

# THE HEIR OR Lancewood

CHAPTER XXXI.

"You would not forfeit them," he said. Miladi waved her white hand. "I should. If I married you tomorrow, you would spend my whole fortune, and when it was spent you would be the first to ill-use me. I decline the honor of being repudiated penniless by you, Monsieur de Nouchet."

"I wish," said Miss Neslie, "that you would permit me to pass; with this unseemly dispute I have nothing whatever to do."

"Nay," said he. "I entreat you to remain. My lady, you have driven me to bay. You promised to marry me, and you have refused. I have you in my power. I tell you that unless you consent, I will betray you to Miss Neslie."

"A betrayer is always a coward," she observed.

"Then I will be a coward. I will tell her all. And then, presumptuous as you are, you will not dare to remain here."

"I shall remain here," said miladi. "Your betraying me is a matter of little moment now. My fortune is secure."

His face grew frightful in its livid rage.

"I will tell all I know of you," he said, "unless you consent. Think again, Valerie—you shall have a gay, sunny, bright life in Paris. You know I love you, and will make you happy."

Miladi shrugged her shoulders.

"We will leave love out of the question," she said; "this is a matter of funds for gambling, and the betrayal of a friend."

"I have more patience with you," he hissed between his white lips, "than I thought I could have with any woman living."

"It is all of no use," said Lady Neslie. "Words are vain; threats, persuasions, are vain. I will not marry you. You want to marry me because you want my fortune to gamble with; you shall not have it. I would rather gamble it all away myself than give it to you."

He drew his watch from his pocket and laid it on the table between them.

"I give you just five minutes in which to reconsider your words. Lady Neslie, if you promise to marry me, you shall never regret it; if you refuse, I will tell Miss Neslie your story."

"Pray give me a chair," said miladi, laughing. "I am tired—I cannot stand for five minutes longer."

But he did not stir, and the others stood in silence, unbroken save by the faint ticking of the watch.

The scene was intensely dramatic. Outside a bright moon was shining, the dew lay on the sleeping flowers, the tall trees stood like huge sentinels.



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els; inside the soft pearly light of the lamp filled the room with a warm glow, and shone upon the three faces. Never was there a more striking group—miladi, lovely, laughing, mocking, her gay dress and jewels seeming to attract all the light, her mouth curled in scorn, her eyes flashing defiance, yet gay and reckless; Vivien, with her picturesque velvet dress sweeping the ground, her grandly-beautiful face filled with noble disdain, tall, imperial, queenly; the Frenchman, agitated, pale, with white lips and burning eyes.

Never a word was spoken. Miladi stirred the air with her fan. Vivien's heart beat loud and fast; it seemed to her that she stood there holding the honor of her house in her hand. How slowly the minutes passed! What had she to hear when they were over?

"Now," said Monsieur de Nouchet, "the time is past; give me your answer, Lady Neslie."

"I refuse most absolutely to marry you," she replied.

He bowed, and Vivien thought she had never seen anything so terrible as his handsome, haggard, livid face.

"You refuse; then I will keep my word. I pray you to listen, Miss Neslie, while I tell you Lady Neslie's story."

"I would rather not hear it; it comes to late," said Vivien, earnestly.

"Lady Valerie is one of us now; if there are any secrets in her past life, let them lie buried."

"That is the most sensible speech you have ever made, Vivien; but really I do not mind—it can make no difference to me. Before Sir Arthur's death I persuaded, coaxed, conciliated; but now I am quite indifferent—nothing can touch my fortune. As for my position, we shall see what harm monsieur can do me."

"Valerie," he cried once more, "will you retract?"

She looked at him with burning eyes.

"After you have threatened me! Coward, betrayer, I would not marry you to save my life!"

He turned to Vivien.

"Miss Neslie," he said, "listen to me. This woman who mocks me so cruelly now was my first love. She was not Valerie D'Este, as she told your father, but Valerie Rolleux, the daughter of a grocer in Paris."

Miladi interrupted him with a little laugh.

"Miss Neslie will not be surprised to hear that. She never believed that I was a D'Este—did you, Vivien?"

