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**LADY IRIS'
MISTAKE;**
— or the —
Hero of 'Surata'

CHAPTER XXVI

"I did not clearly understand him; but I believe it was done to save your mother in some way. You must tell me the details; I would rather hear them from you."

"I assure you most solemnly," he replied, "that I have not the faintest notion of what you mean. You are jesting, Iris?"

"No; why should I jest? John Bardon also told me that you were one of the Osburns of Sketchley."

"Of Sketchley?" repeated Allan. "How could he say such a thing? Why, Iris, I have never even heard the name before!"

"He told me so, I assure you," she replied; "and then he added that there was a romance about your birth, and that you had done something that was very heroic—sacrificed wealth and a title for your mother's sake, although he did not explain why. He told me to ask you about the romance. What could he mean, Allan?"

"A horrible fear seized him, a fear which drove the color from his face. 'I do not understand it at all, my darling; but no doubt we shall make it out. John Bardon told me that you knew the story of my birth, and that you sympathized with me.'"

"I know no other story but that which he has told me—that which I now tell you—of some romance—that you had given up a great deal for your mother's sake."

"Is that all you know?" he asked hurriedly. "Have we both been deceived?"

"What is there to know, Allan?"—and the same fear which had taken hold of him seized her. The topics fell from her hands, and her heart almost stood still.

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"Five years ago when I was first married, I had wonderful energy. I could be on the go all day long without feeling the least bit fatigued. I had a great appetite and could eat anything. I weighed 147 pounds. I used to be busy every minute of the day and, when the day was over, I could go to bed and never waken once during the night. Thirteen months ago my first baby was born. After that my energy seemed to leave me. I was tired all the time. I had to force myself to do my household duties, instead of being a pleasure as formerly. These duties became a real task. I lost all desire for food and nothing would tempt me. I had to make myself eat. I would go to bed at night and toss from side to side for hours at a time. After a while I would doze off only to find that I had been sleeping for ten or fifteen minutes. Naturally when morning came, not having slept, I started the day completely tired out. I was shabby and nervous. The least noise would startle me and make my heart race. I could see that my husband was worried. I was losing weight every week, and had already lost 54 pounds. I tried all kinds of tonics, but they didn't help me. One night, a night I shall never forget, because it started me on the way to health and happiness again, my husband brought in a bottle of Carnol. A friend told him that Carnol had saved his wife's life, so he insisted upon my trying it. Six weeks after I began taking Carnol, my weight increased from 93 pounds to 158, an increase of 65 pounds. And, am I well these days? Every morning I fairly jump out of bed ready to tackle anything and every minute of the day is a joy to me now."

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"Iris, answer me. Have you believed me all this time to be a gentleman by birth?"

"Yes—most certainly."

"And believing me to be such, you have loved me?"

"Yes," she answered again.

"You would not have loved me had you known that I was not a gentleman by birth?" he continued.

"How can I answer you?" she said.

"You must answer me, my darling."

"I cannot," she replied. "I could not tell my own mind. But, Allan, you are teasing me! This is some horrible jest!"

"It is no jest, my darling; but it seems to me that we have both been most cruelly deceived. Yes, I can see no reason or motive for it. Then, my darling, you do not know of my birth? And I thought you loved me in spite of it! How shall I tell you? For the first time—Heaven help me—I am afraid!"

He rose from the bank and stood erect before her, but with a white face and a painfully beating heart. He would have faced death in any form more willingly; but he did not falter. She rose too when she saw his agitation.

"Allan, what is it? What is wrong? It can be nothing, my darling, which will take me from you?"

"I do not know, Iris. I swear before Heaven that I have never deceived you! Why John Bardon had lied to me I cannot tell; but I believed that he had told you the whole story of my birth and connections. Had I not believed that, I would never have asked for your hand until I had told you myself. That I swear!"

"I believe it on your simple word," she replied. "Oh, Allan, what is it?"

