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THE HEIR OF Lancewood

CHAPTER XXIX.

"I should like to see it," she said musingly.
 His face flushed under her simple, unconscious gaze.
 "I hope you will some day. You will admire it."
 "Have you seen Lancewood?" she asked.

"Yes—that is, I have seen the towers and turrets of the Abbey from between the trees. Miss Neslie, will you let me speak to you as a friend—as an old friend? Try to imagine that we have known each other for many long years—that we are trusted, true, loyal friends."

"I can easily imagine it; it is not difficult with you," she replied, dreamily.

"Then let me talk to you. In common with every one else, I hear unpleasant stories about Lancewood—are they true?"

"I will tell you just how much is true," she replied; and she told him exactly what had happened—how the place was crowded with strange French visitors, people whom her father would not have admitted.

"And you can do nothing to put an end to it?" she said.

"No, my interference makes it worse; that is the sorrow of my life," she said—"the sorrow that takes the brightness from my days, the sleep from my nights—the sorrow that seems to hang over me and hide all hope from me. To see degraded the home that I have loved with such passionate love, to imagine the shameful future of a race that has never known dishonor—this has produced a sorrow for which there is no cure."

"I feel keenly for you," he said, gently.
 "No one knows what I suffer," she observed. "If I could save Lancewood by sacrificing my life, I would do so. I would do anything to restore it and make it what it was in my father's time."

"But these friends of Lady Neslie—who are they?" he asked.

"I cannot tell you. There are two or three military men—French captains, who play at billiards and drink cognac all day. The ladies—well, they are quite unlike any other ladies I have seen; they quarrel a great deal amongst themselves, but in one thing they all unite—in flattery and praise of Lady Neslie."

"Why do you not leave the place?" he said. "It must be very uncomfortable for you?"

"It is uncomfortable," she replied; "but I cannot leave it, Lord St. Just, because my father confided the honor of his house to my hands." And then she told him of the will.

"If your father uttered such words as those, he must have had doubts about his wife," said Lord St. Just.

"I often fancied that he had, but he was too true a gentleman to breathe them. I am like one chained to a rock; I long to get away, yet I know my duty lies there."

"And the boy who is to inherit Lancewood, what is he like?" asked Lord St. Just. "How old is he?"

"He is nearly six—very clever, but wanting in truth and honesty. Hard discipline, good training, might have prepared him to be a good man; as it is, he is simply ruined. His mother considers his wickedness cleverness. Heaven help Lancewood when it falls to him!"

"It is a sad story," said Lord St. Just, thoughtfully; "the ruin and decay of many an ancient house could be traced to a foolish marriage, I believe. I wish I could think of some way to help you, Miss Neslie."

She raised her beautiful face to his, and he was struck by its expression of patient devotion.

"I see no way in which I can be helped; my only hope lies in patient endurance."

"But," he said, gravely, "you do not surely intend spending the whole of your life in a place and in society that must be hateful to you?"

"I must obey my father. He wished me to remain at Lancewood until Oswald was of age. Only Heaven knows what would become of the house if I left it."

"But you may marry, Miss Neslie," he said, with a flush on his face.

"No," she replied, gravely. "I never shall—I could not; because I could not leave Lancewood—and I have never thought of marrying."

"How is that?" he asked, amused at her simplicity.

"Before my father died all my love and all my thoughts were given to him and to Lancewood. Since he died I have done nothing but grieve over it."

"I see. You have had no time for thoughts of aught else?"

There was not the least consciousness in her face as she answered—

"No, I have had neither time nor inclination. See, Lord St. Just—the shadow of the trees is falling over us—the sun is setting—we must go."

He walked by her side through the Park. They trampled the wild flowers under their feet; they stopped to listen to the low song of the birds; they talked of the setting sun and the distant hills, of the wheat-sheaves, and the bloom in the hedges; they admired the same views; they often gave expression to the same thoughts; yet, while Adrian St. Just vowed to himself that he would win the beautiful, imperial dark-eyed woman for his wife, Vivien never dreamed that she was in love.

Lord St. Just made no secret of his devotion; he became Vivien's shadow; every one perceived it long before she herself knew what it meant. She had promised to remain for three weeks at the Park, and she fancied that the new, vague, delicious happiness was the result of peace.

She had been so unselfish all her life; she had thought so much of Lancewood, of her father, of her ancestors, that she had never given her mind to girlish dreams of romance and sentiment. Another girl would have known what this new feeling meant—she did not. She thought Adrian St. Just very kind, very clever; she was thankful to have so true a friend; she knew that she liked to be near him, to listen to his voice, to watch his face; but she did not know that she loved him, came when he knew that life without



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CHAPTER XXX.

Vivien was now in the sweetest phase of her love-story. Life was all different—the world was a thousand times more fair. She wondered why the sunshine seemed more golden, and the flowers of brighter hue. What caused the new and beautiful light that had fallen on everything? What was the music always rising from her heart to her lips? Why did the world seem full of strange, sweet melody? She grew more beautiful; the proud expression of her face had given way to one of tenderness, the light in her eyes was softened and sweet, the beautiful lips curved more graciously.

Was this the same dreary world that so lately had seemed to her all sorrow, all darkness? Not that her sorrow had grown less, but that this beautiful light seemed to have absorbed it. The Neslies did nothing by halves—when they loved at all, they loved deeply, truly, and well. Vivien had begun to love unconsciously, and when she awoke to full and complete knowledge of the fact, it was too late for any change.

