his life, shot in the back? And Dashwood, the bully and fire eater—dead.

"What will his mother say?" inquired Ouslow blankly, when he and Ralph Seton had read the brief paragraph together. "Or the lovely Malincourt," said Seton, "since she is at the bottom of the whole imbroglio? I should never have thought it to look at her—she's just one of those dear little girls—for all she is so tall—that you feel wouldn't hurt a fly, yet if there is a broken hearted woman in town today that woman is Lady Appuldurcombe, and all the gentle Malincourt's doing!"

"She is awfully cut up at her old friend Lady de Salis' death," said Ouslow. "Some one ought to go and tell her, or she may hear some of those beggars shouting it in the streets. I've a great mind." He paused, for his courage failed him. It wants something more than mere pluck with which to face a mother who loved her son as Ronny loved him with the news that but yesterday her darling boy miserably dying. And then there was Cynthia—how would she take it? Between the two Ouslow did nothing, only propped restlessly up and down between the two stricken homes, and by eating no luncheon in some vague way felt he was partly helping them to bear it.

Charville's dark, clean shaved, handsome face was unwontedly pale when he opened the door to his mistress and at luncheon sent both his scared looking subordinates out of the room and waited entirely on his mistress.

He even excused his office by pressing champagne on his mistress and seemed above all things anxious that she

should make a good luncheon, but the face he turned to the sideboard was heavy with grief, and he looked like a man who has a hard task before him from which he dares not flinch.

Lady Appuldurcombe spoke to him from time to time, chiefly of Ronny and of little things to be done for his comfort when he returned, and Charville controlled himself to answer, though the words almost choked him.

When luncheon was over, he opened the door and silently beckoned to some one who was there; then, leaving the door ajar, came behind his mistress' chair and said gravely:

"My lady, there is bad news."

For a moment she sat as if turned to stone. Then she rose up, and seizing him by the arm shook him violently.

"It is Mr. Ronny!" she said in one long moan, and she tore out of the man's hand the orange envelope which it contained:

Ronny wounded in duel, we fear fatally. Come at once.

YELVERTON, Hotel Bristol, Paris.

In one of those awful moments when the world reels and we feel, know, realize and endure a stupendous calamity, coming out on the other side with the mangle of life broken, Lady Appuldurcombe's instinct pointed straight to Lesley, and with wild lips that shrieked out a bitter curse upon her she fell like one smitten with palsy to the ground.

When she sat up, she found her face covered with tears, and she

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"Oh, my lady, my lady!" cried her old housekeeper, trying to raise her up. "Mr. Ronny is not dead. While there's life there's hope." And she wiped the deathly brow and helped Charville to lay their mistress on the sofa, where she rested scarcely a moment, with feverish energy bidding them call the carriage and pack her traveling bag at once, for she must set out that very moment to her boy.

In ten minutes all was ready, and with Charville on the box and her maid beside her Lady Appuldurcombe had started, at the last moment beckoning the housekeeper to approach her.

"Go and tell Miss Cynthia," she said. "Tell her gently. She—she loved him—and if she will come here, bring her and take care of her. I—I do not know when I may return. If—if Mr. Ronny is dead!"

She pulled up the window sharply and made a sign that the coachman was to drive on.

"And if Mr. Ronny is dead," said Mrs. Crockett, looking through her tears at the carriage, "I will never see my lady alive again."

But in the hot Miss Cynthia, she shivered, for the mother's curse on Lesley still thrilled horribly in her ears, for as all men know:

Beneath . . . the mother's curse No child could ever thrive. A mother is a mother still, The holiest thing alive.

And poor Miss Lesley had meant no harm. She was full of pranks and play, but her heart was of gold, as all those about her knew, and if the gentlemen got quarreling about her how was the fault hers?

"And there's Miss Cynthia, too," the housekeeper added, as with something like a groan she turned and reentered the white walled, flower embowered house that already seemed to have taken to itself an air of calamity.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Cynthia sat beside her unburied dead, a great hush and silence all about her and in her spirit peace and something of that awe that is more than peace and passeth human understanding.

For she saw not Ronny dead or suffering, but only the man she had always loved and who would never belong to any woman now; therefore was he hers by divine right of love, and her claim upon him was not to be gainsaid. She would never know the anguish of seeing Lesley warm herself by the heart blaze that none other had been able to kindle, and the memory of him would be hers, and his grave would be hers, and the vividness of her memory of him when all else had forgotten should she establish her right to meet him when she, too, would cross the bar.

And the calm happiness of the face from which she presently drew the linen and stood looking down on seemed to promise an equal peace to Ronny and death seemed a friend and comforter to the girl as she kissed her mother's little dumpy, folded hands, and still shrouded in that curious calm, sat there hour after hour alone.

And that same morning Lesley, fleeing from her to the house, was met by a messenger, bringing a verbal request that she would go over to Lady Cranston at once, if possible, in the dearest waiting, and fearing fresh illness the girl ran up to her room for a hat, to be met by Nadege, who rushed at her with all the insane joy of her class at being the first to communicate evil tidings.

"Oh, miss," she said. "Poor Mr. Ronny! I expect he's dead by now!" Lesley stopped as one pierced in full flight by the arrow, as cold, as dead as in that moment she saw Ronny lying before her.

"Oh, miss," cried the fool, "don't take on so! It's only his spine, not his heart, and p'raps he'll live as a cripple many a day yet!"

Ronny a cripple—Ronny, who rejoiced in his every muscle and put them to such splendid use! And if he were a dying man, or a cripple, might not she go to him? Aye, but he was Cynthia's dying man, her cripple, what Lesley had given, that she might not take back.

How did you hear it?" she said hesely. "It was an accident?"

