John Arthur's Ward;

OR THE DETECTIVE'S DAUGHTER.

Continued from 1st page.

Cora sees that all is lost. But she recalls the promises of safety given her by Madeline, and nerves herself for a last attempt at cool insolence. Her quick wit have taken in the situation. Now she understands why Madeline has led Davlin on, and why her hatred of him is so intense. Now she knows the meaning of the words that last night seemed so mysterious: "Lucian Davlin is my lover, but I am his bitterest foe." Now, as she steps forward, the hate she feels shining in her eyes, and with a growing air of reckless bravado as she glances at him. Cora, too, is Lucian Davlin's bitter foe.

"Cora!" The name comes from the lips of John Arthur, almost in a cry.

"Tell us what you know of this man," Madeline says, pointing to Edward Percy; "and be brief."

"Miss Arthur," she says, with a malicious gleam in her eyes, "this will interest you. I knew that man ten years ago. I was making my first venture out in the world, and it was a very bad one. I fell in love with his pretty face, and married him. Before long I discovered that matrimony was a mania of Mr. Percy's—by-the-by, he sailed under another name then. I found that he had another wife living; a woman he had married for her money. Well, being sensitive, I took offense, and after a little, I ran away from him, carrying with me the certificates of his two marriages, which I had taken some pains to get possession of. After that—"

Cora pauses suddenly and glances toward Madeline.

"After that you went to Europe. You may pass over the foreign tour, and take up the story five years later," subjoins Madeline, coldly.

"After that, I went to Europe," echoes Cora. "And five years later found me in Gotham."

"Be explicit now, please; no omissions," commands Madeline.

"Five years ago, then," resumes Cora, "that gentleman there," motioning to Davlin, but never turning her face toward him, "came to me one day with the information that my dear husband was a rich man, thanks to some deceased old relative, and that his other wife was dead. For some reason this other marriage had been kept very secret, and my friend there argued that in case anything happened to Percy, I might come in as his widow, and claim his fortune. Well, Mr. Percy did not die, more's the pity. Instead of that he lived and squandered his money in less than three years. He was hurt somehow and a certain Mr. Philip Girard was falsely accused and convicted for attempted murder."

"Who was the real assassin?" asked Madeline, sternly.

"Lucian Davlin," emphatically.

Madeline turns swiftly to Percy. "Mr. Percy, explain, if you wish to lighten your own burden, by what means did that man persuade you to let him go free?"

"By—threatening me with an action for—"

"Bigamy!" finished Cora.

"I am letting these people hear you tell these things because I want that man,"—pointing to John Arthur, who had long since collapsed into a big chair—"to hear all this from your own lips," says Madeline.

Turning again to Cora she says—

"Lucian Davlin made use of the papers—she certificates you had stolen from Edward Percy—to intimidate that gentleman, and secure himself from danger. Am I correct?"

"Yes," replies Cora, casting a malignant glance from one to the other of the accused men.

"Very good. Now we will pass on four or more years. You were in some little trouble last June, Mrs. Arthur. Explain how you came to Bellair."

"How?"

"Yes, for what purpose. And at whose instigation."

Cora hesitated and Davlin moved uneasily.

"Don't think that you will damage your cause by making a full statement," suggested Miss Payne meaningly. Answer my questions please."

Again Cora glances at Davlin. Then turning toward Madeline she assumes an air of defiant recklessness, and answers the questions promptly. "I came at Lucian Davlin's suggestion, and because he had induced me to think that I could easily become—what I am."

"And that is—"

"Mrs. Arthur of Oakley!" with a mocking laugh.

The old man in the chair utters a loud groan, but no one heeds him. All eyes are fixed upon Madeline and Cora.

"You plotted to become John Arthur's wife?" pursues Madeline relentlessly.

"Yes."

"And—his widow?"

No reply.

"You planned to keep him a prisoner?"

"Yes."

