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For Her Sake;

—OR—

The Murder in Furness Wood.

CHAPTER LIII.

Lady Clanronald fell quickly into her new place as guest where she had once been mistress. There were no collisions now between Lady Cameron and herself. Every one was delighted to see her, and the servants could not show her sufficient respect and homage. She was still the young mistress to them. Hughes, the gardener, with whom she had so often quarrelled, would have sacrificed his finest flowers to bring a smile to her face; Mrs. Seldon, the housekeeper, could not show her sufficient attention; the old butler never ceased talking of the change in her, and shook his head gloomily when matrimony was mentioned.

Lady Cameron was a most considerate and kind hostess, and Lord Clanronald a perfectly passive guest. The mistress of Furness agreed with him in everything; but if she had been suddenly called upon to say why, she must have owned that a tinge of the old hostility to her step-daughter lay at the root of it.

Lady Clanronald enjoyed the peace of the first few days at home. It was keenest pleasure, yet keenest pain to revisit the old familiar places where she had spent the happiest days of her life. Her old friend, Lady Colwyn, was delighted to see her, and gave her a genuinely warm welcome. She looked at Diana steadfastly—for she, like others, was struck by her altered appearance.

"You have changed from a beautiful girl into a beautiful woman, my dear," she said; "but you do not look like a happy one."

Lady Colwyn found a different Diana from the blithe and gay girl she had known but a few years before. She was most kind, loving, and affectionate to her old friend; but she had nothing to tell her. Lady Colwyn tried to draw her into a conversation about Ronald's Court, about her husband, about the ordinary affairs of life, but Diana had nothing to say. She

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parried every attack, she politely evaded all her questions. She persisted in talking about Lady Colwyn, while Lady Colwyn persisted in talking about her, so that the interview was not altogether satisfactory. They had, however, one theme in common—Sir Royal, for whom Lady Colwyn had the greatest affection and respect. She spoke of his failing health, and Lady Clanronald was sorely troubled at the sad news.

"He is coming to dine with us to-night," she said; "then I shall see him."

"I find you so changed, Diana—I cannot think how or why," Lady Colwyn remarked presently. "You do not seem one bit like the Diana who went away five years ago. What is it, my dear? Can you not trust an old friend such as I?"

"I do trust you, Lady Colwyn," said Diana—"I always did. You are my true friend, I know."

"Then tell me you are happy, Diana!" she pleaded.

"Everybody has a different standard of happiness," replied Diana, evasively. She could not say "Yes," and she would not say "No."

"I see," said Lady Colwyn, with a quiet sigh. "You will not trust me; but I understand." And, though her ladyship did not venture to speak on the subject again, it was always uppermost in her mind, for she knew that her dear young friend was unhappily married.

Diana's troubles were not long in abeyance. She had had some faint hope that her husband would refrain from excess while under her father's roof; but before three days had passed that faint hope expired. He had the grace to withdraw when he felt conscious of having indulged to freely; but Diana had all the misery of knowing his condition, even though he was not in sight. Lady Cameron saw it, Mr. Cameron soon perceived it, and then they understood the sorrow and the shame of Diana's life.

It was near the hour when Sir Royal was to arrive at Furness, and Diana looked forward with some impatience to the moment when she should see her kind, true, dear old friend.

The light still lingering in the western sky rested on the budding trees, and the fragrant spring flowers. Diana had dressed with unusual care. She did not wish her old friend to find her so greatly changed as her father and Lady Colwyn had; she wanted to see in his eyes, if in no other, a gleam of recognition of the "child Diana." Her dress of a pale-blue brocade embroidered with flowers suited her fair stately loveliness. A feeling of delicacy forbade her wearing the Clanronald jewels. She wore a bunch of delicately-tinted garlands in the bodice of her dress, and one in her hair. She wished to see him young, fair, and charming in the eyes of the man who had always lavished on her such a wealth of honest affection—and yet she had but little heart even for this effort. She could wear costly dresses and fair flowers, but she could not take the shadow from her eyes, or the look of care from her face. Lovely as she was, she glanced at herself despondently.

"Royal will know," she said to herself—"he will know when he sees me. Even were I to laugh and talk the whole time, I could not deceive him. He always found out my childish troubles; he will not now fail to detect my heavy load of sorrow."