"A duel, miss; it's all in the papers," said the girl glibly, an eager mouthpiece of calamity in dusty cotton and cambric, "with Sir Graham Dashwood. They say it's about a lady, and the baronet's dead, and Mr. Ronny?"

"Bring me the paper," said Lesley, who had not moved an inch from where she had stood when struck and was standing there still when the pretty sonnet came in with a whirl of lilac skirts.

Lesley read the paragraph through, then vaguely put her hand to her head. She wanted something, she did not know what, and then she remembered it was her hat, and that she must get to Lady Cranston. . . . Lady Cranston. . . . She got it at last and walked down stairs and out to the cart quite steadily.

She saw nothing during the short drive—nothing but Ronny's face, with the look that she had—passed by. She would never see it there again. . . . And she might have answered it when he was going, on her account, to his death, . . . for that the two men had fought on her account she was morally certain.

And then Lady Appuldurcombe, brought to the bar of God and punished for her idolatry of her boy, came before her, torn with anguish, and darkened with hatred for the cuckoo in the nest who had brought about the whole tragedy.

When she got to Lady Cranston's side, for while the two women looked into each other's faces without speaking, for no love could assuage, no tenderness soften the stony calm in which Lesley was enwrapped.

Cranston came and told me. He got letters from town. And then there were the papers, which I had not seen.

But men have been shot in the back and recovered, dearest."

"Oh!" cried Lesley, flinging out her arms wide. "What did I do, what did I do? I gave her Ronny whole and willful, and just a man. He can't be hers now he is dying, or dead! Would it be dishonourable—mean—if I went to him now? If I just said to him, living or dead, 'I love you, Ronny, I love you?'"

The passion, the truth, the loveliness of pure love rang out in her voice and spoke in every fiber of her quivering body, and Lady Cranston said to herself that let any other woman love Ronny as she would she could never touch Lesley.

"You can't go to him, dear," said Lady Cranston gently, "and even if you could his mother!"—She paused, and Lesley's imagination filled up the gap.

"Why should they fight about me?" cried Lesley, more lovely than ever in the intense pallor that made startlingly blue her great eyes. "I had done nothing to the man—except to refuse to know him."

"Which was enough," said Lady Cranston, "and of course he took his revenge. It is always the men we won't allow to make love to us who take our characters away. The complaisant woman has in time of trouble armed men who start up from every bush."

"They fought on Tuesday," said Lesley, throwing her mind back to the events of the few preceding days, "so he must have crossed on Monday—the day I ran away from Ark lane—and he must have known all about it on Sunday when he—he!"

She stopped abruptly and pushed the dark locks from her brow.

"I wonder if Cynthia has gone?" she said. "We need not have made such a bargain, need we?" she added, laughing queerly, "and, as you said, we reckoned without the man—without the man! Oh, if he is dead, I will plant flowers over him—they shall be in a pattern, and the words shall be:

"Many a heart no longer here, As I will too too soon be dead. Yet, O Love, 'tis thou dost call."

She staggered and threw up her hands, falling in a heap by the couch, and for once nature was merciful and gave her oblivion.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

HER CHECK WAS A CINDER

There Was Enough Left for Identification, and She Got Her Money.

One of the greatest curiosities in the check line has just come to light in this city, says a San Francisco paper. A lady brought it to the Bank of California to be cashed. It was in a paper box and had to be handled very carefully, for it was in two pieces and both were burnt to a crisp.

There was not a decipherable word on either piece. The lady said the bits of crisp paper represented a check for \$125 which she had received in a letter. The check, she said, was drawn by the national bank of D. O. Mills of Sacramento. She had removed the letter from the envelope and thrown the envelope on some live coals in the grate. Upon reading the letter she found a reference to an enclosure of check for the sum named, and turned to the fire in the grate with sore disappointment. The fire had done its work. The crisp paper lay on the coals. She carefully removed the same, placed it in a box, and hurried to the Bank of California to get the money before the pieces were further crumbled.

After listening to the story the officers of the bank made a careful examination of the burnt paper, and by the aid of powerful glasses they were able to make out portions of words from the pen impressions made on the paper. There were enough of these left to show that "Ella" had been written, and part of the word "hundred" was also made out, with two or three letters of the name of the bank. These discoveries corresponded with the story of the lady, and the bank officers then communicated the circumstances to the national bank of D. O. Mills & Co. of Sacramento, and asked for a duplicate check in behalf of the lady. The circumstance disproved the charge all the more curiosity of women. Had there been more curiosity about the enclosure of the envelope the trouble would have been avoided. The practical application of the story is to be careful that what you throw into the fire has no further value for you.

An Exception in Favor of Rats.

They are very literal in Japan. Not long ago a bridge was built which was so slight that a notice was put up, "No animals allowed to cross." But it was found impossible to keep the rats off it, and, in order to have a rule which could be enforced, the notice was taken down, and "No large animals allowed to cross" was put up in its place.

But men have been shot in the back and recovered, dearest."

"Oh!" cried Lesley, flinging out her arms wide. "What did I do, what did I do? I gave her Ronny whole and willful, and just a man. He can't be hers now he is dying, or dead! Would it be dishonourable—mean—if I went to him now? If I just said to him, living or dead, 'I love you, Ronny, I love you?'"

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"Why should they fight about me?" cried Lesley, more lovely than ever in the intense pallor that made startlingly blue her great eyes. "I had done nothing to the man—except to refuse to know him."

"Which was enough," said Lady Cranston, "and of course he took his revenge. It is always the men we won't allow to make love to us who take our characters away. The complaisant woman has in time of trouble armed men who start up from every bush."

"They fought on Tuesday," said Lesley, throwing her mind back to the events of the few preceding days, "so he must have crossed on Monday—the day I ran away from Ark lane—and he must have known all about it on Sunday when he—he!"

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