"And Lucian Davlin, your pretended brother, was your accomplice?"

"Yes."

Madeline turns swiftly towards her step-father, as she does so moving nearer toward Edward Percy.

"John Arthur are you satisfied?" she asks sternly. "Shall the knowledge of your disgrace go beyond this room? Do you choose to remain here and be pointed at by every boor in Oakley, as the man who married an adventuress, a gambler's accomplice? or will you accept my terms?"

John Arthur lifts his head, then staggers to his feet. "Curse you!" he cries. "Curse you all! What proof have I that these people will respect my feelings?"

"You have my word," replies the girl, coolly. "These gentlemen of the Secret Service are not given to gossip. Mr. Davlin will have but little opportunity for circulating scandal where he is going. Mr. Percy and your wife will hardly remain in the neighborhood long enough to injure you here unless by your own choice. Your sister will scarcely betray you, and the rest are my friends. Choose!"

Pallid with rage and shame, the old man turned toward Cora.

"You she-devil!" he screams, "this is your work—"

"No," interposes Madeline calmly, "it is your work, John Arthur! What you have sown you are reaping. Will you have all your guilty past, your shameful present made known? Or will you leave my mother's home and mine and cease to usurp my rights? Choose!"

Every eye is turned upon the old man and his questioner. Every ear is intently listening for his answer.

Every ear, do we say? No; one man is only feigning rapt attention; one mind is turning over wicked possibilities, while the others await, with different degrees of eagerness or curiosity John Arthur's answer.

"Needs must when the devil drives," says the baffled old man turning toward the door. "I will go, and I leave my curse behind me!"

This is the moment which Lucian Davlin has watched. While all eyes are turned toward John Arthur he bends suddenly forward. He has wrenched the pistol from one of his guardians, and the weapon is aimed at Madeline's heart!

Instantaneously there is a quick, panther-like spring, and Claire Keith's little hand strikes the arm that directs the deadly weapon. There is a sharp report but the direction of the bullet is changed.

Madeline Payne stands erect and startled while Edward Percy falls to the floor, the blood gushing from a wound in his breast. In another instant, Lucian Davlin lies prostrate, felled by a blow from one detective, while the other bends over him and savagely adjusts a pair of manacles.

The others even to Cora group themselves about the wounded man. Dr. Vaughan kneels beside him a moment, then he lifts his eyes to meet those of Madeline.

"It is a death wound," he says.

"Prepare a couch in the next room directly. He must not be carried upstairs."

When this order had been obeyed, and the injured man had been removed, Madeline returns to the drawing-room untenanted now save by the officers and their prisoner. They are waiting there until the midnight train shall be due, and the time approaches. Moving quite near to the now silent, sullen villian, the girl surveys him with absolute loathing.

"The goddess you worship has deserted you, Lucian Davlin," she says slowly. "It was not in the book of chance that you should triumph over or outwit me. The bullet you designed for me has completed the work you began five years ago. Go, to live a convict, or die on the scaffold, and when you think upon this failure of your villainous schemes, remember that this retribution has been wrought by a woman's hand! Officers, take him away!"

CHAPTER XLIX.

AS THE FOOL DIETH.

Edward Percy is dying—was dying when they lifted him from the drawing-room carpet and gently laid him on the couch hastily prepared by Hagar and the frightened servants. They have watched beside him through the night and now in the gray of the morning Clarence Vaughan still keeps his vigil

The wounded man moves feebly, and turns his fast dimming eyes toward the watcher "I thought—I saw—some one," he says, brokenly "when—I fell Who—was—the lady?"

His voice dies away as Clarence bending over him answers gently "You mean the lady that stood near the door whose face was turned away?"

"Yes" in a whisper; "was it—my—wife?"