It was three weeks of love, poetry and romance. There could be no more charming companion than Lord St. Just. He had traveled—he had studied, read, and thought. He had resolved quite early in life that, though fortune had favored him with plenty of money, with a fine estate, an ancient title, he would not on that account fritter his life away. It should not be spent in a round of senseless amusements. It should not be passed in dissipation and folly. He cultivated his mind by reading the choicest books—his intellect by travel and the society of clever men—his taste for art by working hard at it. One thing he had never done—he had never indulged in the idle flirtations that so often lead to ruin and sorrow. He was heart-whole, fancy free. He had a fervent admiration for the sex, but not for any one woman in particular. He had never made love, played at love, or imagined himself in love. The first time his heart or fancy was touched was when he met Vivien Neslie. He carried the memory of her beautiful sorrowing face with him, and that memory was dearer to him than the living presence of any other woman. He thought so much about her that she grew into an ideal love for him.

He resolved to find her out as soon as he returned home. It would not be difficult to discover the whereabouts of the heiress of Lancewood. True, he might find her married—she might even be dead; but, if she were living and well—if she were unmarried and to be won—he would win her.

He remembered that it was with Lady Smeaton she had been staying. He did not have much difficulty in making the acquaintance of the kindly-natured woman, and in securing an invitation to the Park. There he met Vivien again, and there he heard her sorrowful story. His love increased with every moment that he spent in her presence, until the time

her would be blank and dreary to him. He had some little hope; but she was so unlike other girls that he could hardly judge whether she loved him or not. She was above all coquetry and affectation, above all little acts of meanness. He saw that her face brightened for him as it did for no other, that her voice took another tone in addressing him, that her eyes had a deeper light when they met his; but in her proud, noble simplicity there was something which half frightened him. She seemed too lofty in her aspirations; the woman who was so ready to lay down her life for the honor of her house could hardly care for love as other women did.

It was a noble love that he had to offer her—noble in its simplicity, its integrity, and purity; it was the one love of his lifetime—he was never to know another. Would she accept or reject it? He was a brave man, but he trembled for the answer to that question. Day by day he said to himself that he must ask it, yet the bright days passed on, their golden calm unbroken. He was so truly happy that he dreaded to interrupt his happiness. He was aroused from his dream by hearing that Miss Neslie would return to Lancewood in two days—her three weeks' visit had drawn to a close. He must wait no longer—back to that wretched home, if he could help it, she would never go.

Dinner was over at Smeaton Park; the visitors, availing themselves of the warm, balmy night, had gone out on to the lawn instead of remaining in the drawing-room. Vivien was standing watching the light fade in the western sky thinking of the dreary lot to which she was returning, when Lord St. Just went to her. From one look at his grave, handsome face Vivien knew by instinct what was coming.

"Miss Neslie," he said, "I have something that I wish to say to you. Will you come away from these people? Come through the rosary."

Without another word he took her hand and laid it on his arm.

"I want you," he said, "away from all the world. Sit here amongst these roses, and let me tell you something."

She sat down, and he knelt amongst the fallen crimson leaves at her feet, clasping her white hands in his. He looked up into the lovely face.

"How am I to speak to you?" he said. "Kneeling here at your feet, you seem as far above me as the darkening skies. How am I to tell you that I love you with all my heart and so pray you to be my wife?"

She did not rise in wonder, nor turn angrily away. She sat perfectly, passively silent. He went on:

"It is the whole love of my life I have to offer you, Vivien. You will let me say 'Vivien'! It is the sweetest of all sweet names. I have never given even one thought to another. I loved you the moment I saw you lying on the grass, my darling, your face white with despair. I loved you through all the months I spent in travel. I love you now more dearly than words of mine can tell. My question, will you accept my love, and give me yours in return?"

She made no answer—there was no movement in the silent figure—he could not read the expression of her face.

"I have longed to make you happy. I have longed to brighten your life. Oh, my darling, give me the power! Let my love brighten the dark clouds that hang over you. You shall know no more trouble, no more sorrow, if you will love me."

She raised her face to his, and he saw that the dark, proud eyes were filled with tears.

"My darling," he cried hastily, "let my love bring you happiness, not sorrow! I see tears in your eyes. I want to save you from sorrow, not to bring it to you. Tell me, will you try to love me?"

(To be Continued.)

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LATEST

From the Front

Messages Received Previous to 9 A.M.

OFFICIAL.

LONDON, Aug. 17.
 The Governor, Newfoundland: The French Government reports the enemy repulsed in Argonne successful raid by nineteen airplanes on the German artillery positions and depot near St. Mihiel. The Russian Government reports German attacks repulsed between Narce and Bug. The enemy furiously bombarded the fortifications of Georgievsk. There has been successful fighting in Galicia. The Italian Government reports progress, especially on the Cadore front; and the Sistine Valley. **BONAPARTE**

BULGARIA RECALLS DELEGATE
 LONDON, Aug. 17.
 So much importance is attached to results expected from the proposals made by the Entente Powers to Bulgaria and Greece regarding conditions to Bulgaria, that Bulgaria recalled from Constantinople its delegates who went there to negotiate with Turkey, says a despatch from Sofia to the Daily Mail.

THE BALKAN POSITION ACUT
 LONDON, Aug. 17.
 The importance of the Balkan situation is emphasized by the morning papers, which point out particularly that events there may reach a crisis within twenty-four hours. King Charles, of Roumania, called a special meeting of the cabinet at Bucharest yesterday, to meet leaders of political parties, as well as influential members of the chambers of the Rumanian National assembly will convene at Nish to-day to receive a statement from Premier Pachitch. Bulgarian negotiations, stimulated by the Greek parliament will be at Athens to oust the present cabinet, with the supporters of former Premier Venizelos as powerful lever. The analysis of the morning papers point out that Austria may while its gathering troops on the Danube, and that the German writers advocating openly an advance to Aegean Sea. The Daily News says that Roumania may make a surprise move which will give the Balkan deadlock. The force of events, paper says, may cut the knots which diplomatic fingers have

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