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## THE HEIR OF LANCEWOOD

CHAPTER XLVIII.

She knew now that further disguise was useless. He had observed her too keenly to be mistaken. It would be folly to deny that she had a secret. She raised her white face to his.

"I do not deny that there is a secret," she said; "but, Adrian, it does not concern you. You have no share in it, and I decline to tell it to you."

"You must," he replied, sternly. "This is our first disagreement, Vivien—our first struggle for supremacy. You owe me at least wifely submission—you have never refused it. You must not refuse it now—you must tell me your secret."

"I refuse absolutely," she said. "I tell you again that it does not concern you—you have no share in it—no right to ask to know it."

"Nevertheless, I do ask. I can see some little way into it, but not far. Your secret concerns Lancewood, and it has also something to do with this boy whom you have been visiting."

She started, and then controlled herself. It seemed to her that her whole life depended now on her self-possession, on her self-control.

"If you refuse to tell me your secret, if you refuse to give me your confidence, you cannot surely refuse to tell me who that boy is."

"I do refuse," she answered.

He drew nearer to her.

"Ah, beloved," he said, "do not be so cruel, so hard—do not be unjust! We are husband and wife. We have but one heart, one soul, one love, one interest between us. I would tell you the dearest secret of my soul. Why do you wound me? Why do you shut me out in the chill of doubt and suspicion? Who is the boy?"

"He told you himself, Adrian," she replied.

"But you know that story is not true. He is no nephew of poor Dorman's, I am quite sure of that. Why did he speak so strangely? I shall never forget his words."

It was strange that he should, as it were, beat round the secret, yet never suspect it—that, while he felt sure it concerned both Lancewood and the boy, he should never connect the two.

"I do not understand," she said coldly, "why you should refuse to believe him. Surely it is no uncommon thing to have a nephew."

"It is your conduct which is uncommon," replied Lord St. Just, "not the fact of poor Dorman having a nephew. If he be, as he says, Gerald Dorman's nephew, why have you never mentioned him to me? Why have you kept his very existence a

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mystery from me? Why have you gone to see him under a false name? Why does the fact of his existence prey upon you like a secret curse? You think," he continued, passionately, "it is a chance that has led me to see and to notice all these things. I tell you, Vivien, it is the finger of Heaven. Answer me one thing—you, my wife, you whom I believed one of the purest, best, and noblest of women, answer me one thing. If that boy is Gerald Dorman's nephew, how comes he to have your face? I repeat it—your face, the curve of your lips, the shape of your features—how came he by those?"

He stopped abruptly, for the pale, beautiful woman had slipped from his arms and fallen like one dead to the ground.

At any other time Lord St. Just would have been terribly alarmed, now his fears were lost in anxious wonder.

What was this secret that she persisted in withholding from him? What could it be? Had Gerald Dorman contracted a private marriage and left his child to the care of Lady St. Just? There was neither sense nor reason in supposing such a thing—that would not explain the mystery of the resemblance between this boy and Vivien.

"Who would have thought," said the unhappy nobleman, "that I should ever have such a sorrow as this? Only a few short weeks since I considered myself one of the happiest of men, and now—"

He raised the pale, lovely woman in his arms and laid her on the couch; he bathed her face with fragrant waters, and opened the windows so that the fresh sweet air might play over her; yet even as he rendered her these services his heart did not warm to her.

He loved her none the less; but it was not in human nature to forget he had loved her with all his honest heart. He had devoted himself to her, he had lived for her and her alone, and now he had found that she was keeping a secret from him—that, while he thought himself soul of her soul, he had never even known her thoughts—that one part of her mind and heart was barred from him. It was not pleasant; no man living, however much he might trust and love his wife, would care to look upon her face and know that she was keeping a secret from him.

Lord St. Just bent down and kissed his wife's pale face.

"Vivien, my darling," he murmured, "what is this dark horror between us? My wife, my love, trust me."

Her dark eyes opened slowly. He was shocked at the pain and despair in them.

"Do you really love me, Adrian?" she asked. "Do you love me enough to care to keep me alive?"

"My dearest Vivien, most certainly. What do I care for in life except yourself?"

"Then, if you love me, cease to ask me any more questions. The secret is not all mine; you have no share in it; so I cannot tell it to you—I will not reveal it. If you love me, cease from speaking of it."

"No," said Lord St. Just. "I am certain of one thing—no wife has a right to keep such a secret from her husband; moreover I am quite sure that the hand of Providence has led me so far, and will lead me still further, even if you refuse to tell me. Now I shall consider it my duty to find out what you have chosen to conceal. In all sincerity, in all sorrow, I say still more—there can never be peace between us until you have trusted me fully and entirely. We may sit at the same table, live un-

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Under the same roof, but we shall be almost as strangers until you have told me all."