The haughty disdain of the beautiful face was her only answer. Monsieur continued:

"Valerie was always pretty; her sister Marie, who passes here as her maid, always plain. I need not weary you, Miss Neslie, by telling you of the quiet home where this cold, cruel woman lived, or of her vanity, greater even than her beauty. I was the son of a notary living near, and as a child I madly loved her fair, laughing face. The quiet home did not long content her; against the prayers, the wishes of her parents, she left it, and when she was only fourteen she was known as the most daring rider in the most fashionable cirque in Paris. She travelled half over France with that circus, and then returned to Paris and promised—ah, madmen that I was to believe her!—to marry me. Her parents were dead then, and she had a little money. She took her only sister Marie as her maid and travelled abroad. She afterward returned to a Parisian boarding-house, and there met your father—Sir Arthur."

Vivien interrupted him. She did not look at the fair, false woman who had blighted her life, but the dark, earnest eyes were fixed on De Nouchet.

"If you do not mind," she said, "will you tell me how she duped my fa-

ther?" I always knew that she had deceived him; I never knew how."

"Yes, I will tell you. When she found from the mistress of the house that a rich English baronet was staying there, she at once made up her mind. She caused herself to be introduced to him as Mademoiselle D'Este, a daughter of one of the younger branches of the D'Estes. She told him a sad little story about limited means and the painful position of an orphan girl. Sir Arthur, your father, permit me to say, Miss Neslie, was not very shrewd. She was very quick, very cunning; she was very fair and very charming. She had the face of an angel, the voice of a siren; he was indolent, and liked to be amused—she amused him. He did not take the trouble to inquire into her antecedents. He took all she said for granted, fell in love with and married her."

"But you, monsieur—what did you do?" asked Vivien. It annoyed her that her father should have been so easily duped—her poor dead father.

"What did I do, Miss Neslie? I had to submit. What could I do? When she told me of her resolve to marry a rich baronet, I knew that all I could say would be in vain. I will not grieve you by repeating what she promised. As to one thing she kept her word. After she was married she sent me continually handsome sums of money. She has been ungrudgingly generous to me."

"And you took it?" said Vivien.

"Yes; I took it. It was the price of miladi's secret. I professed to believe her a D'Este. I said no word about her being a strolling player."

Miss Neslie held up her hands with an exclamation of horror.

"Hush!" she said. "Your words are terrible."

"They are true," he declared. "She was neither more nor less than a strolling player. I kept her secret—she paid me to do so. I read the notice of your father's death in the English papers, Miss Neslie, and then I wrote to her, reminding her of her promise. It was for that reason she came to Paris, and no other. You know what followed. She promised to marry me as soon as etiquette would permit, and in the meantime she invited me to the Abbey. Miss Neslie, she is there—ask her whether every word I have said is not true."

"There is no need to ask," said miladi, with careless, airy grace. "I do not deny it. Every word is true. What then?"

The proud indignation of the noble face, the measureless contempt in the dark eyes, would have silenced another—they produced no effect on Lady Neslie.

"You deceived him," said Vivien.

"So much the worse for him. He should have been more on the alert," she observed. "I admit it all. I do not mind in the least about the exposure. I only cared to keep my affairs secret during Sir Arthur's life. Of course an exposure then would have been very awkward for me. He might have tried for a divorce, though I cannot see on what grounds. He would certainly have altered his will and left me penniless. Now that he is dead and my fortune secure, I am indifferent. You may have the story printed, Vivien," she added, "if you like; it will be a finishing touch to the honor of the Neslies—a strolling player, a grocer's daughter, mistress of Lancewood. It seems to me that infelling it you will bring more shame to yourself than to me." Then, turning from Miss Neslie, she looked at Henri de Nouchet. "As for you," she said, "traitor, coward, trader on a woman's secrets, go! Never while I live will I look upon your face again!—never will I address another word

to you. Go from my presence, and take with you my contempt. You have done your worst. Do what you will, your power over me is ended; the strolling player, the grocer's daughter, has the honor of wishing Monsieur de Nouchet a lasting adieu."

