

THE HEIR OF Lancewood

CHAPTER XLII.

"It must be," he said to his wife, "because I find life so pleasant and so fair that I dread death, because life ends with it. I was so grieved for your poor friend whom we laid under-ground to-day."

It was one of the saddest in Vivien's life; he had been so true a friend, and he belonged to the sunny past as much as he was associated with her sin.

On the evening of the day after which she had heard the terrible story, she had shut herself into her own room that she might think, what was best for her to do. There was but one thing to be done—that she knew. Lancewood ought to be restored to the young Sir Oswald. Had Gerald lived a few minutes longer, she would have been compelled to promise that; but he had died while the words were on her lips. He had told her in the course of their last interview how it could be arranged—how the boy might be produced through the family solicitor, who would understand that he had been stolen years before. She saw that it was possible, without incriminating herself, to yield up Lancewood to him.

But after her years of possession, when she had given every energy of her heart and soul, all her talents, her patience, time and fortune to the restoration of the home of the Nesles—after years of labor and thought, and with the consciousness that Lancewood was now the finest estate in the county—it seemed to her impossible to yield it. To give it to a strolling player's child, to see it once more laid waste, made desolate, its revenues squandered on a horde of needy foreigners, its glories tarnished—she could not entertain the thought. Honor and honesty, justice and right, pleaded in vain—she could not yield up the place; and so, in willful defiance of right, knowing full well the extent of her crime, banishing the remembrance of the dying face and the pleading eyes, she resolved to continue the sin of her lifetime.

"If he had a different mother," she repeated, over and over again, "I would do it; but Lancewood shall not be the prey of a strolling player, no matter by what name she is known, and her associates."

At the same time she resolved upon doing what she could for the boy; he should have the best of education, the best of assistance. She trusted to her own ready inventiveness for keeping his existence a secret. If the worst came, she could say that he was a boy in whom Gerald Dorman had been warmly interested, and whom, for Gerald's sake, she was befriending. She could always take refuge in that equivocation, although she detested false words.

"It cannot be wrong," she said to herself, with an air of desperation; "the sin would rather lie in allowing Lancewood to be the prey of the spoilers."

The next morning, as she left her dressing-room, she saw her little Arthur waiting for her at the door.

"Mamma," he said, springing up to her, "I told Frank I should have the first kiss—and I have had it."

She took the child in her arms and looked at him long and steadily. They were grave thoughts that passed through her mind then. This sin of hers, this usurpation of another's rights, might extend to the innocent child in her arms. He was one day

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She looked at the boy's fair, sweet face, and her heart warmed to him with a great love.

"I wish," said Lady St. Just to herself, "that I understood more of these things. How could he suffer for it, when he would be innocent of the facts even?"

She looked at the boy's fair, sweet face, and her heart warmed to him with a great love.

"I would do nothing that should hurt him," she thought, "my beautiful boy."

Then she remembered how proud she had been of him, as one who would inherit the home she loved. Could she take it from this fair-faced boy, and give it to Valerie's son? A thousand times no! Her boy was a true Nesle; he had noble blood in his veins, a noble soul shone in his little face. Rob him for Valerie's son—the boy who in his youth had learned to deceive and to tyrannize? A thousand times no!

"I will keep Lancewood and risk it," she said to herself. "I will keep it for Arthur's sake."

The child clasped his little arms round his mother's neck.

"Mamma," he said, "you look so sad, so serious; have I been naughty?"

"No, my darling," she replied; "and the boy hid his face on her neck, for he saw the beautiful dark eyes were filled with tears.

The child ran away to his play, and Lady St. Just went to her daily duties.

She never looked or listened to her own children without thinking of little Oswald, whom she remembered as a child. She had loved him after a fashion because he was her half-brother, and because she had tried so hard to educate him. She wondered what he had grown into—what he was like now—above all, if he had any remembrance of Lancewood. A longing came to her to see him, to know if he believed himself to be Henry Dorman, to know if he had any lingering memory of his former life.

This idea grew upon her until it became a perfect fever. She said to herself that if she once saw him she should be at rest—that if she could speak to him, know something of him, she would not be haunted as she was.

How could she see him—by going to the school where he was? She remembered the name—Dr. Lester's, Hammersmith. She looked in a directory and found the name—"Grove House Academy." She might go there some day when Lord St. Just was occupied. She need not take Joan with her, neither need she take the carriage; she could go in a cab, and return in the same way.

Would the boy recognize her? No, she was sure of that; Gerald never spoke falsely, and he had assured her that Oswald remembered nothing of his former life. She would go, and, if her name were asked for, she could say Mrs. Smith, Mrs. Anything. One thing was quite certain—she must see the boy.

"Vivien," said Lord St. Just, anxiously, "either you are not well or you are plotting some terrible conspiracy—which is it?"

The words were so near the truth that Lady St. Just trembled.

"Why do you say that, Adrian?" she asked.

"My darling, you do not know how you have changed. Hitherto you have been all smiles and sunshine, now you are always thinking so deeply. I never find you reading, writing, playing with the children; whenever I come in you are sitting or standing quite still thinking—always thinking so intently. Do you know that sometimes I enter a room and leave it without your having once seen or heard me? I often speak to you, ask you questions, and you look at me with such vague, dreamy eyes. What

is it that occupies all your thoughts?"

She tried to smile, to answer him lightly, but she could not. Her lips trembled, her face grew pale.

"You are not well," he said. "You have worked hard for me this year, Vivien. I owe a great part of my success to you—but now you must rest. We will leave London as soon as possible."

