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LOVE'S MAGIC CHARM.

(Continued.)

Such was Elinor Darrell; and she entered the drawing-room now with that soft, gliding movement that seemed always to irritate Pauline. She drew a costly white lace shawl over her fair shoulders—the rich dress of silver and white was studded with pearls. She looked like a fairy vision. "I think," she said to Miss Hastings, in her quiet calm way, "that the evening is cold."

"You have just left a warm country, Lady Darrell," was the gentle reply. "The South of France is blessed with one of the most beautiful climates in the world."

"It was very pleasant," said Lady Darrell, with a dreamy little sigh. "You have been very quiet, I suppose? We must try to create a little more gaiety for you."

She looked anxiously across the room at Pauline, but that young lady's attention was entirely engrossed by the crimson flowers of the beautiful plant. Not one line of the superb figure, not one expression of the proud face, was lost upon Lady Darrell.

"I have been saying to Sir Oswald," she continued, looking intently at the costly rings shining on her fingers, "that youth likes gaiety—we must have a series of parties and balls."

"Is she beginning to patronize me?" thought Pauline.

She smiled to herself—a peculiar smile which Lady Darrell happened to catch, and which made her feel very uncomfortable—and then an awkward silence fell over them, only broken by the entrance of Sir Oswald, and the announcement that dinner was served.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A RICH GIFT DECLINED.

The bride's first dinner at home was over, and had been a great success. Lady Darrell had not evinced the least emotion; she had married for her present social position—for a fine house, troops of servants, beautiful, warm, fragrant rooms, choice wines, and luxurious living; it was only part and parcel of what she expected, and intended to have. She took the chair of state provided for her, and by the perfect ease and grace of her manner proved that she was well fitted for it.

Sir Oswald watched her with keen delight, only regretting that years ago he had not taken unto himself a wife. He was most courtly, most deferential, most attentive. If Lady Darrell did occasionally feel weary, and the memory of Aubrey Langton's face rose between her and her husband, she made no sign.

When the three ladies withdrew, she made no further efforts to conciliate Pauline. She looked at her, but seemed almost afraid to speak. Then she opened a conversation with Miss Hastings, and the two persevered in their amiable small-talk until Pauline rose and went to the piano, the scornful glance on her face deepening.

"This is making one's self amiable!" she thought. "What a blessing it would be if people would speak only when they had something sensible to say!"

She sat down before the piano, but suddenly remembered that she had not been asked to do so, and that she was no longer mistress of the house—a reflection sufficiently galling to make her rise quickly, and go to the other end of the room.

"Pauline," said Lady Darrell, "pray sing for us. Miss Hastings tells me you have a magnificent voice."

"Have I? Miss Hastings is not so complimentary when she speaks to me alone."

Then a sudden resolution came to Lady Darrell. She rose from her seat,

and, with the rich robe of silver and white sweeping around her, she went to the end of the room where Pauline was standing, tall, stately, and statue-like, turning over the leaves of a book. The contrast between the two girls—the delicate beauty of the one, and the grand loveliness of the other—was never more strangely marked.

Lady Darrell laid her white hand, shining with jewels, on Pauline's arm. She looked up into her proud face.

"Pauline," she said gently, "will you not be friends? We have to live together—will you be friends?"

"No!" replied Miss Darrell, in her clear frank voice. "I gave you warning. You paid no heed to it. We shall never be friends."

A faint smile played round Lady Darrell's lips.

But, Pauline, do you not see how useless all your resentment against me is now? My marriage with Sir Oswald has taken place, and you and I shall have to live together perhaps for many years—it would be so much better for us to live in peace."

The proud face wore its haughtiest look.

"It would be better for you, perhaps Lady Darrell, but it can make no difference to me."

"It can, indeed. Now listen to reason—listen to me," and in her eagerness Lady Darrell once more laid her hand on the girl's arm. Her face flushed as Pauline drew back, with a look of aversion, letting the jeweled hand fall. "Listen, Pauline," persevered Lady Darrell. "You know all this is nonsense—sheer nonsense. My position now is established. You can do nothing to hurt me—Sir Oswald will take good care of that. Any attempt that you may make to injure will fall upon yourself; besides, you can really do nothing." In spite of her words, Lady Darrell looked half-fearfully at the girl's proud, defiant face. "You can do nothing," she continued eagerly. "You may have all kinds of tragic plans for vengeance in your mind, but there are no secrets in my life that you can find out to my discredit—indeed, you cannot injure me in any possible way." She seemed so sure of it, yet her eyes sought Pauline's with an anxious, questioning fear. "Now I, on the contrary," she went on, "can do much for you—and I will. You are young, and naturally wish to enjoy your life. You shall. You shall have balls and parties, dresses—everything that you can wish for, if you will only be friends with me."

She might as well have thrown drops of oil on an angry ocean to moderate its wrath.

"Lady Darrell," was the sole reply, "you are only wasting your time and mine. I warned you. Twenty years may elapse before my vengeance arrives, but it will come at last."

She walked away, leaving the brilliant figure of the young bride alone in the bright lamp light. She did not leave the room, for Sir Oswald entered at the moment, carrying a small, square parcel in his hand. He smiled as he came in.

"How pleasant it is to see so many fair faces!" he said. "Why, my home has indeed been dark until now."

He went up to Lady Darrell, as she stood alone. All the light in the room seemed to be centered on her golden hair and shining dress. He said:

"I have brought the little parcel, Elinor, thinking that you would prefer to give your beautiful present to Pauline herself. But," he continued, "why are you standing, my love? You will be tired."

She raised her fair, troubled face to his, with a smile.

"Moreover, it seems to me that you are looking anxious," he resumed.

"Miss Hastings, will you come here, please? Is this an anxious look on Lady Darrell's face?"

"I hope not," said the governess, with a gentle smile.

Then Sir Oswald brought a chair, and placed his wife in it; he next obtained a footstool and a small table. Lady Darrell, though half-ashamed of the feeling, could not help being thankful that Pauline did not notice these lover-like attentions.

"Now, Miss Hastings," spoke Sir Oswald, "I want you to admire Lady Darrell's taste."

He opened the parcel. It contained a morocco case, the lid of which, upon a spring being touched, flew back, exposing a beautiful suite of rubies set in pale gold.

Miss Hastings uttered a little cry of delight.

"How very beautiful!" she said.

"Yes," responded Sir Oswald, holding them up to the light, "they are indeed. I am sure you must congratulate Lady Darrell upon her good taste. I suggested diamonds or pearls, but she thought rubies so much better suited to Pauline's dark beauty; and she is quite right."

Lady Darrell held up the shining rubies with her white fingers, but she did not smile; a look of something like apprehension came over the fair face.

"I hope Pauline will like them," she said gently.

"She cannot fail to do so," remarked Sir Oswald, with some little *hauteur*.

"I will tell her that you want to speak to her."

He went over to the deep recess of the large window, where Pauline sat reading. He had felt very sure that she would be flattered by the rich and splendid gift. There had been some little pride, and some little pomp in his manner as he went in search of her, but it seemed to die away as he