Clarence turns toward the window where Mrs Ralston sits out of view of the sick man

She moves forward a little "Tell him" she says in a low voice

Edward Percy is a dying man but his mind was never clearer He perfectly comprehends the explanations made by Clarence He had recognized the face of his wife when he lay bleeding at her feet He closes his eyes and is silent for some moments. Then he asks in that dying half-whisper the only tone he ever will use "You think—I—will—die?"

"You cannot live" replies Clarence gravely

Again the wounded man shuts his eyes and thinks; then "How long—will I—last?" he questions.

"I can keep you alive twenty-four hours—not longer" says Clarence after a pause.

"Then—I must talk now."

Mrs. Ralston moves forward and he looks at her long and attentively Then with a turn of his olden coolness "You grew tired of me" he said

"Yes" she replies in a low sad voice "I grew tired of you; very tired But don't talk of those days now. You are too near the end; think of that"

"I do" he said slowly. "But I can't alter the past—and—I don't know—about the future. I want—to see a—notary"

"Don't you want to see a clergyman?"

"What for? If I am dying—it's of no use to play hypocrite—I don't believe in—your clergyman I admit that—I wronged—you" he continues gazing at Mrs Ralston "and I deceived Miss Keith. If you two—can forgive me—I will take my chances—for the rest"

Mrs Ralston bends above him with a face full of pity, but in which there is no love "I forgive you Edward; and so will Claire, fully But you did her very little harm She was not long deceived Do you want to see her?"

"Yes; and—don't let Alice—Cora, you call her—come near me"

Night comes on and the end is very near. Over the dying face flits a malignant shadow and he makes a last effort to speak. Again the watchers bend nearer

"I hope—they will—hang Davlin," he breathes feebly

The two listeners recoil with horror at the sound of the vindictive wish from dying lips

These are the last words of Edward Percy Slowly go the minutes and deeper grow the shadows Again Clarence Vaughan bends above the couch and then he says "Your vigil is ended, Mrs Ralston He is dead"

That night while the house is hushed to a quiet one portion of the household asleep the other keeping the death-watch, Cora again tries to escape from Oakley But this time Strong is not to be caught napping, and the vanquished adventuress resigns herself to her fate

Two days more, and then Edward Percy is buried, according to his request, "like a gentleman"

And John Arthur and Cora remain, and "keep up appearances" to the last

Dr Le Guise, or the Professor, has stayed too, for appearance sake But the day after they have buried Edward Percy he goes and very gladly, back to the city Madeline keeps her promise; he goes free, and none save the few ever know that Dr Le Guise is an imposter

At the same time John Arthur turns his back upon Oakley forever "Appearances" are observed to the last He goes, tenderly attended by the Professor by Cora and by his sister Goes much muffled and enacting the role of invalid

They are taking the sick man South; this is what the villagers think

But when the train reaches the city this select party disbands John Arthur becomes active once more and with his sister hurries away in the nearest cab while the Professor and Cora separate by mutual consent

And here we leave them—all but Cora She has escaped Scylla only to fall upon Charybdis As she hurries along through familiar streets her plans are laid She will go to Lucian Davlin's rooms; nobody will be there to dispute her possession for a day or two to come and she has possessed herself of the keys left behind as useless by their outlawed owner

When she ascends the steps some one who is lounging past the premises looks at her narrowly As she disappears behind the swinging outer door this lounger becomes wonderfully alert and hastens away as if he had just discovered his mission

Two hours later as Cora descends the stairs and emerges into the street the vision of a monkey-faced old man appears before her And while another lays a firm detaining hand upon her arm the old man fairly dancing with glee cries out—

"Ah ha! here you are my pretty sharper I didn't have these premises watched for nothing did I? Now I have got you Bring her along officer bring her along She won't dodge us this time"

And Cora is hurried into a cab, closely followed by old Verage, who chatters his doubtful consolation, and laughs his eldrich laughter, and finally consigns her to prison to answer to a charge of swindling.

CHAPTER L.

"AND THEN COMES REST."

