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LADY LAURAS' RELEASE

—OR—
THE STORY OF A SPOILED BEAUTY.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"It was a mistake that very nearly put an end to Miss Rooden's life," said the squire, gravely.

But none of the three had the least suspicion of what had brought about the accident.

Angela implored them not to let Lady Laura know anything about it. "If mamma knows," she said, "she will never let me skate again."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

The accident was not referred to at the Abbey lest Lady Laura should be alarmed. Two of the maids were informed of what had happened, but they kept the secret. Lady Bell was thoroughly alarmed, and could not be induced to go upon the ice again. To Squire Arden the accident was a puzzle, and he could not conceive how the misunderstanding had arisen. He decided in his own mind that both Captain Wynyard and his step-daughter were to blame. The captain should have spoken more plainly; Miss Rooden should have been more careful about the directions given to her. "If I had not been there, she would have been drowned," he said to himself; "nothing could have saved her." But no suspicion of the terrible truth ever crossed his mind.

Angela thought a great deal about her mishap. She was certain that the captain had said to her, "Go to the bend of the pool, where the willows grow." She could not have mistaken him. She heard his voice clearly and distinctly, and she could hear it in her memory now. The wind could not have played her false, could not have wanted to her words that had never been uttered. The more she thought of the matter the more puzzled she was; but it was not just yet that the real truth dawned upon her.

One fine spring morning the captain suggested a row upon the lake.

"The water is quite tempting this morning," he said. "Laura you should come. I have been on the lake, and found it so delightful that I have come expressly for you."

This little act of attention and kindness delighted Lady Laura and brought a rush of color to her pale face.

"I will go with pleasure," she replied. "I should like it, for I have not been on the lake since last autumn. You will come, too, Angela?"

The gleam of pleasure on her mother's face so delighted Angela that

she would have done anything the captain wished.

The water was pleasant, the sun bright, and the air balmy. Lady Laura was for a while quite her old self again. The captain exerted himself to amuse her; he talked and laughed more gayly than he had done for some time.

"It is fine exercise, Angela," he said. "You should learn to row."

"I can row," she replied. "When I was a little child, papa taught me, and I used to row with him."

"Row with me now," said the captain; and he gave her a scull and told her where to sit.

Lady Laura was pleased to see this. "If he would only take more interest in Angela!" she thought to herself.

She little knew how great was his interest in Angela.

"You could not have better exercise than this, Angela," said the captain. "I have had two of the pleasure-boats repaired and repainted. There is a third in the boat-house, one better than this. It shall be got ready for you and called the 'Queen of Rood.'"

Angela was pleased with the idea, though somewhat surprised by the perseverance with which the captain continued to give her lessons.

"You will be competent to row at Henley," he remarked laughingly to her one morning; "you manage a boat capably."

"Is there any danger?" asked Lady Laura, who was always nervous about her daughter.

Angela and the captain both laughed at the idea of danger.

"I am taking pains to teach Angela how to manage a pair of sculls properly, so that there shall be no danger in her taking the boat out alone," replied the captain.

Angela kissed her mother's pale face.

"If there was any risk, I would not go, mamma; for I would not alarm you."

So, morning after morning, the captain went down to the lake, and gave Angela lessons in rowing. Lady Laura occasionally accompanying them. Then the time came that the girl required no more lessons, but could row to any part of the lake without assistance.

Angela was fond of the water, and it soon became quite a habit of hers to go upon the lake every morning. She would row to one or other of the little islands and take her books with her. To her poetical, dreamy nature solitude was full of charm.

April, with its violets and snowdrops, was come, and again something seemed to shroud the captain's life in gloom; again all his high spirits deserted him; again morose and sullen melancholy seemed to take possession of him.

"He is longing to see Gladys Rane," sorrowfully thought his unhappy wife, as she noticed the change that had come over him.

It was a brilliant morning; the sun shone brightly, the odor of violets filled the air, pale yellow primroses dotted the emerald surface of the little islands, all nature was looking its finest. There were a few visitors at the Abbey. Lady Bell was still there, and a friend of the captain's, Major Norton. On this morning Lady Bell remained in her room—she had a bad headache—and Major Norton had gone out with the intention of riding over to Hetfield. Lady Laura took her breakfast in her room. Angela had therefore to go through the ordeal she detested—taking breakfast alone with the captain. He read his newspapers the greater part of the time, but occasionally exchanged a few words with her. Suddenly he looked up at her.

"Angela," he said, "I had almost forgotten to tell you. The Queen of Rood has been done up, and it looks a thoroughly smart craft. I prefer it to any of the other boats. You should try it this fine morning. I would accompany you, but I am going over to Caton Hall. Get Jones to

help you with it; for an hour or two on the water will do you good."

The captain seemed very kind and solicitous about it. But Angela remembered afterward that he never looked at her while speaking, and seemed nervous and hesitating in his manner. He appeared to be anxious for her to go, yet while the servants were in the room, he gave many warnings and directions. To them it seemed as though the captain was very solicitous about their young mistress, and as though she were on the point of doing something which he rather feared might be rash. That was the impression left by the captain on the minds of the servants, so artfully had he chosen his words in their presence.

He rode off to Caton Hall, and Angela went down to the boat-house, where Jones, who had charge of the boats, was in attendance.

"I will have the new boat this morning, Jones," she said—"The Queen of Rood."

"All right, miss," returned the man, touching his cap. "It is not a new boat, but it is quite as good. It has been put into thorough repair and done up beautifully. You need have no fear, miss. I looked it well over yesterday when it came, and I had it on the river last night for an hour or two."

"I am not afraid," said Angela. "How prettily it is painted! And I like the name, the Queen of Rood."

A few minutes later the little boat was ready; and away went Angela over the shining water. How beautiful it was! The trees were budding on the little islands, the birds were singing, the water was so clear that she could see the blue sky and the white fleecy clouds reflected in it. She rowed along swiftly, enjoying the freshness of the morning.

The lake was an unusually large one, and very deep—indeed, it was the largest sheet of water in that part of the county. She had reached the center when suddenly—and to the end of her life Angela never forgot the terrible pang of fear that came to her—she felt the water rising about her feet. She bent down, and found, to her utter dismay, that it was coming in rapidly from a hole in the bottom of the boat. At first she did not realize the full danger of the situation; the idea that ran through her mind was that one of the planks had in some way or other become loosened. She stooped down and placed her hand where the water seemed to spring up most quickly, and there, to her horror, found that there was a large hole in the boat.

The little craft was right, when she entered, she knew, and had been right for some time afterward. Now quite suddenly, without any apparent cause, it was filling with water. What should she do? She was naturally brave and courageous, but for a moment she lost her presence of mind. She looked toward the shore, but she was far from it, and Jones was out of sight. The nearest island was at some distance, and, before she could reach either the banks or the island, the boat would sink through the weight of the water.

She gave a piercing cry for help; but there was no one in sight. Faster and faster the water rushed in, and she could feel the boat momentarily settling deeper and deeper. She saw that there was no hope of saving her life, for she could not bail out the water, neither could she row the boat to land. In a moment the full sense of her danger came to her, and she uttered another loud and piteous cry.

(To be continued.)



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