

ing tennis in the garden behind the cottage. The coast was clear, and Sir Vivian nerved himself for his task, which seemed more than ever odious as he glanced at his fiancée's pallid face and heavy eyes.

"I am afraid you have not recovered yet from your headache of yesterday, Lady Gladys?"

She raised her head quickly. "Lady Gladys" he had not called her since the accident.

"No, I am not much better, thank you," she answered wearily.

In spite of his just anger, and much against his will, Sir Vivian found himself beginning to pity her, she looked so ill and sorrowful; but still her beauty rose triumphantly above the marks of care and anxiety. They could not take away her queenly dew. Sir Vivian stood before her, leaning against the mantelpiece, trying to harden his heart against her.

"North went off this morning," he observed abruptly.

Lady Gladys knew what was coming then, and her breath came short and fast; she had not been down to breakfast, so did not hear of his departure.

"I am sorry I was not up to say good-bye to him"—calmly.

"I suppose you know that he was not engaged to Miss Vane?"

"Indeed!" she replied, closing her eyes, as if the subject had no interest for her.

"You gave me to understand that you knew she would accept him."

"Did I? I must have made a mistake"—carelessly. "I do not remember saying so."

"You told me that she love him"—sternly.

"By the way she encouraged his attentions, I presumed that she meant to accept him."

"His was an injudicious speech, and she knew it as soon as she had uttered it. His eyes flashed dangerously as he heard her sneer at the pure, innocent girl he loved."

"You knew I loved her," he said sternly, "and I should have asked her to be my wife. If you had not made me believe that she cared for North!"

Lady Gladys felt the bitterness of death pass over her as she heard those words. All along she had deceived herself with the idea that he did not really care for Dollie, that it was only a passing fancy for a pretty new face, which would vanish as quickly as it had begun. She was silent; the dull moments passed on slowly. She felt that the man whom she so madly worshipped despised her, and what was worse, she believed that he had never really loved her. Without a word, she slipped from her chair and fell at his feet in a swoon.

Horried, he gazed down at her as she lay on the ground, her loosened hair rippling and flowing over her. His dream was realized; he had killed her. He lifted her up—a dead weight in his arms. The beautiful soft hair touched his hands caressingly; there was no sign of life. In an agony of remorse he called her by every fond loving name of which he could think; he assured her of his forgiveness, of his love. He kissed her; but she lay quiet in his arms; and it seems as if nothing would ever trouble her again. Better for her if had been so—better for her if she might have been placed then in her quiet grave.

Sir Vivian raised his head suddenly—a man's face with a horrible smile upon it, was looking in at the window; it vanished, and Sir Vivian rang for assistance, and, leaving Lady Gladys in the housekeeper's care, he went out to look for the intruder, but could find no one. He returned to the house, and was met with the joyful intelligence that Lady Gladys was better, and had gone to her room.

That afternoon there was a loud ring at

the front door bell; it was a visitor for Lady Gladys.

"She cannot see any one; she is indisposed," said the housekeeper importantly rustling into the hall in a stiff black silk.

The stranger, a short, red-haired man, muttered something that was inaudible.

"I must see her; it is on business. Tell her I come from the *Waterwitch*."

The housekeeper departed unwillingly. Presently she reappeared.

"Lady Warvin will see you in a few moments. Will you come in?"

She ushered him into the library. He sat down by the fire and took up one of the daily papers and began to read. In about half an hour Lady Gladys came in and stood at a little distance from him. He did involuntary homage with his eyes to her beauty, which was now more brilliant than ever. Her eyes shone like stars, her dusky cheeks glowed with color, her loosely-confined hair fell lightly over her shoulders like a golden-brown cloud. She did not begin the conversation, so he gazed his fill at her.

"You have not lost your good looks in fretting after me, my loving wife," he said, with a sneer.

"I thought you were dead," she answered slowly. "Why did you not come home sooner?"

"I have never flattered myself that you would regret my absence. If I had thought so—who knows?—I might have done so! But, having heard from your own lips that you hated me, I did not expect a very rapturous welcome home."

"I never said that I hated you."

"I heard you murmuring it to yourself one day, after one of the pleasant little altercations which we used to indulge in occasionally, years ago."

"You might have written."

"What is the use of talking like that?" he answered roughly. "I did not; so there is an end of it. I may have wished to see how you would conduct yourself under the heavy affliction which befell you. I have seen; I am satisfied."

At the cruel words Lady Gladys looked up.

"Is that all?" she asked in a cold haughty tone. "If you have finished insulting me, I will go"—moving towards the door.

"Not so fast, my lady; I have not done with you yet. Do you think I intend letting you go back to your lover—your wife?"—coming close to her and hissing the last words in her ear.

"What do you mean to do with me?" she asked coolly and imperturbably, every fibre in her body revolting against his close contact.

He regarded her with grudging admiration in his small ferret eyes.

"By Jove, you are a cool hand! If you were not my wife, I should adore you."

Hiding her shivering disgust at this idea, she said quietly—

"You used to love me once."

"I did for a little while," he agreed; "but it was all on one side; so I grew tired of it."

"Whose side?"

"There can be no doubt on that point. I was the fool"—roughly; "but I shall never be again."

"We can be friends, at all events."

"I suppose so," he answered sulkily, surprised at her unexpected gentleness. "I mean you to live with me. No more of your old lovers hanging on, my lady. You are engaged to him, are you not? A good joke—that!"—and he laughed loudly.

If he had caught the look of Lady Gladys's eyes he would not have been deceived by her apparent quietude.

"You do not seem to see the point of the joke," he observed when his laughter had subsided. "It is the last you will ever have of that kind; so I advise you to make the most of it."