"I have never been afraid to speak of my birth until now; and now I will not be ashamed of it. I will trample down false pride, as I have done all my life. Iris, I am not a gentleman by birth. My mother was a gentle loving woman, who died when I was four years old. My father was a tradesman, who kept a draper's shop at Elmore and laid the foundation of a fortune there."

As he spoke the words he looked at her, and he saw the color fade from her face, leaving her deathly white.

"Then he went to London, and with the money he had made in trade he speculated on the Stock Exchange and amassed a large fortune. I have never deceived any human being. I belong to the middle class, and I am proud to own it. I have received education and the training of a gentleman, and I follow the profession of a gentleman. I believe in my heart that nature has made me one, although my father was a tradesman. What is more," he added, throwing back his head and looking prouder than he had ever looked before, "I do not see why a tradesman should not be a gentleman if he be an honorable man. I believe that nature, and not money or birth, makes a gentleman."

He stopped, for a wall of pain came from her white lips.

"Hush, Allan!" she said. "You are trampling the dearest belief of my life under foot. Your words pain me!"

He stopped abruptly, and she thought as she looked at him that, no matter what his father was, she had never seen one who looked more like a gentleman than the man who confronted her.

"I am bewildered, Allan," she went on; "I shall understand better in time; but of one thing I am quite sure—you have never deceived me."

"Heaven bless you, my darling!" he cried. "I can bear anything if you say that."

She looked up at him with a ripple of scorn on her face.

"I begin to see through it now," she said. "I offended John Bardon once—it matters not how, I admit that I was hard, proud, and cruel to him. I stung him, I suppose, with my bitter, scornful words; and he swore to be revenged on me. And this is his vengeance?"

"But how should it be his vengeance? I do not understand," returned Allan.

"He brought us together, feeling sure we should like each other. He has lied to both of us. He has told you that I knew the truth about your birth, and he has told me that you were well-born, but that there was some hidden romance connected with you. He has trusted to chance that we should like each other; and he has concluded that, when I knew the truth, it would part us, and so we should be miserable for life. That is

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his vengeance; that is what the wretched almond-blossom means. He told me that, when you explained the romance to me, I was to remember him!"

"But," cried Allan, in a voice of despair, "how could he do this? He is my friend."

"He has betrayed you," she said. "To punish me. May Heaven help us both!"

CHAPTER XXVII

For a few moments there was silence between the earl's daughter and Captain Osburn, broken only by the ripple of the water and the song of the birds. A low cry of pain came from her lips; and then she stood still, her pale face bent and her hands clasped. He looked at her in a passion of fear and amazement. How soon the bright sunshine had changed to gloom! His heart beat with anguish, and he trembled with emotion.

"Iris," he said, in a low voice, "it will not matter. You said some few minutes since that nothing could happen that would part us."

He was not a man to cry for mercy; yet wild and frenzied prayers rose now to his lips; but he uttered none of them.

"Iris, speak to me. I am so grieved, so sorry. I would have given my life rather than this should have happened. How blind I must have been to fall into the trap that villain laid for me! But I was so happy," he added, with a fearless sob—"so unutterably happy—that I never even remembered the fact that might have told against me. I was so certain you knew all that not a shadow of doubt ever crossed my mind. Iris, speak to me. Ah, darling, if you have loved me hitherto, am I to be loved less now?"

Still she stood silent and motionless, as though the greatness of the blow had stricken her dumb. He stretched out his hand to her in mute appeal, and she laid her own in his.

"Am I less or more to you, Iris," he said, "because my father made money instead of inheriting it?"

"No," she answered, in a low, pained voice; "it is not your fault, Allan. I acquit you of all blame; it is the evil result of my own pride. If I had been kinder to John Bardon, he would not have done this to me; it is my own fault."

(To be continued.)

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4161. Trim and neat is the here portrayed. The design and adjustment are equally figured. Percale was used in instance, combined with white silk. The pattern is cut in 36, 38, 40, 42, 44 and 46 inch measure. A 38 inch size requires yards of 40 inch material. The vest, collar and cuffs of contrasting material require 1 1/2 yard width at the foot is 2 1/4 yards. Pattern mailed to any address receipt of 10c. in silver or stamps.

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