

Lucinda Lee

by LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

(Continued From Our Last Issue.)

With an ease that in a queer, detached way she found surprising, she managed to break his embrace. Nevertheless the effort left her faint. She faltered to the fireplace and rested a hand on the mantel, her forehead upon the hand. Lynn followed, stood by her side. Over and over he murmured gently: "Lucinda, Lucinda."

"No, Lynn. Wait. Tell me something. . . You say she—your wife—agreed to divorce you?"

"I made her promise," Summerlad asserted grimly.

"When was that? The day she disappeared?"

"The day I found her lying senseless in her room?"

"I suppose so. Well, then—yes."

"Did you have much of a scene?"

"I'll say it was some stormy young session."

"Is that why you found it necessary to strike her?"

"Summerlad started. 'What! Strike her? What do you mean?'"

But his eyes winced from her importunate regard.

"She—Nelly had a bruise on her cheek, that afternoon; and it wasn't an old bruise, Lynn; you struck her?"

"Perhaps. Maybe I did forget myself, I don't remember. What if I had?"

"I'd have killed her if she'd stuck to her refusal to go back east."

Realizing that his tongue was again running away with his discretion, he curbed it sharply.

She started back in repulsion, but he overtook her in the middle of the room.

"Lucinda, Lucinda! What do these things matter?"

The fury of her antagonism found him unprepared. And this time when he started in pursuit, something he couldn't see struck him.

Back in the same instant he heard a heavy, crashing noise he couldn't account for. An inhuman sound. It shook the room, beat deafeningly upon one's ears. As if someone had overturned a heavy piece of furniture. Only one had. And that was Lucinda. Lucinda hadn't. She was flattened against the farther wall, watching him with a face of horror blanched and gaping.

Enraged, he put forth all his strength to recover from that inexplicable blow. And instantly it was repeated. And again. Each time the companion of that savage, crashing noise. Like thunder cut off short. And each time he reeled under the impact, and sickening pains shot through him, like knives white-hot. He felt himself sinking . . .

In expiring flashes of consciousness he saw Lucinda still flat against the wall, staring out flat against the French window nearby. Between its curtains a woman's arm was thrust, the hand grasping an automatic pistol with muzzle faintly flaring. There was a face of shadowed pallor dimly visible beyond the curtains, a face with wild, exultant eyes . . . Nelly's . . .

XXXI.

To the woman plumed to the wall by shock the moments immediately following that fusillade were a welter of horror. Lucinda still flat against the wall, staring out flat against the French window nearby. Between its curtains a woman's arm was thrust, the hand grasping an automatic pistol with muzzle faintly flaring. There was a face of shadowed pallor dimly visible beyond the curtains, a face with wild, exultant eyes . . . Nelly's . . .

As the din of those three shots lost weight and volume, a thin shouting became audible from some point outside the house, and Nelly Marquis, with the sweep of a fury, her eyes burning like black sparks, broke through the hall powder, broke the door and pulled up with pistol leveled point-blank at Lucinda's breast.

A single thought persisted: Another instant and I shall be as Lynn . . .

Then abruptly through the window a dark and heavy body hurled and fastened upon the woman's back, swinging her aside, the pistol plumed into the wall close by Lucinda's head.

She heard a voice crying out again and again, "Bel! Bel! Bel!"

Her own voice . . . and for a long time hung in dread upon the issue of that swaying combat; while Bel clung to the woman's arm, muttering and panting in futile efforts to wrest her weapon away; while Nelly, clawed, bit, kicked, pounded her free hand repeatedly into Bel's face, and wrenched madly at her captive wrist.

Of a sudden, from her hand a spiteful tongue of fire licked out at Bel, his right arm flailed back and fell useless, agony convulsed his features. Free, the woman bounded away with a laugh of maniac glee, swinging the pistol to bear upon his head.