She did not seem to have heard his remarks; at all events, she did not notice them by word or look; she stood beside him, like a queen condescending to one of the lowest of her subjects; but, in reality, no slave could be more utterly in subjection to his master than she, the worshipped beauty, the queen of so many hearts, was to the little red-haired man by her side; and she knew it.

"How beautiful you are!"—taking up a tress of her golden-brown hair and winding it round his fingers. "And you are mine, to do what I like with! I bought you, you know!"—with a cruel laugh. "Will the other fellow blow his brains out, I wonder, when he hears that I have turned up?"

"I do not think so," she replied calmly.

"What were you doing this morning that made you faint?" he inquired curiously.

"I have been in delicate health for some time"—evasively.

"Have you? I do not believe you"—with sudden passion. "Tell me the truth at once."

"Do not ask me now, Robert," she pleaded faintly. "I will tell you some other time."

He looked half inclined to force her to confess; but seeing that she was white to the lips, he refrained; he had no desire to make a scene.

"Did you see me yesterday in Rainsforth?"

"Yes!"

"Ah," he thought, "she was telling her lover that I had returned" and he stored this discovery in his memory to be used as an instrument of torture at a more convenient season. Then aloud—"Wouldn't you like to know my adventures since I last saw you?"

She bowed her head in assent.

"I suppose you have guessed by this time that the *Waterwitch* which was found wrecked was not my yacht. I saw the report of my supposed death in the papers, and, for those reasons to which I have already referred, I succeeded in keeping my name secret with a little trouble and a good deal of expenditure. Fortunately I had enough money with me for my expenses. However it ran short at last; so I came back to Edinburgh, stopping at Rainsforth. There I met you, driving on a drag by Sir Vivian's side. I made a few enquiries in the town, and here I am. Had you better not sit down?"—startled by the look which came over her face at the memory he recalled of that happy day which she had passed by Sir Vivian's side.

She sank back on the sofa, and looked up at him.

"That is all," he said, in answer to the mute inquiry on her face. "I came to see you this morning, but finding that you were better engaged, I refrained. By the way, I believe your lover had the felicity of seeing me at the window; I disturbed him while he was caressing you."

"Was he?"—her white face flushing with rosy delight.

"None of that!" he said fiercely. "Remember, you are my wife."

She hid her face in her hands and moaned. The sight seemed to madden him; and, grasping her shoulder passionately, he said in a low voice—

"Stop that, or it will be the worse for you?"

"Oh, how you hurt!" she cried.

His fierce grasp had made great black bruises on her tender brown shoulders. He retained his hold and looked quite capable of carrying his threat, when steps were heard outside the door; and he dropped his hand as Vivian entered. Lady Gladys raised a desolate face to him but said nothing.

"Gladys," said her husband quietly, "will you introduce me to your friend?"

She opened her pale lips and essayed

to speak; but no words came. Her eyes had the look of a hunted deer's. At last she spoke—

"My husband—Sir Vivian Bramhall."

They bowed; Sir Robert looked eagerly for some trace of surprise on Sir Vivian's face; but there was none. With all the self-possession which a London life had taught him, he subdued all emotion and murmured a few polite phrases.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance," said Sir Robert, smiling agreeably. "I hear that you have been very kind to my wife."

Sir Vivian bowed again.

"She will be no longer a burden upon your hospitality, as I shall take her on board my yacht."

"Yes?" said Sir Vivian interrogatively. "Not to-night though, surely; it is too late! To-morrow or the next day?"

"To-morrow will do," replied the other, after a short pause, during which he reflected that it would be exquisite pain for them to say "Good-bye" to each other. "I hope we shall have the pleasure of seeing you at our summer residence in Forfar some time this year."

"You are very good," returned Sir Vivian courteously; "I shall be most happy."

After a few more polite remarks, Sir Robert bowed himself out with the finished politeness of which he was master, the door closed, and the two were alone once more.

"This must have been a great shock for you, Lady Gladys," said Sir Vivian softly. "Your husband ought not to have allowed you to be placed in such a false position."

"No," she replied faintly with a cowed, subdued look on her sad face.

"What has he said to her?" wondered Sir Vivian with deep pity, the deeper because of his utter helplessness to aid her in any way.

"Say you forgive me, Vivian?" she whispered. "Do not hate me now."

His eyes were dim as he sat down beside her and wondered what he could do to comfort her.

"As I hope for Heaven," he said solemnly, "I shall always think of you as the dearest friend I have! And remember, Gladys, that I shall always watch over you; and if you want me for any cause whatever, even if it is at the other end of the earth, send for me and I will come!"

She broke down at last, and the hot tears fell down slowly and silently.

"Don't, dear," he said sadly. "I cannot bear to see you so unhappy."

She made no answer, only laid down her head on his shoulder, weeping quietly and miserably. He put his arms round her.

"Poor Gladys," he said brokenly—"my poor darling!" forgetting everything but the awful trouble of the woman at his side who loved him.

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It was midnight. The cottage was dark and still; there was silence in the hall, up the stairs, and along the passages. All the lights were out; every one was asleep, and the weary troubles of the day gone by were blotted out. Stay! What was that? Could it be a ghost? A dark figure had noiselessly descended the stairs and crossed the hall. As its white hand was on the bolt, the great clock in the corner whirled loudly, and then stopped. "One!" The great broken silence settled down again. "Two!" Under cover of the noisy clang the dark figure opened the door, turned round, and listened. "Three!" The face was visible then. It was Lady Gladys, her large eyes full of an awful dread. The long glass opposite reflected her—a dark figure, with long hair falling like a mantle over her, and bare feet gleaming whitely beneath her black draperies. "Four!" A chair creaked; she lanced