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ST. JOHN'S

## The Lost Will; OR, LOVE TRIUMPHS AT LAST.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Dearest, I have not spoken of my past to you because—well, one shrinks from recalling anything that is painful, shameful; one tries to hide it from the woman one loves, because to speak of it is to cast a shadow over her. And yet sometimes I have thought it would be better—it would be only honest—to tell you of the cloud which has darkened my life."

"Don't tell me," she said quickly, for she shrank from receiving the confidence to which only a woman who loves a man is entitled.

"Yes, I will," he said, after a pause of hesitation, and taking her hand. "Some day the impulse would come on me, perhaps after our marriage; I should tell you, and you might consider that I ought to have told you before. Now, when I was a young man, quite a young man, scarcely more than a boy, I made a fatal mistake. There was a young girl, the daughter of a petty tradesman, at Oxford—oh, I can't talk about her—to you especially; it is like sacrilege. Let it suffice that I was infatuated with her, that her coarse and common beauty exerted that kind of spell to which so many a young man falls a victim."

"But why tell me all this?" said Nora. "I know something of the world, of men—the many temptations they have to face, the follies. I can guess the rest. It is all over now. Why give yourself—and me—the pain of talking about it?"

"Yes, it is all over," he said, with a movement of his white hand, a toss of his head. "But I don't think you guess the whole of the story, the extent of my folly. Nora, I—married her."

Nora did not shrink; indeed, the whole of her became rigid. It was not that she was startled or horrified, but that the revelation had placed him, in her mind, in a different position from that which he had occupied a few moments before. Although she did not love him, she admired and respected him, regarded him as a kind of Bayard, a knight without fear and without reproach; indeed, she had tried to strengthen that respect for and regard of him by comparing him with other men—say, Jack Chalfonts, who had been caught by the mere prettiness, the showy charms of the village girl, Maud Delman. And now this Bayard, this spotless knight, was

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proved by his own confession to be no better than the general run of men. The glamour she had striven to weave about him was dispelled as by a vulgar breath, and in an instant he had sunk in her estimation, and was just a common-place man, masked in a handsome face and a graceful form. She sat quite still, her eyes fixed on the ground, her heart like lead, and his voice came to her robbed of that intonation of dignity and pride of rank which, though she did not love him, had held something of a charm for her.

"I married her," he said, with the bitterness of self-contempt. "We lived together for a short time; I had kept our marriage secret. Oh, I must have been ashamed of her from the first. She did not care for me, and only married me because she thought she would be a 'fine, grand lady,' as she phrased it, and, of course, she was disappointed when she found that I was poor and could not give her all the things she had set her heart on. We parted, and she went abroad. I made her an allowance. It was not an illiberal one; it made me poorer than I had been; and she went her own way, bribed to silence. Her course was a foolish and a vicious one. Repeatedly, I had to send her additional sums of money."

He paused and drew his hand across his brow, then he said, in a lower voice:

"She is dead. She died quite recently, a few weeks ago. You will remember that I went up to London? It was free, that my release had come, death. It was when I knew that I was free, that my release had come, that I let my heart speak to you. It was full of love for you, almost from the first day I saw you. I tried to crush it down. I think, dearest, you must have noticed the constraint, the forced coldness of my manner. Nora, I was in misery, in agony. Then the news came, and— Ah, well, it is all over. The penalty of my folly has all paid. I am not only free, but I am consoled for all that is past by your sweet, pure love."

There was silence. Nora's heart was still as heavy as lead; she was burdened by the consciousness of the disillusion which his revelation had worked.

"Are you sorry I have told you, Nora?" he asked, feeling the constraint of her rigidity, her irresponsiveness.

"No-yes," she replied, in a voice that sounded hard and unsympathetic even in her own ears. "It wasn't necessary."

"I know," he assured her. "I know that that tender heart of yours can only feel pity for the folly which cost me so much. I am glad I have told you; the doing so has lifted a weight off my mind. I feel now that, indeed, there is nothing between us."

Nothing between them! To Nora it seemed as if a great barrier had risen between them, reared on the foundations of the ideal which she had made of him, and he had destroyed.

"So now you see why I do not attach any importance to that past of yours, that old poverty and—want of position," he said, regaining his usual composure and characteristic air of dignity. "Compared with mine, it is as the snow to the mire. Nora, we will never speak of this again. At one time I felt as if I should never be able to get away from the dark shadow which this cloud cast over us; but our mutual love has lightened, brightened all my life, and from this moment I am going to forget everything but the life of joy and sunshine which spreads before us."

He bent and kissed her brow—Nora had moved so that his lips did not reach hers—and rose, drawing on his gloves slowly, with the air of ease and leisure which was habitual to him. When he had gone Nora paced up

and down her room, as she had paced so often of late. The spell, the slight spell in which he had held her, was dispelled. She was not going to marry a man without speck or flaw, a stainless knight, but a man who had proved himself a fool like other men, and had besmirched himself by a marriage with a common "no-class" girl. She threw up her arms with a gesture which expressed her longing to be free. Why, even Jack Chalfont's rose superior in his folly to Lord Ferndale; for Nora divined that Maud Delman was neither vicious nor self-seeking. Oh, to be free! And yet, how could she demand freedom, when the man who loved her had been so frank and candid, when her money would restore the Abbey, his ruined fortunes?

