THE ACADIAN
AND KING'S CO. TIMES.

HONEST, INDEPENDENT, FEARLESS.--DEVOTED TO LOCAL AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

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THE ACADIAN.

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I know that the world—the great big world—
From the peasant up to the king,
Has a different tale from the tale I tell,
And a different song to sing.

But for me, and I care not a single fig,
If they say I am wrong or am right,
I shall always go in for the weaker dog,
For the under dog in the fight.

I know that the world—that the great big world—
Will never a moment stop
To see which dog may be in the fault,
But will shout for the dog on top.

But for me—I never shall pause to ask,
Which dog may be in the right—
For my heart will beat, while it beats at all,
For the under dog in the fight.

Perchance what I've said I had better not said,
Or 'twere better I had said it incog.,
But with heart and with glass filled chock to the brim
Here is luck to the bottom dog.

SELECT STORY.

A Life for a Love.

BY L. T. MEADE.

CHAPTER XXII.—*Continued.*

Mr Paget felt his heart beat a trifle too fast. Would that stall be full or empty when the curtain dropped at the close of the first act? Would his heart's desire, his wicked and treacherous heart's desire be torn from him in the very moment of apparent fruition. Suppose Gerald did not put in an appearance at the Gaiety? Suppose at the eleventh hour he changed his mind and resolved to leave Esther Helps to her fate? Suppose—pshaw!—where was the use of supposing? To leave a girl to her fate would not be his chivalrous fool of a son-in-law's way. No, it was all right; even now he could dimly discern a faint commotion in the neighborhood of Esther Helps—the kind of commotion incident on the arrival of a fresh person, the gentle soft little movement made by the other occupants of the stalls to let the new comer, who was both late and tiresome, take his reserved seat in comfort. Mr Paget sank back in his seat with a sensation of relief; he had not listened for nothing behind an artfully concealed curtain that morning.

The play proceeded. Much as he had said about it beforehand, it had no interest for Mr Paget. He scarcely troubled to look at the stage. There was no room in his heart that moment for burlesque; he was too busily engagged over his own terrible life's drama. On the result of this night more or less depended all his future happiness.

"If she turns back to me after what she sees to-night then I can endure," he said to himself. "I can go on to the bitter end—if not—well, there are more expedients than one for a ruined man to throw up the sponge."

The curtain fell, the theatre was in a blaze of light; Valentine and Lilias sank back in their seats and began to fan themselves. They had been pleased and amused. Lilias, indeed, had laughed so heartily that the tears came to her eyes.

"I hate to cry when I laugh," she said, taking out her handkerchief to wipe them away. "It's a tiresome trick we all have in our family, Gerald and all."

She had a habit of bringing in Gerald's name whenever she spoke of her family, as if he were the topmost stone, the crowning pride and delight.

Mr Paget had his back slightly turned to the girls. Once more he was devouring the stalls with his eager bright eyes. Yes, Gerald Wyndham was in his stall. He was leaning back, not exerting himself much; he looked nonchalant and strikingly handsome. Mr Paget did not wish him to appear too nonchalant when Valentine first caught sight of him. No—ah, that was better. Esther was turning to speak to him. By Jove, what a face the girl had!

Mr Paget had often seen Helps' only daughter, for he found it convenient occasionally to call to see Helps at Acadia Villa. But he had never before seen her dress becomingly, and he was positively startled at the pure, high type of her beauty. At this distance her common accent, her poor uneducated words, could not grate. All her gestures were graceful; she looked up at Gerald, said something, smiled, then lowered her heavy black lashes.

It was at that moment, just as Wyndham was bending forward to reply to her remark, and she was leaning slightly away from her other cavalier, so that he merely seemed to belong to her party, that Valentine, tired of doing nothing, came close to her father, and allowed her eyes to wander round the house. Suddenly she uttered a surprised exclamation.

"Look, father, look! is that Gerald? Who is with him? Who is he talking to? How is it that he comes to be here? Yes, it is Gerald! Oh, what a lovely girl he is talking to!"

