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**LADY JANE.**

**CHAPTER XXX.**

**AT MRS. LANIER'S**

It was a few days before the following Christmas, and Mrs. Lanier, who had just returned from Washington, was sitting alone one evening in her own pretty little parlor, when a servant handed her a card.

"Arthur Maynard," she said. "Let him come up at once," and as the servant led the room she added to herself: "Dear boy! I'm so glad he's come for Christmas."

In a moment a handsome young fellow was in the room, shaking hands in the most cordial way. "You see I'm home, as usual, for the holidays, Mrs. Lanier," he said, showing a row of very white teeth when he laughed.

"Yes, you always do come for Christmas and Mardi-gras, don't you? You're such a boy still, Arthur," and Mrs. Lanier looked at him as if she approved of his boyishness.

"Sit down and let us have a long chat. The children have gone to the theater with Mr. Lanier. I was too tired to go with them. You know we reached home only this morning."

"No. I didn't know that or I wouldn't have come. You don't want to be bothered with me when you're so tired," said Arthur, rising.

"Nonsense, Arthur; sit down. You always cheer me up. You're so full of life and spirits, I'm really glad to see you."

While Mrs. Lanier was speaking, the young fellow's bright, clear eyes were traveling about the room, and glancing at everything, pictures, bric-a-brac, and flowers.

Suddenly he uttered an exclamation, and springing up, seized a photograph in a velvet frame that stood on a cabinet near him.

It represented a family group, father, mother, and child; and for a moment he seemed so surprised to speak. Then he asked in a very excited tone, "Mrs. Lanier where did you get this—and who is the lady?"

"She is a friend of mine," said Mrs. Lanier, much surprised. "Why do you ask—have you ever seen her?"

"Yes, yes; and I have a copy of this picture. It is such a strange story; but first, before I say a word, please tell me who she is, and all about her."

"Why, Arthur, you seem greatly interested," returned Mrs. Lanier, with a smile. "The lady is my dear friend, Jane Chetwynd. We were classmates at board-school in New York; her father is the rich Mr. Chetwynd. You have heard of him, have you not?"

"Yes, indeed; but please go on," said Arthur, leaning forward.

"Do you want all the history?" "Everything, please. I've a serious reason for wanting to know all about the originals of this photograph."

"Well, the gentleman is Jane's husband, Mr. Churchill, an Englishman, and the little girl is 'Lady Jane,' their only child. There's quite a romance connected with Jane's history, and I'm just now foundering in a sea of darkness in regard to that same Jane Chetwynd."

"If you please, go on, and perhaps I can help you out," urged the young man, eagerly and abruptly.

"Well, as it's a subject I'm greatly interested in, I don't mind telling you the whole story. Jane Chetwynd was the only daughter; her mother died when she was a child. Jane was her father's idol; he had great plans for her, and when she was only eighteen he hoped she would marry one of the rich Bindervilles. Jane, however, married a young Englishman who was in her father's employ.

The young man was handsome, as you can see by his picture, well born, and well educated; but he was unknown and poor. To Richard Chetwynd that was unpardonable, and therefore he disowned Jane—cut her off entirely, refused to see her, or even allow her name to be mentioned.

"A cousin of Mr. Churchill, who lived in England, owned a fine ranch in Texas, and there the young couple went to pass their honeymoon. They were delighted with the ranch, and decided to make it a permanent home. Their little girl was born there, and was named for her mother. On account of some dainty little ways, and to avoid confusion, her father called her Lady Jane.

she should direct, after she reached New York; he had since received no instructions, and the property was still lying there.

"Then I wrote directly to New York to a friend with the Chetwynds, for some information about Jane; but she could tell nothing more than the newspapers told me, that Richard Chetwynd had gone abroad, to remain some years. Of Jane I could not hear a word.

"Sometimes I think she may have followed her father to Europe, and that they are reconciled and living there together. But why does she not write to me—to the friend whom she always loved so dearly?"

"Then there is another thing that has worried me no little, although in itself it is a trifle. When we were at school together I had a little birthday gift made at Tiffany's for Jane, a silver jewel-box, engraved with the design myself, and the design for the monogram also. About a year ago I found that very box for sale at Madame Hortense's, on Canal Street.

When I asked Hortense where she got it, she told me that it was left with her to sell by a woman who lived down town on Good Children Street, and she gave me the name and the address; but when I went there a day or two afterwards the woman had gone,—left mysteriously in the night, and none of the neighbors could tell where she went.

Of course the woman's sudden disappearance made me feel that there was something wrong about her, and I can't help thinking that she got the little box dishonestly. It may have been stolen, either in Texas or in New York, and finally drifted here for sale. I got possession of it at once, very thankful that such a precious relic of my girlhood should have accidentally fallen into my hands; but every time I look at it I feel that it is a key which might unlock a mystery if only I knew how to use it."

All the while Mrs. Lanier was speaking, Arthur Maynard followed every word with bright, questioning eyes and eager, intense interest. Sometimes he seemed about to interrupt her; then he closed his lips firmly and continued to listen.

Mrs. Lanier was looking at him inquiringly, and when he waited as if to hear more she said: "I have told you all. Now what have you to tell me?"

"Something quite as strange as anything you have told me," replied Arthur Maynard, with an enigmatical air. "You must not think you're the only one with a mystery worthy of the skill of a Parisian detective. If I had any such talent I might make myself famous, with your clues and my clues together."

