

She wrung her hands, but no murmur passed her lips, save that it was her fault—all her fault—the price of her sin.

"Vano," she said, "you must not tell Lady Darrell what you came to ask me. She must know that you are here only to say good-by. I would rather keep her in ignorance; she will be the happier for not knowing."

Was ever anything seen like that love and that sorrow—the love of two noble souls, two noble hearts, and the sorrow that parting more bitter than death brought upon them? Even Miss Hastings did not know until long after Sir Vano was gone of the sacrifice Pauline had made in the brave endeavour to atone for her sin.

She never forgot the agony of that parting—how Sir Vano stood before them, pale, worn, and sad, impressing one thing on them all—care for his darling. Even to Lady Darrell, the frail, delicate invalid, whose feeble stock of strength seemed to be derived from Pauline, he gave many charges.

"It will be so long before I see her again," he said; "but you will keep her safely for me."

"I almost wonder," said Lady Darrell, "why you do not ask Pauline to accompany you, Sir Vano. For my own sake, I am most selfishly glad that you have not done so—I should soon die without her."

They looked at each other, the two who were giving up so much for her, but spoke no word.

Sir Vano was obliged to return to London that same day. He spoke of seeing Pauline again, but she objected—it would only be a renewal of most bitter and hopeless sorrow. So they bade each other farewell under the lime-trees. The bitter yet sweet memory of it lasted them for life.

Miss Hastings understood somewhat of the pain it would cause, but, with her gentle consideration, she thought it best to leave Pauline for a time. Hours afterward she went in search of her, and found her under the limes, weeping and moaning for the atonement she had made for her sin.

### CHAPTER XLIII.

#### LADY DARRELL'S WILL.

Two years passed away, and Sir Vano St. Lawrence's circumstances were rapidly improving; his letters were constant and cheerful—he spoke always of the time when he should come home and claim Pauline for his wife. She only sighed as she read the hopeful words, for she had resolved that duty should be her watch-word while Lady Darrell lived—even should the frail, feeble life last for fifty years, she would never leave her.

There came to her chill doubts and fears, dim, vague forebodings that she should never see Vano again—that their last parting was forever; not that she doubted him, but that it seemed hopeless to think he would wait until her hair was gray, and the light of her youth had left her.

Never mind—she had done her duty; she had sinned, but she had made the noblest atonement possible for her sin.

Two years had passed, and the summer was drawing to a close. To those who loved and tended her it seemed that Lady Darrell's life was closing with it. Even Lady Hampton had ceased to speak hopefully, and Darrell Court was gloomy with the shadow of the angel of death.

There came an evening when earth was very lovely—when the gold of the setting sun, the breath of the western wind, the fragrance of the flowers, the ripple of the fountains, the song of the birds, were all beautiful beyond words to tell; and Lady Darrell, who had lain watching the smiling summer heavens, said:

"I should like once more to see the sun set, Pauline. I should like to sit at the window, and watch the moon rise."

"So you shall," responded Pauline. "You are a fairy queen. You have but to wish, and the wish is granted."

Lady Darrell smiled—no one ever made her smile except Pauline; but the fulfillment of the wish was not so easy after all. Lady Hampton's foreboding was realized. Lady Darrell might have recovered from her long, serious illness but that her mother's complaint, the deadly inheritance of consumption, had seized upon her and was gradually destroying her.

It was no easy matter now to dress the wasted figure; but Pauline seemed to have the strength, the energy of twenty nurses. She was always willing, always cheerful, always ready; night and day seemed alike to her; she would look at her hands, and say:

"Oh! Elinor, I wish I could give you one half my strength—one half my life!"

"Do you? Pauline, if you could give me half your life, would you do so?"

"As willingly as I am now speaking to you," she would answer.

They dressed the poor lady, whose delicate beauty had faded like some summer flower. She sat in the window in a soft nest of cushions which Pauline had prepared for her, her wasted hands folded, her worn face brightened with the summer sunshine. She was very silent and thoughtful for some time, and then Pauline, fearing that she was dull, knelt in the fashion that was usual to her at Lady Darrell's feet, and held the wasted hands in hers.

"What are you thinking about, Elinor?" she asked. "something as bright as the sun shine?"

Lady Darrell smiled.

"I was just fancying to myself that every blossom of that white magnolia seemed like a finger beckoning me away," she said; "and I was thinking also how full of mistakes life is, and how plainly they can be seen when we come to die."

Pauline kissed the thin fingers. Lady Darrell went on.

"I can see my own great mistake, Pauline. I should not have married Sir Oswald. I had no love for him—not the least in the world; I married him only for position and fortune. I should have taken your warning, and not have come between your uncle and you."

(To be Continued.)

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