At last Oakley is rid of its intriguants, its plotters and imposters

And Madeline and Claire sit alone in the chamber of the former, talking of the strange events that have so lately transpired—of Philip Girard's vindication, of Lucian Davlin's punishment, of Edward Percy's death.

It is the day following that of the burial, and Mrs. Ralston is lying asleep in her own room, with old Hagar in near attendance.

"Poor Mrs. Ralston," says Claire, after a long pause in their converse. "She is thoroughly worn out, and yet, weary as she was, she must have talked with you for hours, Madeline, after we came back from the grave."

Over Madeline's face flits an odd, half sad smile, as she replies, dreamily:—

"Yes, we talked a long time, dear; Mrs. Ralston was then in the mood for talking. Can't you understand how one may be nervously active, may be at just that stage of bodily weariness when the mind is intensely alive? The excitement of all she had lately undergone was still upon her, and the mind could not resign itself to rest while anything remained unsettled or under a cloud."

"Oh, I can understand how that may be." Then after a pause, "so something remained to be settled?"

"Yes."

"And between you, you disposed of the difficulty"

"Yes."

Another silence. Then Madeline turns to look at her companion.

"Why don't you ask me what the difficulty was?"

No answer.

"But you want to know?"

Claire laughs nervously.

"And I want to tell you," pursues Madeline. "First we talked of ourselves."

"Oh" ejaculates Claire, looking immensely relieved.

"Yes, we talked of ourselves first; and we have become great friends."

"Of course" cries Miss Enthusiasm; "I knew you would."

"We have decided to give our new friendship a severe test."

"How?" asks Claire, forgetting her caution.

"By visiting Europe in each other's society.

Claire springs up excitedly. "Madeline Payne, you dont mean it! You can't! You shall not; there! Europe indeed. You are crazy! I won't hear of it!" stamping her foot emphatically.

Madeline leans back in her chair and laughs; then suddenly becomes grave.

"But I do mean it, Claire, my darling," she says softly. "And I'll tell you what else I mean. Sit down here, close beside me and listen."

Instinctively Claire obeys

"Now, then, continues Madeline, "you know what an odd, uncultivated sort of a life mine has been, and you know that this little world of mine has not been a very bright one. Well, ever since I could read and think, I have longed to see Italy, and France, and England, and Germany, and the Holy Land. My work is done here. There is nothing now to prevent my going—no duty to perform, no one to keep me here. I could not find a better friend and companion than Mrs. Ralston, and she is very anxious to go, and to take me with her. You are very dear to me, but no one needs me now more than she, nor so much. And, Claire, don't make any mistakes about me. I am not going away sorrowfully, or with any heavy weight upon my spirits. I am going to enjoy and make the most and best of the life and youth God has given me. I am going for change, and recreation, and rest. I have been acting the part of an avenger here, a stern, unforgiving Nemesis, but I would do over again all that I have done, if need be. I am not half so good as you. I can submit with meekness to injustice and wrong. I shall fight my enemies if I have more to fight, until the end of the chapter. And now I have a confession to make."

Claire stirs uneasily. "Don't," she says, deprecatingly: "I don't want to hear a confession."

"But I want to make one, and you must listen. First, however, let me tell you that during my talk with Mrs. Ralston, I heard about a certain interview, wherein a ridiculous young lady discarded the man she loved because she fancied she would wrong some one else if she admitted her love for him, and accepted his. Well—don't turn your face away—that was foolish. But my blunder was a downright wicked one. Yes, Claire, I will tell all the truth. When you and I stood together out under the trees, and talked of Clarence Vaughan; when you showed me the picture and told me the little pastoral about Edward Percy; I knew that Clarence Vaughan loved you—and I thought I loved, nay, I did love, him.

"When I came down here and found so soon that Edward Percy was—so utterly unworthy, we will say, because he is dead, I felt at once that you must be undeceived.

"Then a great temptation came to me, and I said to myself, 'When she becomes disenchanted, and ceases to love this man, she will learn to value the other and more noble lover; she will learn to love him!'