"What in the world do you mean, Arthur? What do you know?—for pity's sake, tell me! You can't think how Jane Chetwynd's long silence distresses me."

"Fool that I was!" cried the young fellow, jumping up and pacing the room with a half-tragic air. "If I had not been an idiot—a simpleton—a gossamer—I'd had a spark of sense. I could have brought that same Jane Chetwynd, and the adorable little Lady Jane, straight to your door. Instead of that, I let them get off the train at Gaeta alone when it was nearly dark, and—Heaven only knows what has happened to them!"

"Arthur Maynard, what do you mean?" asked Mrs. Lanier, rising to her feet, pale and trembling. "When—where—where is she now—where is Jane Chetwynd?"

"I wish I knew. I'm as wretched and anxious as you are, Mrs. Lanier, and what has happened to-day has quite upset me; but I must tell you my story, as you have told yours."

And then, while Mrs. Lanier listened with clasped hands and intent gaze, Arthur Maynard told of the meeting with Lady Jane and her mother on the train, of the gift of "Tony," the blue heron, and of the separation at Gaeta.

"Oh Arthur, why—why did you not go with them and bring them to me? She was a stranger, and she didn't know the way, and your being our friend and all."

"My dear Mrs. Lanier, she never mentioned your name, or number. How could I guess you were the friend to whom she was going? and I didn't want to seem presuming."

"But where did she go? She never came here!" "Wait till I tell you the rest, and then we will discuss that. I stood on the platform until the train started, and watched them walking toward the ferry, the mother very feebly, and the child skipping along with the little basket, delighted with her new possession; then I went back to my seat, angry enough at myself because I was not with them, when what should I see on the floor, under their seat, but a book they had left. I have it now, and I'll bring it to you tomorrow; inside of the book was a photograph—a duplicate of this, and on the fly-leaf was written 'Jane Chetwynd.'"

"I thought so! I know it was Jane!" exclaimed Mrs. Lanier excitedly. "But she never came here. Where could she have gone?"

"That's the mystery. She may have changed her mind and gone to a hotel, or something may have happened to her. I don't know. I don't like to think of it! However, the next day I advertised the book, and advertised it for a week; but it was never claimed, and from that day to this I've never been able to

discover either the mother or the child."

"How strange, how very strange!" said Mrs. Lanier, greatly troubled. "Why should she have changed her mind so suddenly? If she started to come to me, why didn't she come? The only reasonable solution to the problem is that she changed her mind and went on to New York by the night-train. She evidently did not go to a hotel, for I have looked over all the hotel registers of that time, and her name does not appear on any of them. So far there is nothing very mysterious; she might have taken the night-train."

"Oh, Arthur, she probably did. Why do you say she might have?"

"Because you see I have a sequel to my story. You had a sequel to yours, a sequel of a box. Mine is a sequel of a bird—the blue heron I gave the little Lady Jane. I bought that same blue heron from a bird-fancier on Charter Street this very morning."

"How can you be sure that it is the same bird, Arthur? How can you be sure?"

"Because it was marked in a peculiar way. It had three distinct black crosses on one wing. I knew the rogue as soon as I saw him, although he has grown twice the size, and—would you believe it?—he has the same leather band on his leg that I sewed on more than two years ago."

"And you found where the fancier bought him?" asked Mrs. Lanier breathlessly.

"Of course I asked, the first thing, and all the information I could get from the merchant was that he bought him from an Italian a few days before, who was very anxious to sell him. When I called the bird by his name, Tony, he recognized it instantly. So you see that he has always been called by that name."

"The child must have lost him, or he must have been stolen. Then the box, the jewel-box here too. Good heavens! Arthur, what can it mean?"

"It means that Mrs. Churchill never left New Orleans," said Arthur decidedly.

"My dear Arthur, you alarm me!" cried Mrs. Lanier; "there is something dreadful behind all this. Go on, and tell me everything you know."

"Well, after I bought the bird, and while I was writing my address for the man to send him home, a funny little old Frenchman came in, and suddenly pounced on Tony, and began to jabber in the most absurd way. I thought he was crazy at first; but after a while I made him understand that the heron belonged to me; and when I had calmed him down somewhat I gathered from his remarks that this identical blue heron had been the property of 'one leetle lady,' who formerly lived on Good Children Street."

"Good Children Street," interrupted Mrs. Lanier; "what a remarkable coincidence!"

"That the bird had been lost, and that he had searched everywhere to find it for the 'leetle lady.' Then I asked him for a description of the 'leetle lady.' And, as I live, Mrs. Lanier, he described that child to the life,—and Arthur Maynard pointed to the photograph as he spoke.

"Oh, Arthur, can it be that Jane Chetwynd is dead? What else can it mean? Where is the child? I must see her. Will you go with me to Good Children Street early to-morrow?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Lanier. But she is not there; the old man told me a long story of a Madame Jozain, who ran away with the child."

"Madame Jozain!" cried Mrs. Lanier excitedly—"the same woman who had the jewel box?"

"Evidently the same, and we are on her track—or we should be, if she were alive; but unfortunately she's dead. The little Frenchman says so, and the child is now in Margaret's Orphans' Home."

TO BE CONTINUED.

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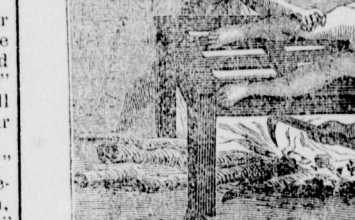
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