At that moment, strange to say, Nora wished herself back in the wilds of Australia, in Melbourne, in the London slum—wished herself anywhere, again poor and of no account. It seemed to her, at that moment of her disillusionment, of her revolt against a marriage with Ferndale, as if the fortune into which she had stepped was a kind of ban or curse. She bathed her face and went downstairs.

The door of Mr. Chalfont's den was open, and, aimlessly she went in and sank into the cheap and uncomfortable Windsor chair in which Chalfont used to sit and smoke his pipe. The simplicity, plainness, of the room, the absence of the luxury which characterized the rest of the great house, appealed to her and soothed her; it recalled her own simple, poverty-stricken past. As she sat there looking absently at the common furniture, the pipes on the mantelshelf, the cheap paraffin lamp which, from respect and reverence for the dead, had been left in its place, she wished that all this wealth of hers could take to itself wings and fly away, and that she could be free to live her own life, to marry whom she pleased or not to marry at all.

The longing for freedom, for an unshackled condition, was torturing her. A sheet of paper lay on the desk before her; she drew it towards her and looked at it. Of course it was a sheet of memoranda in Jack Chalfont's handwriting. She flung it from her and eyed it as if it were a basilisk. She sat thus for some half hour or so, when gradually there grew upon her consciousness a faint smell of burning.

She looked round the room, but there was no suggestion of the cause. There was no fire in the grate; for, though the autumn had come, this room was in the sun and the fire had not been lit. Mechanically she rose and moved about, trying to trace the smell, and presently she was assured that it came from the wall behind the safe.

Like most of the rooms in the Hall, the den was panelled by wood, and it occurred to her that in some way or other, one of the panels behind the safe had become ignited. She was pondering over this solution of the enigma when James opened the door suddenly, and at sight of his mistress stopped short and stammered:

"I beg your pardon, miss; but something's gone wrong with the fire in the still-room, and I thought—there was a smell of burning, miss—that perhaps it had set light to this old wall. You see, miss, the fireplace is just at the

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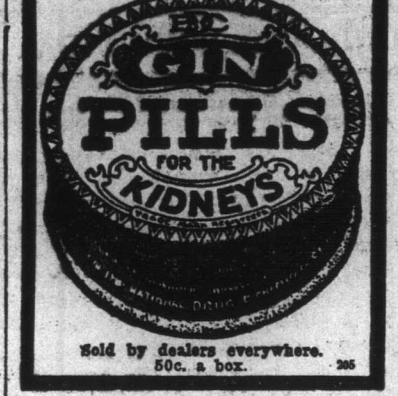
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## BACK-ACHE! Fashion Plates.



back of this wall, and there's no telling in these old 'houses—"

"You mean that the chimney is on fire, that something may have been set alight? The still-room. Let me see; it is at the back of this one."

"Just behind this wall, miss," said James. "It's just as likely as not that a brick might have got loose, and that the fire might have set alight to a bit of the partition."

As he spoke the smell of burning grew stronger, and a wisp of smoke rose from behind the safe.

"There you are, miss!" cried James. "It 'as set light to the partition. Oh, dear me, what had we better do?"

"Call some of the servants; tell Forbes the fire is behind the safe there. It must be got away from the wall at once—at once—do you hear?"

James ran out, and in less than a minute the butler and half-a-dozen other men were in the den.

"You must drag the safe away," said Nora, with the quietude and self-possession of a woman who has seen men draw upon each other, who has helped to extinguish a prairie fire; in short, the coolness and readiness of one who has been confronted by serious accidents.

The men eyed the heavy mass of iron and steel dubiously; but they were spurred to effort by Nora's "Be quick, please!" and, throwing themselves on the safe, they managed, with no little difficulty, to drag it some six inches or so from the wall, and disclosed a burnt and smouldering patch on the wooden panelling.

"I thought so!" exclaimed Nora. "Bring some buckets of water, quick! We shall soon put it out."

They rushed from the room in a confused body, and Nora knelt down to examine the burning spot. As she did so something, a paper, lying on the floor, as if it had fallen when the safe had been removed, caught her eye. She picked up the paper and thrust it inside her belt mechanically. In a minute or two the men returned with some buckets of water, which they threw on the smouldering wood; there was a hissing, some flecks of steam, and a belch of smoke; they threw on more water, and presently the smoke ceased; they had extinguished the fire. The men drew back and surveyed the success of their efforts with an air of satisfaction.

"It hasn't done much harm, miss, thank goodness," said Forbes. "We've put it out on the other side; and—ah—it's all right. Don't be frightened, miss. It wasn't anybody's fault; these old 'houses—"

"No, no, it's all right, Forbes," said Nora. "We will have a brick wall, a fireproof wall, built up between the fireplace and the partition. What's that?"

"That" was the village fire-engine, which, attended by the amateur fire brigade and a large following, had come snorting up the drive.

