

LOST, A PEARLE

— BY —

Mrs. Georgie Shelden

"No," she said, with an assumption of indifference, "my son did not mention the fact, he evidently did not consider it of sufficient moment to do so."

Adison Cheetham's eyes blazed at her reply, and at the resemblance of the ignominious defeat he had suffered at the hands of this proud woman's son. His lips curled into their customary sinister smile when moved to anger, as he replied:

"He did, however, consider the matter of sufficient moment to defend the beautiful governess right valiantly, when she appealed to him for help against my authority over her."

If looks could have annihilated her visitor, there would not have been much left of him by the time he was through speaking; but it was vulgar to give vent to passion in words, and her ladyship replied only by asking a searching question.

"If this girl is your wife, as you claim, how is it that she is hiding from you and dependent upon her own exertions for maintenance?"

"Madam, she is not dependent. I am a gentleman, and I can give her every luxury."

"Why, then, is she hiding from you?" she repeated sternly.

"She imagines that she has sustained some wrong at my hands; but she is my wife, her place is in my home, and I cannot and will not longer be subjected to the mortification which I have for over a year endured on her account."

"What is the nature of the wrong which she imagines has been done her?"

"Pardon me, your ladyship, but I do not think it necessary to enter into particulars which can concern no one but ourselves," he replied, coolly, and the proud dame realized that she had found her match for sang froid and impudence.

"You will perceive," he continued, "that having found my wife, I cannot out of respect for myself, allow her to remain a governess longer in your family, nor, indeed, in any other."

Lady Fennelsea bowed, and smiled scornfully, as much as to say that she could have done no desire to retain Miss Melfert's services under such very questionable circumstances. "She cannot be a connection of those Radcliffe's," she thought, "or she would never have conducted herself in such a manner."

But this man aroused all the antagonism of her nature and she could not refrain from saying, with something of malice in her tones:

"It may all be as you say, but, even then, I do not see how you can compel this person to go with you, if she is unwilling to do so."

"This person," Adison Cheetham showed his teeth at the implied disrespect; but he answered, with the utmost politeness and unconcern.

"If your ladyship will kindly send for Mrs. Cheetham, I think you will not need to remain in doubt much

longer regarding the truth of my assertions. As to my wife accompanying me, that is a matter we will settle between ourselves."

Lady Fennelsea bowed stiffly, and with a very red face. This man, with his cool impudence and assumption of equality, upset her dignity as nothing had been able to do for many years.

With an expression of vindictiveness in her eyes, and of stern decision on her countenance, she rang the bell, and desired the servant to request Miss Melfert to come immediately to the parlor.

A sudden thought seemed to strike Adison Cheetham as she delivered the message, and, with an air of humility and regret, he said:

"My lady, if I have said anything which may have seemed harsh, I pray you will overlook it, for truly my troubles have embittered me sadly; and may I presume to ask your assistance in regaining my wife?"

Lady Fennelsea regarded him for a moment in surprise; then, considerably mollified, she replied:

"If this girl is your wife, it will be no more than my duty to advise her to return to you."

CAPTER THIRTY-ONE Timely Help

Pearle appeared greatly surprised upon receiving Lady Fennelsea's message, and an instinctive fear oppressed her that something was wrong, although her worst surmises did not approach anything so terrible as the ordeal through which she was about to pass.

She looked unpeppably lovely in the crisp, delicate blue lawn which she wore, with the tiny bands of blue velvet tied around her shining chestnut hair, and the half open blush-roses which she had fastened on her belt and at her throat.

Her eyes were bright, and her cheeks flushed with excitement; and when she entered the parlor Adison Cheetham caught his breath on beholding the vision of loveliness and inquiringly vowed that he would have her, no matter who or what opposed.

Pearle did not see him when she first entered the room, but she saw at once that something had happened to disturb her ladyship's serenity exceedingly. With the color rising higher in her cheeks, Pearlle approached her, and asked:

"Did you send for me, Lady Fennelsea?"

"Yes, I did," she answered, with some asperity, for Pearlle's loveliness only served to make her more angry and pitiless. "I sent for you to ascertain whether you are acquainted with this gentleman or not," and she waved her hand pompously toward the spot where her visitor sat, hungrily devouring with his eyes the beauty of the unconscious girl.

With a low exclamation of surprise, not unmixed with fear, Pearlle turned and confronted him.

The next instant her face was blanched to the whiteness of paper, the old hunted look returned over her eyes, and she sank strengthless upon a chair.

"Do you know this gentleman?" Lady Fennelsea asked again, while anger and malice glowed in the eyes fixed so sternly and remorselessly upon the fair, sweet, but horror-stricken face.

Pearle was too overcome to reply, and merely bowed her head in token of assent.

