

# POOR DOCUMENT

## 'LADY ALICE.'

Continued.

'For gold or diamonds,' the girl answered significantly.

Dame Burden took no notice of the remark. She was leaning over the white face on the pillow.

'She is waking,' she whispered.

Myra leaned against the stone wall and watched Alice with a dull, resentful glow in her black eyes. The wonderful glow of the golden hair, the delicate white skin, and graceful limbs filled her with a tumult of maddening pain and jealousy.

'She lies as easily as she drinks,' Myra mused moodily, as she glanced at Dame Burden. 'She thinks to deceive me as if my ears were deaf when George returned. She is my own mother, and yet she tortures me and tells me that the promise of diamonds is more to her than my peace and happiness. What has she brought this girl here for, with her white skin and beautiful face? He is tired of me. Yes, I know it; but I did not think he would have shown it so plainly or so cruelly. It is like his old selfish nature to give to me pain; but I won't stand it for long. She shall be in my power; if she does not love me, I will torture her till she dies.'

Alice was moaning now; her hands, burning as with fever, were thrown out on either side, her throat was parched, her head swimming.

'Water! water! water!' she murmured.

Dame Burden hastily lifted her head, and put the glass to her lips. Alice drank eagerly, and shut her eyes with a sigh of thankfulness.

Her senses were returning; she struggled from the old woman's arm, and half raised herself; her eyes opened again, and wandered round the room in amazement.

'Where am I? Where am I?' she murmured. 'Davis! Davis! Am you there?'

Dame Burden drew back quietly; Alice raised herself, and passed her hand over her eyes.

'Am I asleep, Davis? What place is this? It is all strange. I must be—'

She turned, and her eyes rested on Myra's figure drawn up defiantly, resting against the wall; she uttered a slight shriek.

'Who are you?' she whispered fearfully, the clouds rolling from her brain, and a great terrible dread creeping into her heart.

'Where am I?'

'You are with friends,' Myra said clearly and quietly.

The sound of the girl's voice broke the last traces of dreamland. Alice pressed her hands to her beating heart, and looked round in terror.

'What place was this? Where was her dainty bed, her light airy room? Where was the window and Davis? Who was this girl, and who was that woman? She crouched down on the bed, trembling in every limb; her lips began to scream, but the sound seemed frozen in her throat.

'You are quite safe, dear; lie down and rest a while. Myra, go away; don't you see you frighten her. He will—I mean Paul—will be angry.'

'I don't mind Paul's anger. Frightened, is she? I'm sorry for her, but that will wear off; she will see a good deal of me, and she'll get used to me in time, perhaps.'

Alice was still crouched on the bed; she did not understand the words, she was in a state of bewilderment, but something in the malignant tone roused her. She realized at once some terrible event had occurred to her; she could not grasp the full horror of that moment, but she vaguely understood that she was in some strange horrible place, separated from all she knew, and the fear in her breast had almost become madness. She staggered from the couch and fell at Myra's feet.

'Oh, have pity, help me! I am murmured piteously. 'I don't know what has happened to me. I can remember nothing clearly. I seem to have been asleep, but I feel—I am sure—something terrible has come. I am frightened of this gloomy place—it is strange. Oh, help me to get away! You are a woman—you will understand. I don't know where I am, but let me get out—breathe the air, and I shall feel better. You—will you help me?'

'Come, come,' broke in Dame Burden, trying to lift her from her knees. 'You must lie down again and go to sleep. You will be ill.'

Alice clung to Myra; she pushed the old woman away with a shudder.

'Oh, have pity, help me! I am afraid. I cannot tell what has come to me; but it is hideous, it is terrible. Take me away, carry me out into the air. Oh, help me, for Heaven's sake!'

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Alice looked round eagerly, while Myra folded her arms and fixed her glance like a hawk on the form entering through the curtains. She saw the frown gather on the countess's face as he saw her, but made no sign.

He advanced towards Alice with outstretched hands. She rose from her knees; her face was white, her hands clasped to her heart. She gazed at the count with a look of deadly horror. He did not see it, but placed his hand on her arm.

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The count laughed.

