



MAGIC BAKING POWDER
THE HEIR OF Lancewood

CHAPTER XLIX.

"I will tell you," she replied, "because it will be better for you to hear it from me than from any one else. That boy is Sir Oswald Neslie, heir of Lancewood."

Lord St. Just started; it seemed to him for a moment that he had been shot through the heart. Then he said in a low voice—

"Oswald Neslie? I thought he was dead!"

"So did I—so did every one else—but he is living and well."

"Stay," said Lord St. Just. "You have taken me by surprise; I am bewildered—lost—I cannot believe it. The heir of Lancewood! Great Heaven, Vivien, what does it all mean? Did you know that he was living? Tell me."

"I will tell you all," she replied. And, standing there, erect and queenly, more beautiful in her pallor and her shame than he had ever seen her, Lady St. Just told the whole story. He listened to it, his face grew white. When it was finished he looked at her.

"May Heaven forgive you," he said, slowly.

"I did not mean it to be done, Adrian. When I spoke to Gerald Dorman as I did, I was bewildered, driven half mad by all that was going on at Lancewood. I hardly thought that he would take me at my word so quickly. Believe me, I honestly thought the child was drowned."

"You might have thought so when such was reported to be the case—but afterward, Vivien, when you knew all!"

"Then I sinned more willfully, more deliberately than at first. I have not been happy, Adrian. Sin has not prospered with me. Yet I have not looked upon it as a sin so much as a deed done for the good of Lancewood. People may say what they will, the son of a strolling player has no right there."

"You seem to forget yourself," said Lord St. Just, gravely. "The boy may be the son of a strolling player, but he is also the son of your father, Sir Arthur Neslie."

"But he resembled his mother," she cried eagerly; "even his face was like hers in those days—he was like her, too, in character then. Gerald Dorman's training has doubtless done much for him. Believe me, I never thought of him as my father's son. To me he was always Valerie's boy, an interloper, the evil genius of Lancewood. I had many excuses—the place was getting into evil odor every where—it would have gone to ruin in his hands. I loved my home so dearly, Adrian—you cannot enter into my feelings."

"I can imagine the depth of your love from the gravity of your sin," he said. Then he took her hands in his. He looked at them long and steadily.

"What have you done, little hands?" he said, "with the honor intrusted to you?"

CHAPTER L.

Lord St. Just was literally overwhelmed. He was not a hard or stern man—he was lenient, merciful, considerate. He could make excuses and allowances; he was slow to condemn. But his wife's confession horrified him—he could not recover from the

impression that it had made upon him—he could not realize it; that the noble lady he had worshipped as the pattern of all womanhood had been guilty of what she had revealed was to him incredible. Still he could make allowance for it. For her passionate love of home, for her intense pride in it, for her horror of all desecration of it, for her dislike of the gay French woman and her friends, for her dread of seeing the fine old place ruined, he could allow, but he could not understand, how so noble a woman could have erred so terribly.

"What have you done, my darling," he said, sadly, "with the honor intrusted to your keeping?"

"I have sinned to preserve it," she replied.

"And in sinning you have lost it," he said. "The deed you have done brings greater shame to the Neslies than all Valerie's gayeties, low friends, and dissipation. You have betrayed your father's trust, Vivien; you have tarnished the honor of your house far more than Valerie ever did. You have held Lancewood by fraud, which is what no Neslie ever did before; you have, in plain and simple language, committed a gigantic theft, for which the law could punish you most terribly. You have defrauded an innocent child of his rights. You have taken advantage of the fact that he was fatherless—in plain words again—rob him. Strip your story of all false sentiment, of all sophistry, and the fact lies before you that you stole Lancewood from a child. Family pride, love of race, will not hide or extenuate such wickedness."

He spoke gravely, sternly, and every word seemed to fall like fire on her heart. She saw her sin stripped of all sentiment; she stood face to face with it now for the first time—for the first time she saw that it really was a base, cruel fraud on a helpless child. Before this she had looked upon herself rather as a victim; now she saw the base, horrible nature of her wickedness, and Vivien St. Just cried out with terror.

"I must undo it all, Adrian!" she exclaimed. "I must undo it all—at once." He must go back.

"Thank Heaven," said Lord St. Just, "that I hear you say so. Yes, my darling he must go back at once."

He saw her kneel down and bury her face in her hands while she wept aloud; he heard her murmur words of little Arthur—little Arthur and Lancewood. He knew how terrible the ordeal was for her. His eyes grew dim with tears as he remembered her passionate pride in and worship of the boy who was to have been Arthur Neslie of Lancewood.

"You have sinned greatly," he said, "and your atonement must be complete. It must be speedy and entire, Vivien; the boy must go back without loss of time."

All her pride had left her now, she had sunk sobbing on her knees; she was no heroine, but a criminal; her head was bent in lowly self-abasement, in lowly contrition.

