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ap13.17.20.24.27

## LADY LAURAS' RELEASE

### THE STORY OF A SPOILED BEAUTY.

CHAPTER LV.  
 Could she have fallen into a stream? they asked; and the answer was that there was no water between the Hall and the town. No satisfactory reason could be assigned for her absence, and the ladies gave themselves up to wild and improbable conjecture.  
 Lady Culdale sent for Captain Wynyard to her own room. She was weeping bitterly when he entered.  
 "I have never had such a trouble in my life," she sobbed. "I am quite at a loss what to do. Of course, if nothing is heard of her, I must telegraph for Lady Kinloch."  
 "Where is Lady Kinloch?" asked the captain, with horror at the idea of what Lady Kinloch would say and think if she found him there.  
 "She is in Dublin, with a friend of hers who is ill. I persuaded her to let Miss Rane stay at Culdale with

me during her absence. She was unwilling at first; and now this dreadful affair has happened. What shall I do?"  
 "I cannot imagine what has become of her," said the captain. "Miss Rane is too proud and too sensible to do anything sensational. She would never run away; and there are no brigands here to carry her off," he added, with a faint attempt at a smile.  
 Great heavens! there was the vision again—a white hand stretched out of the eddying water! He reeled against a chair.  
 "Lady Culdale," he gasped, "will you ring for a glass of brandy? I feel terribly ill."  
 "I am sure you do—you look ill!" she cried, as she rose hurriedly, and rang the bell.  
 Captain Wynyard was asking himself what this strange event meant, that the woman he loved should disappear on the very night when he had taken his first step toward winning her. Angela Rooden was sleeping her last long sleep in the depths of the lake; but where was his darling Gladys Rane? If he could have known the truth, that Angela was sleeping with her mind more at rest

than it had been for a long time, and that the woman he loved was drowned by his own hand, what would he have said or done?  
 "It seems heartless to sit and cry about her without doing anything; but I do not see what we are to do."  
 "Nor do I," mournfully observed the captain. "But the morning light is sure to bring us some news of her."  
 He drank the brandy greedily, yet still felt deathly faint. How strange it was that they should both disappear on the same night—Angela whom he hated and had murdered, Gladys whom he loved and had lost! Not the faintest glimmer of the truth came to his bewildered brain.  
 There was little rest in Culdale Hall that night. The women all retired, but many of the men sat up, a few going out at intervals in search of her whom they would never see alive again. That beautiful Gladys Rane should be missing, should be perhaps in danger, and they powerless to help her, was horrible even to think of.  
 CHAPTER LVI.  
 "A woman found drowned in the lake at Brantome Park!"  
 The words seemed to fly from one to another—the very air seemed to catch them and carry them along.  
 One of the keepers, on going between four and five in the morning to look after some water-fowl, fancied he saw something strange on the lake—a light paper parcel, floating as the wind blew. He took a long pole and drew it toward him, and, on opening it, found that it contained a skein of fine blue sewing-silk, such as ladies use in embroidery. Further down, near the fountain, something else was stirring in the water. This too he drew out, and found it to be a lady's handkerchief of fine lace, with delicately embroidered monogram, the letters of which were "G. R."

was a case of "Jock o' Hareidean"—that the missing lady was a most beautiful woman, and there was no doubt a lover in the case. They had parted with a laugh, the servants going back to Culdale, and the keeper, John Thorne, going on to Brantome.  
 The man stood dazed and bewildered as he held the handkerchief in his hand.  
 "She is here!" he declared. "She has not gone with a lover, or lost her way. She is drowned in this lake. May Heaven forgive our light words!"  
 It was but the work of a moment to get into the boat moored close by and row across the water to the fountain, and very little time elapsed before his suspicion was confirmed that the missing young lady lay at the bottom of the lake.  
 Thorne hastened toward Culdale, and, when half way there he met Lord Culdale, with two or three gentlemen, and told them the terrible news.  
 His lordship looked at the handkerchief, with its finely embroidered monogram of "G. R."  
 "Gladys Rane!" he gasped. "But how, in the name of Heaven, could she have fallen into the lake at Brantome?"  
 They hastened to the lake, and soon raised the body, and laid it reverently on the stone terrace. The face was calm, even smiling. Perhaps—Heaven was good!—her last thought had been pleasant ones. The

exquisite features and the rippling black hair were almost as they had last seen them. They were strong; but, as they looked on the fair dead woman, tears filled their eyes.  
 A hat that Lord Culdale recognized as Miss Rane's lay on the steps, just where it had fallen from her hands. Something very thin and light slung round her. It was like a gossamer veil, and, in raising her, one of the men tore it from her hastily and flung it upon the bank, where it lay unnoticed.  
 The alarm had been given at Brantome now, and the servants came hurrying out. Hearing the commotion, Angela asked the housekeeper what it meant, and the answer almost stunned her.  
 "There has been a terrible accident, Miss Charles," replied Mrs. Bowen. "One of the ladies who has been stopping at Culdale has been found drowned in our lake!"  
 "A lady from Culdale?" Angela questioned; and then Mrs. Bowen told her the whole story as she had heard it from the servants—how one of the visitors at Culdale, a very beautiful lady, had been missing since yesterday afternoon, and had been found drowned in Brantome Lake.  
 "What was the lady's name?" Angela asked, in a voice quite unlike her own.  
 The housekeeper replied that she was not quite sure—it was either "Dane," or "Rane"; but she knew that the unfortunate lady was a famous London beauty.  
 "I am going down to the lake, Charles," she added; "come with me" and Angela went.  
 She was bewildered and incredulous. It could not be Gladys Rane, she had been with her on the evening before, and had left her well and strong. What should bring her to Brantome? What had led to her death? How well she remembered her sitting under the shade of the trees! As she thought of their meeting, the dark lovely face seemed to rise again before her. Surely Gladys Rane, with whom she had spoken so lately, was not the girl who had been found drowned.  
 Angela had never felt any respect for Miss Rane; but she would have been shocked at such a terrible calamity had the victim been the greatest stranger. It seemed hardly credible that this beautiful woman who had been queen of the season should have met with such an awful death while she was so close at hand.  
 When her eyes fell on the little group of men standing near the silent figure on the terrace, she uttered a cry of anguish; but apparently no one noticed it.  
 Keeping close to Mrs. Bowen, she walked slowly to the terrace. One glance was enough to satisfy her that the dead body found in the lake was that of Gladys Rane. The face that not many hours before was so brilliant in its loveliness and bloom was now white as marble, cold, and still!

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