'Well, well, it's nothing to me; but what about the diamonds, George?' the old woman asked eagerly.

'Paul is bringing them. Here he is!'

Paul Rose entered as he spoke, carrying the case containing the Darrell diamonds.

'Hallo, mother! he said jocularly, 'all alone? Where's Myra and Sam?'

'Myra is there, Dame Burden replied, nodding her head in the direction of the inner chamber. 'Sam's out doing his duty.'

Paul laughed.

'Where is it?' asked the count abruptly, 'scouting round the Grange, a place about five miles from her, belonging to a man named Armitstead they say he has a pile of plate worth a small fortune.'

'Armitstead?' mused Paul. 'Rose with a dark look; 'he must beware; Geoffrey Armitstead is dangerous.'

'Do you know him?' the count asked as he opened the case and drew out the diamonds.

'I hate him!' muttered Paul; 'he has tracked me down all my life, curse him!'

'Well, you shall help to rid him of his plate as a revenge,' laughed Count Jura. Paul looked up quickly.

'I will not have a finger in that job, George, so I tell you. It would mean danger, perhaps discovery.'

'I am not afraid, my dear Paul, if you can get me into the Grange, I will join in the game at the Grange. I command you.'

'Paul muttered an oath and flung himself down on a pile of rug, and was silent while the count spread the glittering gems before the eager eyes of Dame Burden.

'Here,' he said, picking out a ring that blazed like a star, 'here's your share, Burden. Paul, what will you have?'

'Nothing, my dear; give me the case,' the count glanced toward.

Paul, you are growing cowardly. Well, take the case. I keep diamonds, and you know what to do with them, George?'

asked Dame Burden, holding out her hand and watching the jewels flash in the light.

'Take them abroad and dispose of them where the count answered shortly.

Myra was leaning against the rough plank that formed a door between the two rooms.

'Take them abroad? I she whispered to herself. 'He is going away and takes her with him. Coward! He forgets me!'

She moved back to the bed on which she had placed Alice. The fainting-fit had passed, but the poor girl lay in a state of coma. She knew nothing.

'How beautiful she is!' mused the unhappy Myra; 'fair as a lily. He loves her—all the love I gave him he treats under-look. He remembers nothing now—that he fooled me and won my heart with his pleading. It is all gone—all my pride, my honor, my peace of mind and happiness. And she—what will become of her?'

'I come, come,' broke in Dame Burden, trying to lift her from her knees. 'You must lie down again and go to sleep. You will be ill.'

Alice clung to Myra; she pushed the old woman away with a shudder.

'Oh, have pity, help me! I am afraid. I cannot tell what has come to me; but it is hideous, it is terrible. Take me away, carry me out into the air. Oh, help me, for Heaven's sake!'

Myra stooped, her face reddened; this girl was no willing accomplice. The next moment she had pushed aside her mother and carried Alice across the vault to the other door, had not sounds of steps outside stopped her. Her expression changed.

'Here is someone coming who can help you, perhaps. I can't plead to him,' she said roughly.

Alice looked round eagerly, while Myra folded her arms and fixed her glance like a hawk on the form entering through the curtains. She saw the frown gather on the countess's face as he saw her, but made no sign.

He advanced towards Alice with outstretched hands. She rose from her knees; her face was white, her hands clasped to her heart. She gazed at the count with a look of deadly horror. He did not see it, but placed his hand on her arm.

'You are ill; rest here for a while. You will—'

'Don't touch me,' gasped the girl, her brain reeling. 'You—you—Oh, God! What terrible thing has happened to me!'

There was a confused sound in her throat, she made a faint movement with her hands, and the next instant Alice would have fallen to the ground in a swoon, but in two strides Myra left the wall, and had clasped her in her arms before the count could touch her.

'Leave her to me, George,' she said softly, yet to a well-timed ear her voice sounded stifled. 'I will take her to my room. You don't understand women.'

'I will carry her,' interposed George hastily.

But she shook her head, and lifting Alice in her arms moved away as though the inanimate girl were but a feather-weight.

The count stood watching her as she walked away, and could not repress a feeling of admiration for her graceful muscular figure and wonderful strength and ease. He turned to the old woman as she disappeared.

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