She clasped her arms round his neck and kissed his face.

"You are so kind to me, Adrian," she said. "I do not deserve your great love."

And Lord St. Just laughed at the words.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Her husband's words made a great impression on Lady St. Just. She knew they were true. She had room for no other thought in her mind but the thought of the child Oswald. She took note, and found that for hours together she did nothing but think and ponder. She could never have been a real criminal—she had to keep a conscience. She could take Lancewood from this boy because she did not think him worthy to hold it; but she could not forget the boy's existence. She must see him, care for him, advance his interests in life—do anything, in fact, except give him his inheritance.

"One thing is plain," she said to herself; "if I wish to keep my secret, I must not let it absorb me so entirely."

The very expression of her face seemed to have changed; it was full of dreamy, absorbed thought, the life and animation had almost left it.

"I shall be better when I have seen the boy," she thought. "I am haunted by a thousand fears and a thousand thoughts that will be laid as ghosts are laid when I have seen him."

That soon became her one great object, and the day came that brought her a fair chance of achieving it. Lord St. Just went with some friends to Gravesend; there was a government inquiry about some naval matters that required his attention. He would be absent the whole day, and on that day Lady St. Just resolved to go to Hammersmith.

As when she visited Gerald Dorman, she dressed herself as plainly as possible—a black silk dress that showed some signs of wear, a dark travelling cloak, a bonnet with a thick veil.

Thus attired, who would recognize the beautiful and magnificent Lady St. Just?

She contrived to leave the house without being seen, having sent Joan Hubley out previously. She walked some little distance and then took a cab.

"It is a long drive," was the man's comment when she gave the address.

"You shall be well paid for it," she replied, with sublime ignorance of a cabman's peculiarities.

Her heart beat loud and fast as the cab stopped before a large square house standing back from the road and surrounded by trees. "Grove

House Academy," she read on the door.

"Some one to see me, James? You must be mistaken. No one ever comes to see me."

"You will see for yourself, Master Dorman," was the answer; and then he stood before her.

(To be Continued.)

Your Boys and Girls.

Sometimes young mothers are worried because their babies of a year old or more do not seem inclined to walk. There is really nothing to be worried about.

A child will walk directly if its legs are strong enough, and when that time comes, short of tying him up, you won't be able to keep him off his legs if he wants to use them. No young child should be upon its feet before it shows a decided desire to go upon them. To put it on its legs before this time will not strengthen them at all and may result in deformed legs.

If a child a year old makes no effort to walk it is simply because its legs are not yet fit for walking. Let it alone. Give it plenty of fresh air, plenty of good milk, an egg every day or so, a slightly warm bath once a day using soap sparingly, plenty of sleep and plenty of opportunity for "kicking" exercise on a rug and it will "find its feet" before long.

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House Academy," she read on the large brass plate.

"You will wait for me," she said, as the man opened the door—"I may be some time."

The man seated himself on his box, took out his newspaper, and mentally congratulated himself on being "in for a good thing."

The door was opened by a footman, who said that Dr. Lester was not in, but that Mr. Hardman, the head-master, was.

"I want to see one of the young gentlemen, Mr. Henry Dorman. Is he here?"

"Yes, please step this way, and I will fetch him," was the reply.

She was shown into a small ante-room, with nothing very cheerful to recommend it—it contained a square table, a few horse-hair chairs, a pair of globes and a large map. All view from the window was cut off by a thick wire blind.

Lady St. Just sat down. Her heart was beating fast, her limbs trembled—she could not stand. She was to see him again, Valerie's son, the child she had deprived of his inheritance, the heir of Lancewood, the descendant of a French strolling player, the boy she had hushed in her arms, had tried to teach, and had given up in despair.

She threw back her heavy veil, and seemed to gasp for breath; her lips burned like fire; then she drew down her veil, and tried to calm her terrible agitation. She heard footsteps.

A tall, elderly gentleman entered the room, who introduced himself as Mr. Hardman, the head-master. He looked curiously at the beautiful face half hidden by the veil.

"You wish to see one of our boys, madam, Henry Dorman? He is an orphan, I believe. May I ask if you know any of his relatives?"

"I knew his mother," she replied. "I should like to see him, although he would not know me. I knew his mother when he was quite a little child."

"We are obliged to be cautious," said Mr. Hardman. "As a rule we require a note from the parents or relations before any one is allowed to see any of the boys. But in this case I can dispense with the formality."

He had recognized the musical, refined voice of a lady. "I will send young Dorman to you, madam," he said, as he quitted the room.

Ah, Heaven, if her heart would beat less wildly—if the clinging mist would but pass from before her eyes—if her trembling hands would but grow still!

When had she seen Oswald last? She remembered the day and the hour. He had said a lesson correctly to poor dead Gerald, and, as a reward, she gave him a ball he had been longing for.

"You are a good sister, Vivien," he had said, as he ran laughing from the room. A good sister! The words returned to her with a keen pang.

Before the door opened she heard a laughing voice say—

"Some one to see me, James? You must be mistaken. No one ever comes to see me."

"You will see for yourself, Master Dorman," was the answer; and then he stood before her.

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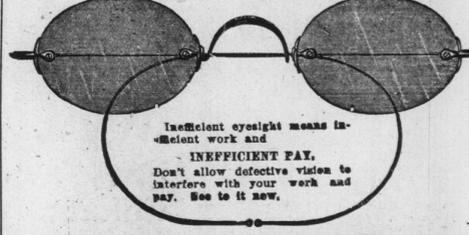
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