"Oh, the fire brigade," said Nora, with a smile. "I'm afraid it will be awfully disappointed. Give them some beer and something to eat, Forbes. Tell them it is all over, and thank them for coming so quickly."

At this moment Mrs. Feltham came in, hurriedly and affrightedly.

"It's all right, dear," said Nora soothingly. "We have been having a little fire. I'm so sorry you weren't here to enjoy it. Yes, it's all over; and there's not much damage done," she added, pointing to the charred wood.

"Oh, my dear, how dreadful!" exclaimed Mrs. Feltham. "How fortunate you found it out in time! The place might have been burned down. And how frightened you must have been! Won't you come and lie down and rest, now it's all over?" she added beseechingly; for not even yet had she realized that Nora was unlike the ordinary run of young women, and not in the least neurotic.

(To be Continued.)

A STYLISH SUIT.

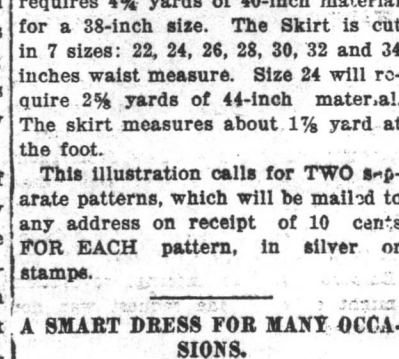


Coat—2556. Skirt—2442.

Comprising Coat Pattern 2556, and Skirt Pattern 2442. This will make a splendid suit in Jersey cloth, gabardine broadcloth, serge, satin, velvet or corduroy. For separate skirt and coat one could have plaid or check suiting for the skirt, and serge for the coat. The collar of satin or velvet or of the material of the skirt. The pockets are a new feature. The vest of the coat may be omitted. The Coat Pattern is cut in 7 sizes: 34, 36, 38, 40, 42, 44 and 46 inches bust measure. It requires 4½ yards of 40-inch material for a 38-inch size. The Skirt is cut in 7 sizes: 22, 24, 26, 28, 30, 32 and 34 inches waist measure. Size 24 will require 2½ yards of 44-inch material. The skirt measures about 1½ yard at the foot.

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2585—Black satin was employed for this design with self-covered buttons for decoration on the peplum. One could have a touch of color in binding or piping, on the free edges of the dress. The skirt is mounted on a body lining. The peplum waist is finished separately. This is nice for serge with matched silk or satin, in some pretty contrasting shade. Furery cloth, outing, gabardine and velvet are also suitable.

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## AUSTRIA

Her Negotiations Peace. Turkey Fifteen Thousand render to Austria arises Lloyd George

AUSTRIA AND PEACE. BASEL, Oct. 29. A semi-official note issued at Vienna to-day on Austria's reply to President Wilson says, Austria was obliged to conform to the methods of President Wilson who has successively applied to the three members of the triple alliance and act apart from her allies. The monarchy which has formally adopted President Wilson's line of action shares his opinion as was shown by the Emperor's manifesto to the peoples which in proclaiming the realization of President Wilson's programme, exceeded President Wilson's programme, however, the complete reorganization of Austria can only be carried out after an armistice. If Austria-Hungary has declared herself ready to enter into negotiations with other states that does not necessarily signify an offer of a separate peace. It means that she is ready to act separately in the interests of the re-establishment of peace.

AUSTRIAN NOTE RECEIVED. WASHINGTON, Oct. 29. The Austrian note asking for an armistice and peace terms, was received by cable to-day at the Swedish Legation for delivery to the State Department. The text is said to be identical with that carried by the Associated Press from Basel, Switzerland, yesterday. Word of the arrival of the note came just as the Cabinet was assembling at the White House for the usual Tuesday meeting, at which both the Austrian plea and the latest German note were expected to be discussed.

BRITISH PRESS VIEW. LONDON, Oct. 28. Austria's reply to President Wilson viewed here as an unconditional surrender. Although recognized as an act of the greatest moment as denoting the breaking up of the Hapsburg power, the main interest in the situation lies in the effect it will inevitably have on the position of Germany.

FRENCH PRESS VIEW. PARIS, Oct. 29. "The capitulation of Austria" is the varying caption with which the morning newspapers precede Count Illus Andrássy's note to President Wilson. The editorials of the newspapers, while accepting this conclusion, urge caution lest there be a hidden snare behind the Austrian offer.

ATTLE CONTINUES VICTORIOUSLY. ROME, Oct. 29. The battle begun on the Piave River Monday by Italian and Allied troops continuing victoriously, the war has announced to-day, Italian troops formed the heights of Val Dobbiaden.

They also carried the heights of Monte and entered Susegana. Numerous guns were captured. French cavalry assaulted Mont-Pionar and captured it.

BRITISH CONTINUE ADVANCE ON ITALIAN FRONT. LONDON, Oct. 29. The resistance of the Austrians against the British in the Italian theatre appears to be weakening, according to an official communication issued to-night. The text of the communication follows: "The advance of the tenth army continues, according to plan. The enemy's resistance appears to be weakening considerably. On this morning the enemy was attacking the line on the River Monte, so with a number of machine guns, yet British cavalry and infantry forced a

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