"All night long, before I came to undeceive you, and to warn Olive, I battled with a great temptation. And I yielded to it. Listen, Claire, while I tell you how base I was.

"When I set out for the city in the morning, I said to myself: 'Claire Keith is the soul of truth and honor. She is generous to a fault. If I let her see how much I care for Clarence Vaughan, I shall appeal to her pity and her honor, without the aid of words. She will never listen to his suit; she will try to advance my interest; she will become my ally.' See dear how truly I judged you.

"Well I came. I told you of Percy's baseness and when I saw how brave you were; how full of scorn for the dishonest man; how impossible it was for one so unworthy to drag you down or darken your life because of his baseness; I was filled with shame and remorse. I knew then that I was unworthy your friendship or of a good man's love.

"Standing in your presence humiliated by your pure nobility I repented and I resolved to give up all thoughts of Clarence Vaughan. I did give him up.

"But Claire although I did not know it my very penitence must have committed me and while I was renouncing my designs you were resolving to further them. In some manner I must have betrayed myself."

There is a moment's pause. Claire Keith's face is buried in her hands and Madeline bending toward her cries out remorsefully:—

"Claire! Claire! Look up and believe me. As God hears me that is past and dead. See how I am humbling myself and do not doubt me."

Claire's head rears itself suddenly. She flings herself forward impetuously and casps her arms about her friend.

"Madeline stop!" she cries brokenly; "I won't hear you slander yourself. Don't I know you too well to doubt you! But I won't have a lover; I won't love any one but you."

Again the laugh comes to Madeline's lips.

"Little Miss Impulse!" she says tenderly. "But Sister Claire I am not done yet. I am going to put you on the penitent's stool now. Just imagine yourself in my place for a little. Do you think I could have made this confession to you if my weakness were not a thing of the past? You know I never could. I am not ashamed to confess that I did love Clarence. But I should be more than ashamed under all the circumstances if I could not say with truth that that love is a thing of the past. As my dearest friend my brother if you will I shall always love him; but no more than that. I am not sorry that I have loved him for I am a better woman because of it. But I repeat it that love is a thing of the past. Claire do you not believe?"

They gaze into each other's eyes for a moment. Then Claire says: "I believe Madeline."

A smile brightens the brown eyes now and their owner says: "Then don't you see that you have made a mistake—one that for my sake you must rectify?"

Claire begins to look rebellious. "No I don't" she cries blushing scarlet. "You wicked girl you have been getting me into a trap!"

Madeline says very gravely:—

"Claire I want you to trust me in this as you all have in other things. I want you to let me feel that I have not made the friends I love best unhappy. I shall leave you soon; if I have been your friend let me have my way in this one thing. If you don't all the rest will have been in vain. See my drama is ended; my enemies are punished. Now let me make my dear ones happy. Do you know John Arthur has put a new thought in my head. 'Confound you' he growled it was his parting benediction 'I might have known your father's blood ruled you. I might have looked for cunning and intrigue from that confounded Expert's Daughter.' It is true Claire; I am the daughter of an Expert a detective brave and shrewd. Hagar says that I am like my father and that I have inherited his talents. When I recall the knot we have just unravelled the war we have just waged I can think that my father's chosen calling may have become mine. If the world ever grows stale if I pine for change or excitement or absorbing occupation I can go to my father's chief and say 'I am the daughter of Lionel Payne the Expert and I have inherited a measure of my father's talents.' Do you think he will trust his knotty cases to the Expert's Daughter?" 'I think he will if he is wise. But Madeline all this is folly. You will never leave us. Olive wants you; we all want you."

"And you will all have enough of me. But Claire do not ask me to stay now. It is better for me better for all that I go away. I must let old memories die out. I want to forget old scenes. I want rest. I need to school my wayward nature to teach my heart to beat calmly my soul to possess itself in peace. Claire I must go."