Valentine's words were emphatic and slightly agitated, for she was simply overpowered with astonishment, but they were spoken in a low key. Lilias did not hear them. She was reading her programme over for the twentieth time, and wondering when the curtain would rise and the play go on.

"Look, father," continued Valentine, clutching her father's arm. "Isn't that Gerald? How strange of him to be here. Who can he be talking to? I don't know her—do you? Do you see him, father? Won't you go down and tell him we are here, and bring him up—and—and—the lady who is with him. Go, please, father, you see where he is, don't you?"

"I do, my child. I have seen him for some time past. Would you like to come home, Valentine?"

"Home! What in the world do you mean? How queer you look! Is there anything wrong? Who is with Gerald? Who is he talking to? How lovely she is. I wish she would look up again."

"That girl is not a lady, Valentine. She is Esther Helps—you have heard of her. Yes, now I understand why your husband could not come with us to the Haymarket to-night. My poor child! Don't look at them again, Valentine, my darling."

Valentine looked full into her father's eyes; full, long, and steadily she gazed. Then slowly, very slowly, a crimson flood of color suffused her whole face; it receded, leaving her deathly pale. She moved away from her father and took a back seat behind Lilias.

The curtain rose again, the play continued. Lilias was excited, and wanted to pull Valentine to the front.

"No," she said. "My head aches; I don't care to look any more."

She sat back in her seat, very white and very calm.

"Would you like to come home?" said her father, bending across to her, and speaking in a voice which almost trembled with the emotion he felt.

"No," she said in reply, and without raising her eyes. "I will sit the play out till the end."

When the curtain fell again she roused herself with an effort and coaxed Lilias to come into the back of the box with her. The only keen anxiety she was conscious of was to protect her husband from Lilias' astonished eyes.

Mr Paget felt well satisfied. He had managed to convey his meaning to his innocent child's heart; an insinuation, a fall of the voice, a look in the eyes, had opened up a gulf on the brink of which Valentine drew back shuddering.

"I was only beginning to love him; it doesn't so much matter," she said many times to herself. Even now she thought no very bad things of her husband; that is no very bad things according to the world's code. To her, however, they were black. He had deceived her—he had made her a promise and broken it. Why? Because he liked to spend the evening with another girl more beautiful than herself.

"Oh, no, I am not jealous," said Valentine, softly under her breath. "I won't say anything to him either about it, poor fellow. It does not matter to me, not greatly. I was only beginning to love him. Thank God there is always my dear old father."

When the curtain rose for the final act of the play, Valentine moved her chair so that she could slightly lean against Mr Paget. He took her hand and squeezed it. He felt that he had won the victory.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Gerald had found his task most uncongenial. In the first place he was disappointed at not spending the evening with Valentine and Lilias. In the second the close proximity of such a girl as Esther Helps could not but be repugnant to him. Still she was a woman, a woman in danger, and her father had appealed to him to save her. Had he been ordained for the Church, such work—ah, no, he must not think of what his life would have been then. After all, it was good of the distracted father to trust him, and he must not betray the trust.

He went to the theatre and acquitted himself with extreme tact and diplomacy. When Gerald chose to exert himself his manner had a quieting effect, a compelling, and almost a commanding effect on women. Esther became quiet and gentle; she talked to Captain Herriot, but not noisily; she laughed, her laugh was low and almost musical. Now and then her quick eyes glanced at Wyndham; she felt thirsty for even his faintest approval—he bestowed it by neither word nor movement.

As they were leaving the theatre, however, and the gallant captain, who inwardly cursed that insufferable prig who happened to have a slight acquaintance with his beautiful Esther, grew cheerful under the impression that now his time for enjoyment was come, Gerald said in a low, grave voice:—

"Your father has given me a letter for you. Pray be quiet, don't excite yourself. It is necessary that you should go to your father directly. Allow me to see you into a cab. Your father is waiting for you—it is urgent that you should join him at once."