Without knowing what she did, Lucinda flung herself upon Nelly's arm and bore it down. With deflected muzzle the pistol exploded for the last time. Dropping it, Nelly turned on Lucinda and dealt with her as might a mad woman. Impressions grew confused beyond assortment, of flopping wildly this way and that, of hot breath beating into her face, of her bare flesh suffering a rain of cruel blows.

Thrown off without warning, how she couldn't guess, she felt herself sailing back, tripping, falling. Something struck the back of her head a stunning blow, and she knew flickering nausea while dense night like a moving cloud on every hand closed

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in upon her.

Choking and coughing, she unclosed her eyes upon the vision of Bel's face. A hand holding a bottle of smelling salts dropped away from her nose. Bel saluted her reviving intelligence with an even growl: "You'll do now, I guess. Try to pull yourself together. No time to lose."

"My head aches," she saw Bel in his shirt-sleeves, with the cuff turned back above his right elbow, the forearm rudely bandaged with torn linen on which a deep stain was spreading. "But Bel—your arm—"

"Hurts. Bullet plowed through the underside from wrist to elbow, nearly. I'd be dead if you hadn't jumped for her."

"And I, if you hadn't come through the window when you did. But . . . Lynn?"

Bel laughed shortly. "The excellent Mr. Summerlad's still breathing. That's all we can tell till the surgeon gets here."

"What became of her?"

"Got away clean, worse luck!—ducked past me and through the window like a shot."

Summerlad lay where he had fallen, on the far side of that piece of furniture. His face, upturned to the starting light, was like a thing of sculptured ivory, expressionless and

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HAS WESTERN ONTARIO ANY GENTLEMEN?

SINCE the propounding of the question, "What is a perfect gentleman?" by The London Advertiser two weeks ago to readers in Western Ontario, hundreds of letters answering the query, have evidenced the fact that there is a wealth of room for serious thought in the proposition. Wherever eyes have lighted on it, it has caused a mind to halt and ponder.

The Contest Editor's decision, arrived at after many perplexed hours, on account of the huge number of replies will be made public on Tuesday, May 30.

A wide range of qualifications for that few-and-far-between personage, "a perfect gentleman," are discovered in the definitions.

Love never faileth. Love possesses all the qualities necessary for a perfect gentleman, and if any man's heart is full of love to God and his fellowman, he will qualify as a perfect gentleman. MRS. J. J. Camblache, Ont.

MAN WHO NEVER PRETENDS. A gentleman is a man who pretends he is nothing more than he is, and pretends he has nothing more than he has. MRS. L. C. M. T. 286 Huron St., London.

SMILES AT DISASTER. My opinion of a gentleman is a man worth while. When a man who will smile. MRS. MARGARET MCINTYRE, Ridgeway, R. R. No. 1.

WHO HAS CLEAN SOUL. A perfect gentleman is one who has a clean soul and a pure mind, who is kindly and courteous in both word and deed. J. R. TAYLOR, R. R. No. 1, Science Hill.

CONSIDERATE TO EVERYBODY. My idea of a perfect gentleman is a man who is considerate to everybody. True to his wife and children and honest in business. MRS. J. J. Camblache, Ont.

ONE WHO RESPECTS GOD. A gentleman is a man who respects God. God is the greatest of all, and has great respect for himself. A SUBSCRIBER.

NOTHING TO BLUSH FOR. What is a gentleman? It is a thing. Dressed in a scarfpin, a chain and a ring. Dressed in a suit of immaculate style, sporting an eye-glass, a lip and a smile. Sunning himself at at homes and bazaars. Whistling music and smoking cigars. What is a gentleman? It is a thing. Dressed in a scarfpin, a chain and a ring. Dressed in a suit of immaculate style, sporting an eye-glass, a lip and a smile. Sunning himself at at homes and bazaars. Whistling music and smoking cigars.

SETS GOOD EXAMPLE. A perfect gentleman, so far as it is possible to be in this kingdom, is a man who has the ability of setting a good example in all forms of everyday life to his fellowmen. INTERESTED, R. 1, Mossley, Ont.

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