"I desire to be answered when I ask a question," her ladyship said, with tightly compressed lips. "Do you know this man?"

She longed to say "this person," but something in those peculiar eyes opposite prevented her.

"Yes, madam," came weakly from Pearlle's pale lips.

"Oh, you do, do you? Won't you please repeat his name to me? I fear I do not know how it should be pronounced," returned the vindictive woman, with a scornful glance at the card she still held in her hand.

The poor girl glanced appealingly at her employer's face. She saw that she knew it all; but there was no mercy depicted there.

"His name," her ladyship repeated, peremptorily.

"I refuse to utter it," Pearlle answered, proudly, though she shuddered involuntarily.

"That is respectful, surely," was the sarcastic retort. "Allow me to ask what relationship he bears to you?"

"Madam, he is nothing to me," and the gray eyes began to glow with a dangerous light—"A tight something like that which Adison Cheetham had seen in them on the morning of their marriage, after their return from the church."

"You may as well own to the truth," Lady Fennelsea said, sternly. "Your agitation betrays more than you are aware of perhaps. This man claims to be your husband, and now I command you to tell me truly whether your name is really Margaret Melfert, as you have led to believe, or Mrs. Adison Cheetham, as he

DOCTOR URGED AN OPERATION

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Again Pearlle shuddered. The name particularly as her ladyship had hesitatingly and gingerly pronounced it, had the most obnoxious sound to her. She never could—she never would answer to it. No moral obligation bound her to the man, and she then and there resolved to throw off the yoke that was so galling to her. She knew that he would persecute her as long as he had any legal right to call her his wife, and she determined to appeal to the courts for a decree of separation. She knew that the English laws were very strict regarding such matters, and she had no hope of ever being really free, so that happiness could come to her—her conscience would not, in fact, allow her to entertain any such hope as that; but she could at least seek protection from further persecution, and she would do it and bear the scandal rather than suffer as she was now suffering.

Lady Fennelsea's cold glance marked the drooping lids, her pale face and quivering lips, as she sat thinking of this, and what she considered the guilty shrinking of the girl for having been detected in her deception only hardened her the more. "You are detaining me; I await your reply, Miss—Mrs.—" and she stopped, as if she really did not know how to address her.

Her sarcastic tones goaded Pearlle to the verge of desperation. She arose and confronted the stern-visaged woman.

There was no shadow of fear on the lovely face, no sign of shrinking in her manner, but, instead, an air of resolution and scorn that made her ladyship wonder at and almost quail before her.

"Madam," she began, with something of hauteur, "I repeat—this man is nothing to me morally; legally, I am bound to confess, he has a hold upon me."

"You acknowledge it, then? You are his wife—you do bear his name?"

"I am obliged to acknowledge it; but I was duped, cheated and forced into it in the most monstrous manner," Pearlle answered, with a shudder.

"You were married to him, then?" continued her inquisitor.

"Yes, madam."

"In the presence of witnesses?"

"Certainly."

"You went to the altar voluntarily with him, and took upon yourself the vows which bind a wife to her husband?"

"No—a thousand times no!" burst forth Pearlle, indignantly, and unable to bear with her patiently; she must justify herself. "I told you I was duped, cheated, and entrapped into this hated marriage. I was to have married a good true man upon the very morning that I was driven into this union; but he—making a slight gesture to indicate Adison Cheetham—"

"frightened me with forged document which seemed capable of working the ruin of the man I loved; and to save him, I sacrificed myself; I appeared to submit to the only alternative—I went to the altar with him, I stood before the vicar at this man's side, and was bound to him irrevocably; but I took no vows upon myself. I uttered no word to perjure my lips or my soul; I would not even sign my name as his wife upon the church register. I did this in order to purchase the proofs, as I believed, of my promised husband's dishonor, that I might save him from the consequences; and within an hour from the time the fatal words were spoken that bound me to him, I found that he had basely forged those proofs in order to carry out his nefarious purposes. In my misery, I vowed I would never remain in his presence one single hour, I would never live out the lie which I had apparently perjured myself, and I fled from him and from all whom I loved. I determined to hide myself from the world where

I had hitherto been known, and live out my miserable life alone."

Pearle stopped to regain her breath for she was nearly exhausted with her excitement.

"You had no right to do as you have done. If you were so foolish as to allow yourself to be deceived, you should have been willing to abide by the consequences. You have ruined your character by leaving your husband and living separate from him when you might have been honored as the wife of a respectable man," said lady Fennelsea, coldly.

Pearle made a gesture of disgust. "Madam, I have at least preserved my self-respect by the course I have pursued, whatever the code of honor may be in the circles which you frequent. Every principle of truth and virtue within me revolts against the sentiments you advance," she said in tones of scorn.

