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# RUMFORD BAKING POWDER

## "Love in the Wilds"

The Romance of a South African Trading Station.

### CHAPTER XLIX. THE END OF THE SEASON.

The deep, almost grand intensity he threw into the last word caused her to start and echo it faintly. "Ay, death," he repeated, sinking on one knee and taking her hand, while he pierced her eyes with a gaze at once imploring and commanding—"ay, death; for I will not live without you. Look at me, Lucille, and doubt it not! Even now our brave fellows are marching on to Rome. They will take it—they must—nay, they shall! But some will fall martyred for the cause, and Reginald Dartmouth shall be on the death-roll if the woman he loves will not give him the right to share her heart with Italy. Lucille, I ask but one word—'Yes' or 'No.' I ask it as a man balancing 'twixt life and death. Whisper 'Yes,' and I lay down my life, my love, at your feet. Whisper 'No,' and I start for Rome, to lay both with the death around her walls."

For a moment she looked round, as if to escape from the mesh he had so dexterously wound round her.

Thoughts flashed like lightning through her perplexed and bewildered brain.

He spoke truly, or never yet was Jan true.

"Could she by saying 'No' condemn the man to die who had done so much for Italy? Could she send him helpless and mad to die at the gates of the city he had been instrumental in plucking from the hands of the spoilers?"

He loved her passionately; what was she that she should ruin his life? "Speak—speak, Lucille; speak!" he implored, breaking into these thoughts and scattering them to the winds. "Speak—'Is it life or death?"

A troubled shade passed over her face, but with an effort the beautiful woman gathered strength and, repressing a shudder that at the moment threatened to quiver through her whole frame, murmured, brokenly:

"Live—if your life is in my keeping!"

In an instant he had covered her hands with kisses, and the next caught her to his breast.

### CHAPTER L. A CHILD OF NO NAME.

This in the name of Heaven I promise here. The which, if He be pleased, I shall perform—SHAKESPEARE.

The last dance had been danced; the string and brass instruments were still; the footfalls on the polished, inlaid floor of the great saloon had all died away; the lights were being quickly extinguished by the

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will not play falsely. I will reveal it. Oh, Reginald Dartmouth, bitter was the day when fate threw me across your path! Look at me," she continued, raising and flinging the shawl and appearing herself with the air of a princess. "Whom do you think you see?"

He pressed his hand to his brow—the change in her from a cold, passionless woman to this creature of fire and passion bewildered and deprived him almost of speech.

"Whom? Am I dreaming, Lucille?"

"Oh, Brian—Countess Vitzarelli!"

He bowed his head.

"Yes."

"And I say no—Countess Vitzarelli by title and by law of Rome, but in reality a child of no name but that of shame!"

He breathed more freely, and leaned against the balcony, wiping the perspiration from his face.

"What mean you?" he breathed.

"Listen, she said, sinking into the seat again with a shudder. 'My mother was a ballet dancer at the Roman Opera House; Count Vitzarelli loved and betrayed her!'

Reginald Dartmouth sprang to his feet, but with a gesture of command the beautiful woman went on coldly, almost sternly:

"Of that unholy union were two children. I was the eldest—two only, for my mother woke one night to the sense of her infamy and her shame, and, crying on the Virgin for mercy, fled from the palace. She fled, taking with her the two evidences of her crime—myself and my sister."

She paused before the last words and seemed to struggle with some fearful emotion; then, before Reginald Dartmouth could speak, continued:

"The count, my father, who loved her as well as so bad a man could, sought her far and wide, but unsuccessfully; then, as a last resource, tried to make the children of the woman he had ruined legitimate. Legitimate! As if Heaven itself could wipe away our shame!"

"Thank Heaven!" murmured Reginald Dartmouth.

But as if she did not hear him, the unnatural voice went on:

"My mother, hearing nothing, knowing nothing of this, fled still, reached France and there, wearied and wayworn, sickened of a deadly fever. Oh, Heaven, can I forget that night? We had taken refuge in a brick-maker's deserted hut, my sister and I kneeling beside the damp straw upon which our mother lay, crying upon her for one last word, one last command. It came. Taking my arm she raised herself and, placing my sister's hand in mine, bid me, if I would hope to meet her in the world to which she was speeding, to watch her, guard her, keep her, and—oh, Heaven, to snatch her, even by death; for the chance of such a fate as had fallen upon her mother! I promised; nay, swore to do so, and with my oath ringing in her ears my mother died."

