

THE LAW AND THE LADY: A NOVEL.

By WILKIE COLLINS,

AUTHOR OF "THE WOMAN IN WHITE," "THE MOONSTONE," "THE NEW MAGDALEN," ETC.

(From Author's MS. and Advance Sheets)

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Part I.—Paradise Lost

CHAPTER XI.

THE RETURN TO LIFE.

I was still miserably weak. My eyes wandered mechanically round the room as I put the question. I saw Major Fitz-David. I saw the

girl had opened the book to show it to me. I saw the girl herself, sitting alone in a corner, with her handkerchief to her eyes as if she was crying. In one mysterious moment, my memory recovered its powers. The recollection of that fatal title-page came back to me in all its horror. The one feeling that it roused in me now, was a longing to see my husband—to throw myself into his arms, and tell him how firmly I believed in his innocence, how truly and dearly I loved him. I seized on Benjamin with feeble trembling hands. "Bring him back to me!" I cried wildly. "Where is he? Help me to get up!"

A strange voice answered, firmly and kindly:

"Compose yourself, madam. Mr. Woodville is waiting until you have recovered, in a room close by."

I looked at him, and recognized the stranger who had followed my husband out of the room. Why had he returned alone? Why was Eustace not with me, like the rest of them? I tried to raise myself, and get on my feet. The stranger gently pressed me back again on the pillow. I attempted to resist him; quite uselessly of course. His firm hand held me, as gently as ever, in my place.

"You must rest a little," he said. "You must take some wine. If you exert yourself now, you will faint again."

Old Benjamin stooped over me, and whispered a word of explanation.

"It's the doctor, my dear. You must do as he tells you."

The doctor! They had called the doctor in to help them! I began dimly to understand that my fainting-fit must have presented symptoms far more serious than the fainting-fits of women in general. I appealed to the doctor, in a helpless querulous way, to account to me for my husband's extraordinary absence.

"Why did you let him leave the room?" I asked. "If I can't go to him, why don't you bring him here to me?"

The doctor appeared to be at a loss how to reply to me. He looked at Benjamin, and said,

"Will you speak to Mrs. Woodville?"

Benjamin, in his turn, looked at Major Fitz-David, and said, "Will you?" The Major signed to them both to leave us. They rose together, and went into the front room; pulling the door to after them in its grooves. As they left us, the girl who had so strangely revealed my husband's secret to me rose in her corner and approached the sofa.

"I suppose I had better go too?" she said, addressing Major Fitz-David.

"If you please," the Major answered.

He spoke (as I thought) rather coldly. She bowed her head, and turned her back on him in

high indignation. "I must say a word for myself!" cried the strange creature, with an hysterical outbreak of energy. "I must say a word, or I shall burst!"

With that extraordinary preface she suddenly turned in my way, and poured out a perfect torrent of words on me.

"You hear how the Major speaks to me?" she began. "He blames me—poor Me—for everything that has happened. I am as innocent as the new-born babe. I acted for the best. I thought you wanted the book. I don't know now what made you faint dead away when I opened it. And the Major blames Me! As if it was my fault! I am not one of the fainting sort myself; but I feel it, I can tell you. Yes! I feel

able as you are, if you come to that. My name is Holghty. My parents are in business, and my Mamma has seen better days, and mixed in the best of company."

There, Miss Holghty lifted her handkerchief again to her face, and burst modestly into tears behind it.

It was certainly hard to hold her responsible for what had happened. I answered as kindly as I could; and I attempted to speak to Major Fitz-David in her defence. He knew what terrible anxieties were oppressing me at that moment, and, considerably refusing to hear a word, he took the task of consoling his young prima-donna entirely on himself. What he said to her I neither heard, nor cared to hear; he

suffered under it, as I was suffering now, than have been kept in the dark. I told him this. And then I turned to the one subject that was now of any interest to me—the subject of my unhappy husband.

"How did he come to this house?" I asked.

"He came here with Mr. Benjamin shortly after I returned," the Major replied.

"Long after I was taken ill?"

"No. I had just sent for the doctor, feeling seriously alarmed about you."

"What brought him here? Did he return to the hotel, and miss me?"

"Yes. He returned earlier than anticipated, and he felt uneasy at not finding you at the hotel."

"Did he suspect me of being with you? Did he come here from the hotel?"

"No. He appears to have gone first to Mr. Benjamin to inquire about you. What he heard from your old friend I cannot say. I only know that Mr. Benjamin accompanied him when he came here."

This brief explanation was quite enough for me; I understood what had happened. Eustace would easily frighten simple old Benjamin about my absence from the hotel; and, once alarmed, Benjamin would be persuaded without difficulty to repeat the few words which had passed between us on the subject of Major Fitz-David. My husband's presence in the Major's house was perfectly explained. But his extraordinary conduct in leaving the room, at the very time when I was just recovering my senses, still remained to be accounted for. Major Fitz-David looked seriously embarrassed when I put the question to him.

"I hardly know how to explain it to you," he said. "Eustace has surprised and disappointed me."

He spoke very gravely. His looks told me more than his words; his looks alarmed me.

"Eustace has not quarrelled with you?" I said.

"Oh, no!"

"He understands that you have not broken your promise to him?"

"Certainly. My young vocalist, Miss Holghty, told the doctor exactly what had happened; and the doctor in her presence repeated the statement to your husband."

"Did the doctor see the trial?"

"Neither the doctor nor Mr. Benjamin has seen the trial. I have locked it up; and I have carefully kept the terrible story of your connection with the prisoner a secret from all of them. Mr. Benjamin evidently has his suspicions. But the doctor has no idea, and Miss Holghty has no idea of the true cause of your fainting fit. They both believe that you are subject to serious nervous attacks, and that your husband's name is really Woodville. All that the

truest friend could do to spare Eustace, I have done. He persists, nevertheless, in blaming me for letting you enter my house. And worse, far worse than this, he persists in declaring that the event of to-day has fatally estranged you from him. 'There is an end of our married life,' he said to me, 'now she knows that I am the man who was tried at Edinburgh for poisoning my wife!'

I rose from the sofa in horror.

"Good God!" I cried, "does Eustace suppose that I doubt his innocence?"

"He denies that it is possible for you, or for



"The window-blind was up, and the Autumn moonlight shone brilliantly into the little room."

it, though I don't faint about it. I come of respectable parents—I do. My name is Holghty—Miss Holghty. I have my own self-respect; and it's wounded. I say my self-respect is wounded, when I find myself blamed without deserving it. You deserve it, if anybody does. Didn't you tell me you were looking for a book? And didn't I present it to you promiscuously, with the best intentions? I think you might say so yourself, now the doctor has brought you to again. I think you might speak up for a poor girl who is worked to death with singing and languages and what not—a poor girl who has nobody else to speak for her. I am as respect-

able as you are, if you come to that. My name is Holghty. My parents are in business, and my Mamma has seen better days, and mixed in the best of company."

I let him proceed no farther. No human forethought could have provided against what had happened. Besides, dreadful as the discovery had been, I would rather have made it, and