"Really, Miss Melfert, or whatever I should call you, your manner is extremely insolent for one occupying the position you do in my family. However, under the circumstances, I shall overlook it; but I would advise you, if you value your future reputation, to yield submission and obedience to your husband, who really appears to be very respectably situated and who says he can give you a good position in the world."

Had not Pearlle been so utterly wretched she would have laughed aloud with amusement at this absurdly patronizing speech and the woman's affectation of superiority.

Lady Fennelsea's family and pedigree were not more honorable than her own; her wealth and position were equal, if not indeed, they did not exceed her ladyship's, while her education and accomplishments were far superior. This condescending patronage, this assumed pre-eminence not to speak of her hard-hearted, worldly-wise advice, was ridiculous, to say the least.

Pearle's lips curled disdainfully, as she replied.

"Lady Fennelsea, it is to be regretted that your advice should be unavailing; but I would rather be homeless, and as destitute as a beggar in the streets, than to humiliate myself to tolerate this man's presence for one single hour."

Adison Cheetham gnashed his teeth audibly at this resolute and spirited speech.

Lady Fennelsea, hearing it, turned to him with an expression of horror.

"I fear you have taken unto yourself a refractory wife," she said; then turning again to Pearlle, she resumed with increasing severity: "It is useless for me now to dwell upon the inexcusable deception that you have presumed to practice upon me and my innocent family. Of course, now that I have discovered it, I can no longer consider you a fit companion for my daughters, a suitable governess for my children, consequently I could, under no considerations, allow you to remain longer in my service. I trust, however, that you may be led to see your folly and repent of it, before the patience of your husband is exhausted. I shall deem it advisable," she concluded, swelling with importance and indignation, "to warn my friends and acquaintances of the deception you have practised upon me, that they may also avoid becoming the victims of your duplicity."

Upon concluding this annihilating speech, Lady Fennelsea arose majestically, as if to leave the room.

But Pearlle, feeling desperate at the thought of being left alone with that man, and without a friend to protect her from his power and fell designs, placed herself in her path.

"Your ladyship," she began, pleadingly, "you are a mother—you have daughters, and you ought to feel for one persecuted and wronged as I am and have been. I appeal to your sympathy and to your protection, until I

can communicate with my friends, and then I will relieve you of my presence immediately."

In her eagerness and despair she bent toward the stately matron, her flushed face raised beseechingly, her lovely gray eyes fixed upon her immovable features, her hands clasped and outstretched imploringly.

Lady Fennelsea drew back haughtily the exceeding beauty of her desisted governess only seemed to harden her already hard heart still more. Not one of her own daughters gave promise of one-half the loveliness of this charming girl, and the thought angered her, and strengthened her prejudice and malice.

Unfortunate people had no business to be beautiful; that gift should only be bestowed upon the rich and prosperous.

"Miss Melfert you are extremely presuming to suggest any such thing, it is not to be considered for a moment; my daughters must not be contaminated by pernicious influences. Come to me in half an hour and I will settle with you, and you will please vacate your room immediately."

This was uttered in the haughtiest accents; then, with a withering look of contempt into the beautiful, despairing face, and a cold bow to Adison Cheetham, she swept from the room.

But Adison Cheetham, who had been watching Pearlle intently, sprang before her and barred the way, as she was about to leave the room.

"I've been made a fool of about long enough," he said, through his shut teeth. "You cannot leave this room until you consent to leave it to go home with me as my wife."

Pearle raised her head and turned upon him her scornful, defiant eyes, while she moved a step or two out of his way.

She had not spoken to him once; but now she was prepared to fight him upon equal ground, and defy him to the last.

But before she could reply to him the door was suddenly and somewhat violently thrown open, and a kindly though excited face looked in upon them.

It was that of the gentleman whom Pearlle had encountered during her walks, attending the invalid imbecile girl.

An expression of surprise swept over his features as he saw the couple with in, so defiantly facing each other then, addressing, Pearlle, he said:

"Pardon me, lady, but it is quite important that I have a moment's speech with you."

"The day is engaged, sir," Adison Cheetham began, insolently, and with an angry scowl at the intruder.

But Pearlle, her heart bounding with thankfulness for this timely interruption, glided quickly to the young man's side, and deliberately taking his arm, said:

"Certainly, monsieur."

Her hand tightened over his arm almost convulsively, and he could feel that she was trembling in every limb.

He hesitated an instant and seemed somewhat surprised at her act.

"Help me," she whispered, appealingly; and comprehending at once that she was in some deep trouble, and that this sinister-looking man was the cause of it, he led her without a word from the room, and closed the door upon the discomfited and baffled husband, who cursed in no moderate manner at being thus balked at the moment when he thought

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