With a smile parting the crimson lips, showing the pearly teeth and the pretty dimples in the white chin, with the light gleaming in her jewels, with an easy, careless grace all her own, miladi swept from the room, while the Frenchman looked after her with a curse.

"She has ruined my life. I have spent it as I should never have spent it but for her," he said. And so ghostly, so terrible was the despair on his face, that Vivien almost pitied him.

"What money do you want?" asked Vivien, curiously.

"Enough to take up my bills; I have some due now."

He seemed to shrink from the clear, bright glance of her dark eyes.

"Monsieur de Nouchet," said Miss Neslie, "I think you are a man utterly without principle. You have traded on a woman's secrets, you have been deceitful, mean, and dishonorable. I would not condescend to ask a favor from you, but I will purchase one. Write down for me all the money you owe. I will give you the amount on condition that you tell no other person what you have told to me, and that you never mention Lady Neslie's name again. This I do," she added, "not in the least from any motive of compassion for you, but to save the honor of the Neslies."

CHAPTER XXXII.

Lady Neslie returned to her guests with a calm, unruffled face, as though nothing had happened—indeed, Henri de Nouchet's exposure of her to Miss Neslie troubled her very little. No one could send her from Lancewood or take her fortune away. It was true, Vivien might and probably would say some very unpleasant things, but then words were only air—they could not hurt her.

"Henri's revenge has come to nothing after all," thought miladi; "and I am really glad to have had the chance of quarrelling with him. How could I have ever fancied that I loved him. How foolish girls are!"

The grand exhibition of fireworks came to an end, the banquet was over, the dancers, wearied and tired, had gone home; no one noticed that the handsome Frenchman who had been her ladyship's shadow had vanished. The exhausted servants had gone to their rooms; my lady, gay and brilliant to the last, had at length allowed her tired sister to escape. The whole household slept except she who had once been its mistress. Vivien Neslie was half bewildered by the horror of what she had heard, though it did not take her by surprise. She had always doubted Lady Neslie. Her brilliant beauty and airy grace could not conceal the fact that she was not a thorough-bred lady. Vivien would not have been surprised had the reality been even more terrible. Her whole soul seemed to die within her. Alas for Lancewood—proud, stately Lancewood! Evil and dark were the days that had dawned on it. A strolling player—Vivien shuddered as she said the words to herself—to take her mother's place—what shame! Never until now had she known the depths of her love for her ancient home, or her pride in it. She was in despair.

(To be Continued.)

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1336 WAIST.

1350 WAIST.

1336 WAIST.

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Composed of Ladies' Waist Pattern, 1350, and Ladies' Skirt Pattern, 1336. As here illustrated, white taffeta was employed in the making, with pipings of new blue on the free edges. The waist has new style features. The sleeve in short length is finished in bell style, and trimmed with buttons to correspond with those on the waist front. The skirt is composed of double flounce sections, that may be finished with deep scalloped or straight lower edges. For poplin, linen, organdy, lawn, dimity, voile or crepe, this design is very attractive. The waist is cut in 6 sizes: 34, 36, 38, 40, 42 and 44 inches bust measure. The Skirt in 6 sizes: 22, 24, 26, 28, 30 and 32 inches waist measure. It requires 7 1/2 yards of 36 inch material with 1 1/4 yard of lining for the foundation skirt, for a medium size. The skirt measures about 3 1/2 yards at lower edge of lower flounce.

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Ladies' House Dress with or without Collar, with Sleeve in Wrist or Elbow Length, and with Skirt in Raised or Normal Waistlines.

This neat and trim little model is good for linen, lawn, gingham, repp, poplin, voile, chambray, ratine or percale. It is also nice for tub silk, taffeta, cotton crepe, corduroy, seersucker or galatea. In white pique with pipings of a smart bright color, it will make a very chic frock. The lines are new and attractive. The shaped yoke is a new style feature, and the sleeve is good in wrist or elbow length. The skirt is a four gore model, and may be joined to the waist at raised or normal waistline. The Pattern is cut in 6 sizes: 34, 36, 38, 40, 42 and 44 inches bust measure. It requires 8 yards of 27 inch material for a 36 inch size. The skirt measures about 2 1/2 yards at the foot.

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