"It is all over, my little boy," she said—"all over."

She kissed him as some mothers kiss a dead child in a perfect passion of grief; tears fell from her eyes on to his brown curls and upturned little face.

"It is all over, my darling," she said.

He would never be heir of Lancewood—this child for whom she had formed such proud hopes.

"Mamma," said the little one with solemn upturned face, "why do you cry so? Am I going to die?"

"No, my darling," she replied, and then she tried to compose herself.

"Is anyone going to die?" he asked again.

"No, dear child," she answered; and she thought to herself there were troubles greater than death.

She parted the soft, shining curls on his forehead. What a lovely face it was—so noble, so fair! What a noble lord and master he would have made for Lancewood! It was all over; the home she had fought for, struggled for, sinned and suffered for, would be the prey of the spoilers once again, and she could not help it.

That same evening, after all their visitors had left them, Lord St. Just

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Lord St. Just sat still, wrapped in thought. The sound of the gong striking for luncheon recalled him to every-day life. He went to his wife and kissed her fondly.

"Vivien," he said gently, "you must rouse yourself—we have to live our lives, dear. We must eat, drink, sleep, walk, talk, no matter what we suffer, what we endure. Raise your face to mine, darling wife."

She looked at him with weeping eyes.

"I do not make light of your error, my wife," he said; "it was a terrible one. But you are ready to undo it, ready to atone for it. I can enter into your feelings—I know how you loved your home—but, my darling, I cannot understand your sin. What I want to say to you is this—you shall not repent of your trust in me. I will take the whole matter in hand—I will so arrange it that, while the young heir shall be restored to Lancewood, you shall be screened. Your share in the transaction shall never be known. You will trust me to accomplish this?"

"Yes," she said, and, raising her face to his, she went on: "You are too kind to me, Adrian. I am all unworthy; I do not deserve it."

But he answered—

"My darling, you are still on your throne—the queen of all womankind for me. There is no creature living who has not done wrong, who has not yielded to temptation, who has not sinned more or less gone astray. Your sin was, after all, a kind of virtue gone to seed—an intense pride in your name, family, and race; it had its origin in what is really a virtue. It was not of the common order of sin, although, my darling, it was the sin of a life-time. Now, we must go back to the duties of life; they will be all the better fulfilled since we have resolved upon doing right, cost what it may. I will tell you this evening all that I have arranged to do."

But Lady St. Just did not go to her room to dress; he saw her go to the nursery—and he followed her, lest in the madness of her misery she should say something of which she would afterwards repent.

He need not have feared. Nurses and children looked up surprised when she entered, looking so pale and stately. She dismissed the servants, and then took the child Arthur in her arms.

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MINARD'S LINIMENT CURES DYPHTHERIA.

told his wife what he had decided upon.

"To begin with," he said, "it would be advisable, before taking any steps to install Oswald as heir of Lancewood, to study the boy for a time, to see what he is like before placing so magnificent a fortune in his hands—not that there should be any unnecessary delay in making him master of Lancewood, but that it would be well to note his tastes and habits, so as to know better how to deal with him."

"What I propose," continued Lord St. Just, "is this. We are going to King's Rest; let us ask him, as your visitor, to go with us—to spend, we will say, the summer vacation. Do you agree to that?"

"Yes," she answered.

"Then," went on Lord St. Just, "when he is at King's Rest, and free from all school restraint, we can watch him, we can talk to him, we can give him some valuable lessons, we can teach him the respect and reverence that is due to the name of Neslie; and, when he is quite imbued with our sentiments, we can tell him the truth."

"How much shall you tell him?" asked Vivien.

"As little as possible," replied Lord St. Just. "I shall write to his mother, telling her that the boy has been restored to us by the people who stole him. I shall send a statement to all the leading newspapers that the child was stolen, not drowned, and that he is now restored to his relatives. The affair will excite comment, no doubt; but it will only be a nine days' wonder, and then it will die away."

"But Valerie will want to know more."

"I shall refuse to tell her more. I do not think she will care; much of her interest in Lancewood has died, she is the Comtesse de Caloux. Indeed, I believe she will be so pleased to come back again that she will ask few questions."

"But the world—the world!" sighed Lady St. Just. "I fear we shall not escape slander."

"The world will say but little about the matter, managed as I shall manage it. There will be a little wonder, a little talk, and then all will be forgotten. Of one thing you may rest assured, Vivien—the world will never attribute to you any share in the abduction; the fact that the restoration of the young Sir Oswald deprives our son of the estate will exonerate you even in the minds of the most suspicious."

She turned to him and placed her hands on his shoulder.

"Our own son," she said, "our little Arthur—what shall we say to him if he asks you in the future about this?"

"My dear Vivien, there is a question of greater importance still. What shall we say to the Great Judge if we permit this injustice to go on?"

"You are always right, Adrian," she said, her hands falling listlessly by her side.

(To be Continued.)

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