CHAPTER XLIX.

Lady St. Just persisted in withholding her secret from her husband, and he as resolutely declared that she must reveal it.

"How cruel you are!" she sobbed. "Cruel, Vivien? I do not wish to wound you. It is you who are cruel. Put yourself in my place. Suppose that you found me changed, unhappy, full of a sullen, brooding sorrow. Suppose that you discovered I was keeping a secret from you; that you found I was in the habit of visiting some place unknown to you, of passing by a strange name; that you found I cared greatly for a child whose face resembled my own as Harry Dorman's resembles yours. What should you think?"

She made him no answer.

"I know," he continued, "what any man who had less faith in your goodness and truth than I myself have would think about your silence. I know what the world will say if it gets hold of the story, and finds out how much the boy resembles you."

"What will it say?" she asked, faintly.

"Nay, if you do not understand, I will not explain, Vivien. I have used entreaties, prayers, expostulations, all in vain. Now I threaten that unless you tell me the secret yourself, I will at once set to work to find it out; and I will never rest until I know it."

"I will never speak to you again if you do that," she threatened.

"I cannot help it. Your silence to me is terrible; it shows that there is something far from right. I consider myself bound in duty to fathom the mystery. It strikes me that the boy himself would be the one to help me."

"The boy himself!" she repeated.

"Yes, he seems struck with the word 'Lancewood.' If I were to send for him, and try all I could to awaken his memory, it seems to me I should get near the truth."

"Would you really do this, Adrian?" she asked.

"I would, indeed," he replied. "I should have no scruple in doing it."

She remembered how the boy had seemed in some vague way to recognize her face. How would it end? How much would he learn from him? All surely—most surely all. With a deep moan she buried her face in her hands. Lord St. Just knelt by her side.

"Dear wife," he said, "there is a struggle in your heart, a struggle between right and wrong; be brave—let the right prevail. Own the truth, no matter what follows. Only cowardice needs secrecy. In the name of Heaven, by the love you bear to me and to your children, by the value you set upon your fair name, by your pride of race, I entreat you to tell me—trust me."

There was no answer save a low moan. He continued—

"I am your husband—the one in all the world who loves you best. Why can you not trust me? Who could help you and comfort you as I can? Who would share your troubles as I should? My darling, do not repulse my warm, true, deep love, but trust me. I am not a foe, not an angry judge, but your true lover. If there is anything in which you have done wrong, let me set you right."

He kissed her face, he kissed her hands, he called her by every loving and tender name.

"Let me use the truest weapon in my armoury," he said, playfully. "For the love of Lancewood trust me, Vivien!"

There came a low cry from her lips, but she did not speak.

"It is from Lancewood your trouble comes," he said—"I can see that—Lancewood and this boy; but I cannot see yet how they are connected. Heaven, which has already shown me so much, will show me more. There is some mystery. Poor Gerald Dorman, the boy, Lancewood, and yourself are all concerned in it. With a little more patience I shall make it out. Vivien, would it not be better for you to tell me than for me to find it out?"

"Yes," she whispered—"but give me time."

"Take all the time you need, if you will but trust me in the end," he said.

She tried to think that what he said was true. It was neither fate nor chance that was guiding him, but the finger of Heaven. She had done a great wrong, a great injustice; it could never prosper. Yet how could she give up Lancewood to Valerie and her dissipated friends—to the boy who really seemed to her to have no claim? How could she take the place from her son, whom she had fondly believed would make so noble a martyr for it?

Then, again, she reflected that if she did not tell her husband everything he would find it out; he was so near the truth that a few questions, a few inquiries, would elicit it; she had never dreamed that he would connect Lancewood and the boy.

She remembered Gerald's dying words—"He must go back to Lancewood—promise me." Dare she totally ignore those solemn words?

"What shall I do?" cried Vivien, wringing her hands.

"Trust me," said her husband. "The time has come when you must tell the truth. Do not hesitate; be brave, Vivien, and tell it."

"You will hate me," she moaned; "but, oh, believe me, Adrian, it was not quite my fault! I was mad when I uttered the words that led to it—all quite mad; and he was so devoted to me he thought I meant it. I did not, it was all a confused horror."

"You forget," he said, "that I do not even know of what you are speaking. Tell me one thing, Vivien, which will make all else easier—tell me who is the boy?"

Should she tell him? If she did not, he would find it out—he would be sure to do so; it would be better to trust him now that he was so near the truth.

She rose slowly from the couch, she stood before him in all the magnificence of her beauty, her face pale, her eyes filled with the fire of pride; she drew herself up to her full height. He looked at her in wonder and amazement.

(To be Continued.)

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