Scarcely knowing why she did it, Esther obeyed. She murmured some eager agitated words to Captain Herriot; she was subdued, frightened, shaken; as Gerald helped her into a cab he felt her slim fingers tremble in his. He took his seat upon the box beside the driver, and ten minutes later had delivered Esther safely to her father. His task was done, he did not wait to hear a word of Helps' profuse thanks. He drew a sigh of relief as he hurried home. Soon he would be with his wife—the wife whom he idolized—the wife who was beginning to return his love. Suppose her passion went on and deepened? Suppose a day came when to part from him would be a sorer trial than poverty or dishonor! Oh, if such a day came—he might—ah, he must not think in that direction. He pushed his hand through his thick hair, leant back in his cab, and shut his eyes.

When he reached the little house in Park-lane he found that the lights in the drawing-room were out, and the gas turned low in the hall. He was later even than he had intended to be. The other theatre goers had returned home and gone to bed. He wondered how they had enjoyed *Captain Swift*. For himself he had not the least idea of what he had been looking at at the Gaiety.

He let himself in with a latch-key, and ran up at once to his room. He wanted to kiss Valentine, to look into her eyes, which seemed to him to grow sweeter and softer every day. He opened the door eagerly and looked round the cheerful bedroom.

Valentine was not there.

He called her. She was not in the dressing room.

"She is with Lilias,' he said to himself. "How these two young things love to chatter."

He sat down in an easy chair by the fire, content to wait until his wife should return. He was half inclined to tell her what he had been doing; he had a great longing to confide in her in all possible ways, for she had both brains and sense, but he restrained himself. The subject was not one he cared to discuss with his young wife, and, besides, the secret belonged to Esther and to her father.

He made up his mind to say nothing about it. He had no conception then what this silence was to cost him, and how different all his future life might have been had he told his wife the truth that night.

Presently Valentine returned. Her face was flushed, and her eyes had an unquiet troubled expression. She had been to Lilias with a somewhat strange request.

"Lilias, I want you to promise me something, to ask no questions, but just like a kind and truthful sister to make me a faithful promise."

"You look strange, Valentine; what do you want me to promise?"

"*Will* you promise it?"

"If I can, I will promise, to please you; but I never make promises in the dark."

"Oh, there's Gerald's step, I must go. Lilias, I've a very particular reason, I cannot explain it to you. I want you not to tell Gerald, now or at any time, that we were at the Gaiety to-night."

"My dear Val, how queer! Why shouldn't poor Gerald know? And you look so strange. You are trembling."

"I am. I'm in desperate earnest. Will you promise?"

"Yes, yes, you silly child, if you set such store on an utterly ridiculous promise you shall have it. Only if I were you, Valentine, I wouldn't begin even to have such tiny little secrets as that from my husband. I wouldn't, Val; it isn't wise—it isn't really."

Valentine neither heard nor heeded these last words. She gave Lilias a hasty, frantic kiss, and rushed back to her own room.

"Now," she said to herself, "now—now—now—if he tells me everything, every single thing, all may be well. I won't ask him a question; but if he tells, tells of his own accord, all may be quite well yet. Oh, how my heart beats! It is good I have not learned to love him any better."

Gerald rose up at her entrance and went to meet her eagerly.

"Ah, here's my bright little wife," he said. "Give me a kiss, Valentine."

She gave it, and allowed him to fold her in his arms. She was almost passive, but her heart beat hard—she was so eagerly waiting for him to speak.

"Sit down by the fire, darling. I don't like long evenings spent away from you, Val. How did you enjoy *Captain Swift*?"

"We didn't go to the Haymarket; no, we are going to-morrow. Father thought it a pity you should miss such a good play."

"Then where did you go? You and Lil did not stay at home the whole evening?"

"No, father took us to another theatre. I can't tell you the name; don't ask me. I hate theatres—I detest them. I never want to go inside one again as long as I live!"

"How strongly you talk, my dear little Val. Perhaps you found it dull to-night because your husband was not with you."

She moved away with a slight little petulant gesture. When would he begin to speak?

CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

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