Just here, some one taps softly. It is a servant who holds in her hands a telegram from Olive to Madeline, which runs thus:—

All is well. Philip and I start for home to-night. Meet us there without fail, all of you OLIVE.

They read it together, and then Claire bursts into tears—tears of joy and thankfulness.

"Philip is free once more! Oh, Madeline, Madeline; and it was you who saved him; it was you!"

Madeline pushes the message into her hand, saying: "If I have done such wonderful things, why do you refuse to obey me? Go, now, and take this good news to Clarence Vaughan. And mind you, don't come back, for I am going to tell Mrs. Ralston."

Half laughing, half crying, Claire is compelled to go down to the library alone. Clarence Vaughan is there, pacing thoughtfully up and down.

Claire enters softly, the paper ostentatiously displayed in her hand. But he looks straight at the blushing, bashful, tear-stained face. Her eyes, half glad, half shy, wholly tell-tale, fall before his own. And the lover who has waited in patience for his opportunity, seizes it now and makes it a moment of victory.

"I have brought you good news, Dr. Vaughan."

He comes straight toward her, and imprisons both little hands, together with the "news" they contain.

"You have brought me yourself, then, and I have been lying in wait for this opportunity. Claire, shall you ever run away from me again?"

It is useless to rebel. His voice tells her that he knows too much, and that he will not be evaded any more. She gives him one glimpse of her face, and then she is clasped in his strong, loving arms, and from this safe haven, after a time, she tells her good news, struggling prettily to free herself from the loving imprisonment.

"Philip is free, and is coming home."

"Of course; why not, darling? There is no accusation against him now."

"Madeline is going away with Mrs. Ralston. Don't you think she is too bad? Can't we make her stay?"

A look of regretful sadness rests for a moment upon his countenance. Then he says, very tenderly:—

"My little darling, Madeline has earned the right to her own perfect liberty. After the fierce schooling through which she has passed, believe me, there is nothing left for us to teach her. She has grown beyond us. Let her have her will, for she knows best what will give her the rest, the forgetfulness, the absorbing interest in other things, that her strong nature needs. Madeline has much to unlearn, much to forget; and she knows this. She is growing to understand her strong, brave self, to value her strength.

Claire draws herself gently from the restraining arm, and turns her blue eyes upon him.

"Madeline will never marry," she says softly, sadly. "You are right; she is above us, beyond us. God has made her sufficient unto herself."

It is dawn, gray dawn.

Madeline Payne rises from a long untroubled sleep, and flings wide her shutters.

What is this that she sees?

All below her an unbroken mantle of white; all about and above, the waving of snowy plumes, and floating, misty-white loveliness.

Above, below, all about her, is silence and whiteness and peace.

She sinks to her knees, and leaning out, absorbs into herself the restfulness, the peace, the white, pure glory of the dawn.

"It is a token," she murmurs, softly. "It is God's benediction on my new day, on my new life. It is the beginning of rest. There is nothing old in this fresh, white world. Let the snow mantle rest thus upon my past life Ah, how rich I am! How rich in friends; how strong in that I have been able to do some good, to make my beloved happy. Never let me repine at my fate. I am rich, and strong, and free. This new, white, beautiful world is mine, when I wish to wander. My friends are mine, when I wish to rest, and find a home."

Up from the east shoots an arrow of gold, and a bar of roseate light. Higher yet, and the world is aglow with mystic, glittering loveliness. Diamonds sparkling everywhere; snow plumes waving; the earth's white unbroken mantle gleaming and sparkling, and stretching away to meet the golden glow at the horizon's edge.

Kneeling there, with her white hands clasped upon the window ledge, the glory of the morning falls over her like a benediction; lighting up the golden hair; pouring its radiance into the solemn brown eyes; kissing the pure pale cheeks; breathing peace, and rest, and hope into the long-tried, but conquering heart of the Expert's Daughter.

THE END

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