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THE HEIR OF Lancewood

CHAPTER XLII

"It was easy to deceive my brother. He is a book-worm, a scholar, a good man; but he taken no interest in the world or what is going on in it. Nothing ever surprises him; he is never sorry, never glad. Years ago, when I took the boy to him, he said, 'Is he your son, Gerald?' and, when I man; but has taken no interest in the none. He is unlike everyone else. It was easy to deceive him. I told him that his charge was ended, that the boy was dead, and that he could return home. He asked no question, he made no comment, he returned, and I remained. Vivien, I meant to bring the boy up as my own, and never to tell you; but I found that I could not live. I worked hard to keep him and myself. I spent all my annuity on him. I brought him back to England when I found that I could not live, and he is here; but, Vivien, listen."

She ceased her passionate weeping and looked at him.

"Listen, beloved," he said. "He has changed so completely; he is not the boy he was—cunning, false, undisciplined; our training has done him some good. He is not perfect—far from it—but he is a better boy than he was."

"Where is he?" she asked.

"I placed him in the best school I could find—Dr. Lester's, of Hammersmith. He is there as Henry Dorman. He has wanted for nothing, Vivien—you believe that?"

"Yes," she replied, "I am sure of it. But it was a cruel deception—a cruel kindness—a cruel deed. I would rather have died yesterday than have heard this to-day."

"Still you have been happy, my beloved?"

"Yes, but all my happiness is over now," she replied, with a bitter cry—"all over. I can never be happy again."

"I did it because I loved you, and could not endure to see you suffer. I

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meant, only kindness—only love. I knew that if you believed the boy dead and buried your last scruple would be removed, and you would be happy. I knew that while you believed him living you would never know one moment's peace. Oh, pardon me, my beloved!"

He held out his white, worn hands. "See how I have suffered," he said, sadly. "I was a strong man once, and a good man. See to what my fatal love for you has led me. I have stained my soul by sin, and my strength has left me. I have loved you so that I am dying for you. Now I know what it is to waste one's heart—to garner the whole strength of a soul, and lavish it in vain. Now I say to myself with contrite tears, that I ought to have thought of Heaven as I have thought of you."

"My poor Gerald," she said; "that is a terrible love."

"I know it—it has killed me. I have never had any hope in it. You were proud, stately, beautiful—I was only a poor dependent. I never dreamed of any return; but just as a flower gives its perfume to the sun, gives its all, gives freely, asking no return, so I was willing to live and die for you. I wanted no return. I laid my honor, my truth, my honesty, my very manhood, under your feet. I would have sinned even more deeply to make you happy. I loved you better than myself."

"But, Gerald," she said gently, "why have you told me your secret? I was happy in my ignorance. Why have you not kept your secret to the end?"

The sad dying eyes seemed to fill with a sudden light.

"Because I could not die with it un told. I have lingered on in the agony of death and could not die. You cannot see what I see, beloved. Here by my side stands the grim king, sword in hand. It would not fall until I had told you—until justice was done. I could live in sin—I dared not die in it."

"Still, I cannot see why you should have told me," she moaned, "I was so happy, Gerald."

"Listen, beloved," he said again. "Justice must be done; the boy must go back to Lancewood."

"Never," she cried hastily—"never! All our sin and suffering shall not have been in vain."

"But I say it must be done, Vivien. You must do justice; you must restore the inheritance to the boy."

A sharp spasm of pain passed over his livid face. Lady St. Just laid his hand down on the pillow; she smoothed back the hair from his brow; his face grew more calm again.

"Vivien," he whispered, faintly, "once, long ago, when I was going away from you, you kissed me, and the memory of that moment has never left me. Beloved, kiss me again, for I am dying for you."

She laid her fresh warm lips on his, already growing cold and chill. She saw a strange change come over his face, and she rose hastily and called the nurse.

"I am afraid Mr. Dorman is worse," she said.

The nurse looked at him.

"He is dying, madam," she told her.

He opened his eyes, which were filled with a strange, deep shadow, and fixed them on Vivien's face. She saw his lips move, and bent over him.

"The boy must go back to Lancewood," he said, with labored breath. "Promise me."

She made no answer.

"Promise me," he repeated, and before her answer came Gerald Dorman was dead.

"Very sudden at the last," said the

nurse. "I am afraid it has alarmed you, madam."

Lady St. Just knelt half-crouching on the floor; it was not so much the death of Gerald Dorman that had prostrated her as the story he had told.

"Shall I get anything for you, madam?" inquired the woman, kindly.

Lady St. Just thanked her, but said "No;" then, rising, she looked long on the dead face of the man who had loved her so well.

"He was a faithful friend to our family," she said, slowly. "He was my father's secretary, and my husband shall see that all proper respect is paid to him now."