For a few moments there followed a deathly silence; then, in a strained voice and speaking as if with difficulty, Lucille, Countess Vitzarelli, went on:

"We buried our mother, and, hand in hand, journeyed on alone. We lived by such chance charity as fell to us from the passers-by. When that failed I learned to dance, and danced in the street for the bread that could not be bought for tears. My sister—she whom I had sworn to guard—was never from my sight. We were known through all the villages of France as the twins, and so lived until one fatal day we reached Paris. There we parted, Oh, do not speak! Let me go on or I shall die! We were parted. I had gone to buy bread. My sister, tired of walking beside the door, strayed from my sight. I lost her. For weeks I sought for her through the cruel city, and at last learned that she had gone, fled—lured by some black heart to the shame I had sworn to guard her from. Then, when the news reached me, I swore to know no peace, to know no love till I found her and avenged her. I went to Rome, found my father, was seized by him and detained to play a hollow part at court; but, for years, with my oath repeated daily, was forced to relinquish the search.

"One night I dreamed she was dead. They told me it was but a dream, but I knew that she was dead as well as if I had heard her last breath. Then my oath changed. I swore I would find the demon who had ruined her. Years rolled on, and my purpose failed. I, who had sworn

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never to love, loved at last. Nay, do not start! It was but my country, Italy. I gave myself to the cause and forgot—oh, Heaven forgive me—my sister!

"But it was but for a time. Suddenly the old desire sprang to life and the oath grew upon me. Lately the remembrance of my mother's and our shame has become more vivid, and now—as she spoke she rose and clinched her hand to her bosom—"and now I am filled with one desire, that of avenging my sister's shame and death!"

Reginald Dartmouth pressed his hand to his brow and looked slowly round.

"Lucille," he said hoarsely, "but that I see your face and hear your voice I should deem this but a dream. Lucille, I know now what stands between you and my love, and here, with Heaven's light upon us both, I take your oath as mine."

She started and held out her hand. He seized it and pressed it to his lips.

"Lucille, I take this as my gauge. Give me some clew, and I will win your love by giving you your revenge."

She gazed at him for a moment, then sank upon a seat.

"You love me still?" she said, with bewildered astonishment.

"Still—ten thousand times more!" he replied, his passion heightening by this new phase of her beauty. "I love you still and will win your love or die in the attempt. Lucille, give me some clew. Tell me your sister's name."

"No use—no use. I will do more—show you her face, as when last I saw it. Here against my bosom I have worn it as a reminder—alas; for how long forgotten!—of my oath. See!" and she thrust her hand into the bosom of her dress. But suddenly she sprang to her feet white and trembling, and her hands dropped to her side. "Oh, Heaven, it is gone!"

"Gone?" he echoed.

"Yes, gone—lost!" repeated the countess, sinking onto the seat and covering her face with her hands. "Gone! It has never been from against my heart since we parted. I have worn it night and day."

"It is in the hall-room—you have dropped it to-night," he said, quickly.

"Let us go at once—at once!" she cried, feverishly.

He drew her arm within his, and, wrapping the cloak round her, walked toward the window.

Before they could reach it, however, a shadow crossed their path, and, starting, Reginald Dartmouth turned his head and saw the slim figure of John Stanfield coming slowly toward them.

With a dark frown he waited until he came up, and said, sternly:

"What brings you here, sirrah?"

The blue spectacles were raised to his face, still white and agitated, and in the slow, monotonous voice, still without the least expression, said:

"I have just returned from London, sir, and hearing voices on the terrace feared they might be—"

"You may go; all is safe," said Reginald Dartmouth, impatiently.

And the slouching figure, with a formal bow, turned and walked slowly away, not turning round until the window was closed behind them; then, with a sudden swiftness, he ran back a few paces, stooped and picked up a small, glittering trinket, and, without waiting to glance at it, ran lightly down the steps in the direction of his own room.

(To be continued.)

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