Diana had dressed early, hoping to have a chat with Sir Royal before dinner; but when she entered the drawing-room it was empty. She threw a shawl over her shoulders, and, opening the long glass doors, went out on to the terrace; and the sweet soft dreams of her early girlhood seemed to come back to her as she learned over the balustrade, the fair glad dreams that had never been realized.

"If I could but live my life over again!" she sighed. "How cruelly have I wrecked my life and hopes!" A few minutes later Sir Royal, looking from the open glass door, beheld the face and form of the one he loved so well. His heart beat fast; a fire flashed in his eyes that had not shone there since he had last seen her; his face crimsoned, then turned deadly pale. He tried to realize that it was Diana—Diana, who in every childish trouble had sought him, who had kissed him in her ecstasies of delight, who had confided to him her little anxieties and childish secrets.

He went toward her slowly. She did not hear his approach until he uttered her name, and then she turned to him with a cry of joy.

"Oh, Royal, is it you?" she said. "I have been longing to see you."

"And I see you, Diana," he responded. He took both her hands in his and held them while he looked into the lovely face. "Why have you gone out of my life, Diana?" he asked. "Why have you never written to me or sent any messages to me?" Then, with his eyes still fixed on her face, he dropped her hands, saying as he did so, "I see—I see it in your face. You are not happy, Diana, and you would not let me know."

"Do not talk of me," she said. "Tell me about yourself, Royal. You look ill; they tell me you are ill. Is it true?"

"I have again suffered very severely with the old pain and confusion in my head. But, Diana—raise your face, dear, and let me see it—what have they done to you? Who has taken the brightness and the hope and the youth from your face? Who has done it?"

"Time," she replied, with an attempt to smile. "You forget that I have been away five years."

"I do not forget," he cried. "How could I, Diana, when I have counted the hours—every hour for five years? Ah, no, I have not forgotten! But it is not time that has obliterated all trace of the happiness that once shone in your eyes. Time has done nothing to you but made you more beautiful. Time has not written the story I read on your face. Tell me what the shadows mean that lie in your eyes. Tell me what the pain and repression and sorrow mean," he asked hurriedly.

But, before she had time to answer, a thick hoarse voice was heard shouting:

"Diana, Diana, where are you?" She knew by her husband's voice that something was amiss. Sir Royal noticed how she started and turned pale as the words fell upon her ears.

"Diana, where are you?" repeated the hoarse voice. "What do you mean by mooning out here? Why do you not answer when I call?"

"I am here, Ronald. Do you want me?" she responded.

"If I did not want you, should I take the trouble of coming all this way to find you? I—?" Then he stopped abruptly, seeing Sir Royal for the first time. He looked slightly confused, then turned to his wife, with an angry scowl.

"Ronald, this is my old friend, Sir Royal West of Westwater," she said, anxious to avert a storm.

Lord Clanronald bowed, and murmured a few words of what should have been acknowledgment and welcome, but which sounded more like an oath.

Sir Royal did not offer to shake hands with the man he despised, nor did he say he was pleased to see him again, or inquire about his health. He simply bowed. He wanted to know what had wrought the sad change in the "child Diana."

Seeing that neither of the gentlemen was pleased at the rencontre, Diana repeated her question.

"Do you want me, Ronald?"

The manner in which he answered her was almost brutal.

"I have told you that, if I had not wanted you, I should not have run after you. Where is the key of my jewel-case?"

"I do not know," she replied.

"You do know!" he cried, his anger increasing as he went on. "Julia tells me that he saw you at my toilet-table yesterday, and now the key is gone!"



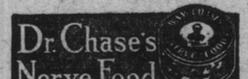
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"I assure you," she said, turning her pale, beautiful face to him, "that I went there to replace a solitaire of yours which I had found."

"It is a lie!" he shouted. "You went to spy among my things, to search for love-letters, I suppose. You want a divorce, do you? and you expect to find something among my papers which will help you? You will be disappointed, my lady."

"You forget, Ronald," she said calmly, "that Sir Royal is here."

"I do not forget," he retorted. "Sir Royal is welcome to hear."

But Sir Royal interrupted him with a polite bow.

"I pray you," he said, white with suppressed rage, "do not mention my name. Lady Clanronald," he continued, turning to Diana, "this is no place for you. Allow me to take you to the drawing-room. I will return and help this gentleman to find his key."

There was a quite significance in his tone which subdued Lord Clanronald, who walked away, muttering some very unparliamentary remarks as he did so.

(to be continued.)

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