For, with the quickness of her keen intelligence, she saw that Gerald's death must be made known to her husband. The annuity that had been his would revert to the estate. It would be better to make no mystery of his death. There would be no need "at present" to mention Oswald.

Once more Lady St. Just bent down and touched the dead man's face with her lips.

"Good-bye, Gerald," she said. "You have served me well, you have loved me well—too well for your own happiness and for mine."

Once again she looked at the strange yet familiar face—strange in the marble beauty that was fast spreading over it. He who had loved her so well, had suffered for her, had sinned for her, lay still—he could love and suffer no more.

A rush of tears blinded her eyes. How good he had been to her, this unhappy man!

"He is dead, Joan," she said to her maid as she re-entered the cab, "he is dead."

And Joan never knew that Lady St. Just had seen Gerald Dorman die; she believed that her lady had reached the house too late. She did not feel surprised that Lady St. Just went during the whole of the way home, wept in such hopeless despair, such weariness of heart, Joan thought it very natural she should regret, and regret deeply too, an old devoted friend like Gerald Dorman.

"His lordship will be vexed to see you so put out," said the faithful woman. "Did he know where you were going, my lady? But, no—I am sure, had he known, he would have accompanied you."

"I did not tell him, Joan," she replied. "The letter that came to me was addressed by the doctor, I suppose. Lord St. Just was not in the room when I read it."

She was so proud that she disliked equivocating ever so slightly to this woman. A false word was detestable to her. When she reached home Lord St. Just was absent, and she was thankful there would be time to compose herself before his return. When he did appear she was looking pale and ill, but he did not notice it.

"Adrian," she said, "can you spare me a few minutes? I have something to say to you."

"The dressing-bell has rung, but I am quite at your orders," he replied.

"You remember my father's secretary? You have heard me speak of him very often," she began in a low voice.

"Certainly," said Lord St. Just, in his kindly, genial manner. "Your father left him an annuity, did he not?"

"Yes. I had a letter to-day telling me that he was dying and would like to see me." She spoke in a low, hurried voice, with her face turned from him. "I went. He was dying when I reached the house—he is dead now."

"My darling wife," cried Lord St. Just, "you should not have gone through such a scene."

She did not appear to have heard him. After a brief silence she continued:

"It was a great surprise to me. I did not even know that he had returned to England."

"It will be a great trouble to you also, Vivien. He was a faithful friend, I believe."

"Too faithful," she said to herself, with a deep-drawn, bitter sigh. But for his readiness to sacrifice himself for her, but for his wonderful love and fidelity, she would not be in her present terrible position.

"It is getting late, Vivien," said Lord St. Just, suddenly. "You are forgetting our dinner-party, darling. You must go and dress." Then, struck by her dreamy, abstracted

expression, he hastened to add: "Is there anything you wish me to do in this matter?"

"Yes," she replied. "Poor Gerald Dorman had but one relative, a brother, and he is in Rouen. I want you, Adrian, to see that Gerald has a fitting funeral."

"I will attend to it myself," said the generous nobleman. "I will go myself as chief mourner; that will please you, Vivien."

Slowly and sadly she raised her pale face to his and kissed him.

"You are always good to me," she said—"always kind."

"My peerless Vivien, who would be anything else? It is hard on you, darling. I know that you are grieved about this; it is a loss to you. No new friends can ever take the place of the old. It is hard on you; but, if you can try to be yourself to-night, and amuse our guests as you usually do, I shall be glad; nevertheless, if you would rather not come down to dinner, I will make all excuses for you."

"I will come," she said; "and you will see that all due respect is paid to my father's old friend and secretary?"

"I will, my darling," and kissing her pale face more warmly than usual, Lord St. Just hastened away.

CHAPTER XLIII

"I shall have to live with the knowledge through all the future," Lady St. Just thought to herself; "I may just as well begin my task now."

Yet she had some terrible duties for anxiety; one was, would anything compromising to her be found in Gerald's papers? She tried to reassure herself that she loved her too well to be careless in any matter affecting her. Yet, for the next two days, the proud, beautiful woman suffered a very martyrdom of suspense. Every ring at the bell, every knock at the door, every unusual sound, every strange footstep started her, and at last Lord St. Just began to fear that she must be ill, and to wonder what was the matter with her. It was a sore and terrible trial of her nerves. She did not dare to go again to Gerald's lodgings, lest her doing so would excite wonder and comment. The day of poor Gerald's funeral came, and every one who had known his connection with the family thought that Lord St. Just acted kindly and courteously in following. It was a fitting mark of attention. The kindly nobleman himself had taken care that the ceremony should be one befitting a friend of the Nesles. Gerald's brother did not attend; the engagement that he had in Rouen would not allow him. So poor Gerald was laid to rest, and Lord St. Just ordered a marble monument that was to tell his name and his age.

He was sorry for the hapless secretary.

(To be Continued.)

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