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 ST. LOUIS - U. S. A.

## THE HEIR OF Lancewood

CHAPTER XL.

"Have I then I ought to be ashamed of myself, and I will drive it away. I shall not take the carriage," she continued. "Will you get me a cab yourself? I do not want remarks made about my going out. Get it yourself, Joan, and dress yourself to come with me."

Faithful Joan shook her head gravely, as she hastened to obey. "She may say what she likes, but I am sure there is something wrong. That is just the troubled, harassed look she used to wear, and I have not seen it on her face for many a long day."

Lady St. Just entered the cab and gave the driver the address, and then she turned to her maid. "I may tell you, Joan, where I am going," she said. "Mr. Dorman is dying, and has sent for me."

"There is something wrong, I am sure," thought Joan Habley again; "but Heaven only knows what it is."

CHAPTER XLII.

The houses in Victoria street are all of one class, large, respectable, and airy. Many of them are let in apartments, and the lodgers are most of them professional men—artists whose studios are in other localities, musicians who find the central situation most useful, authors and editors, whose ambition is perhaps higher than their means of gratifying it, surgeons of good professional standing. It is a quiet, respectable street, neither lively nor dull, but where people take a quiet interest in each other, and the occasional disappearance of an apparently well-to-do resident filled the rest with concern.

Lady St. Just had never been in the street before. She looked anxiously for the number which Gerald

Dorman had given, and when the cab stopped, she looked even more anxiously at the house. It was a large house, with green balconies and a small garden in front—the very ideal of respectability. A few sad-looking flowers grew in the little garden; the windows all had venetians and white curtains.

"Shall I go in with you, my lady?" asked Joan, as the cab stopped. "No," said Lady St. Just. "And no matter how long I am, remain here till I return."

In answer to the summons at the door a servant-maid appeared, and she looked wonderingly at Lady St. Just, Vivien had dressed herself as plainly as possible, but she could not hide the magnificence of her figure, or the grand, noble beauty of her face. The girl stared at the unusual vision, and Lady St. Just asked if she could see Mr. Dorman.

"I don't know. They say he is dying," replied the girl. Lady St. Just recoiled at the words. Poor Gerald, to lie dying there!

"Shall I fetch my mistress or the nurse?" asked the girl. "The nurse," replied Vivien; and in a few minutes the maid returned with her, a kindly, clever-looking woman, who courted profoundly.

"You are the lady, I think," she said, "whom Mr. Dorman wishes to see?" "Yes," answered Vivien; "I will go to him at once, if you please. Is he better?" "No," replied the nurse; "I am sorry to say Mr. Dorman will never be any better in this world, madam. I do not think he has many hours to live; but he told me this morning that he could not die until he had seen you."

Again the words struck her with all the force of a blow. What did they mean? "Will you follow me, madam?" asked the nurse, who, like the servant, was struck by the wonderful grace and magnificent beauty of the visitor.

She followed the nurse up the stairs into a large, well-lighted, well-furnished room. A bedstead with crimson hangings occupied the middle; on it lay Gerald.

She saw the white face, wan, haggard, with a gray shade on it; she saw two large, wistful almost despairing eyes, glazed and terrible, that fastened on her face with a hungry look; she saw the white hands, so thin and trembling, which were stretched out to greet her, and she knelt down by his bedside unable to repress her tears.

"Vivien," he whispered—and in all her life Lady St. Just had never heard anything so terrible as that voice—"have you come at last—at last!" and the dying eyes seemed to drink in every feature of her beautiful face. "At last—at last! and I have waited such long hours—dark, dreary hours; and death—see, death stands here by my side, but he would not lay his hand upon me until you had been—you, my queen, my darling, my only love!"

She raised her head with a warning gesture. "Yes, I know," he said, "you are another man's wife, but none the less my darling, none the less my love, none the less my idol, though you have never loved me!" "My poor Gerald," she said, gently, "you were such a faithful friend to me—so good and so true!"

"Yes, and I am dying because I love you so. I have tried my best; I have tried to live without you, to fill my life with other cares. I could not, so I lie here."

"My poor Gerald!" she said, with weeping eyes. "Rich Gerald," he corrected, "I have lived for you, my beautiful, proud, stately love—lived, sinned, suffered. I also die for you. You will remember that, and not think hardly of me. I know," he said, faintly, "that the love of you constituted my life; but I did not think I should miss you so greatly, so terribly. Vivien, may I hold your hand in mine just once? I am a dying man, dear, dying for you."

She took the worn, white hand in her own, and held it in her warm clasp. "Vivien," he said, "I am thirsting to hear something—tell me, have you been happy since you married? Do not imagine that there is any foolish jealousy in my heart—but I want to know. I want to know if you have been happy?"

His eyes were fixed on her face with such desperate earnestness—with such almost fierce craving for her answer. "Tell me," he said, "have you been happy? Tell me all."

"Yes," she replied; "I have been happy."

A sudden, almost beautiful light

came over his face. She saw how the words delighted him, and she continued—

"I have been so happy that the world has been like a Paradise to me. I love my husband dearly, Gerald; he is noble and generous, he is devoted to me, and spends his life in making me happy. Then I have two beautiful children. Oh, Gerald, how I wish you had come to our house instead of lying all alone here! I would have nursed you and cared for you as though I were your own sister."

"Never mind about me," he said, faintly; "tell me more about your happiness."

"It is so great," she replied, "that it is perfect. I am beloved and happy, Gerald; the days are all bright. What more can I say?" "You tell me that for these past few years you who have suffered so much have been perfectly happy?" he said.

"Yes," she replied, "perfectly." "And, tell me, Vivien—clasp my hand more tightly, dear, it is so cool—if you had never been married you would never have been happy?"

"No," she replied, "never."

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"Then I am content," he said. "And, Vivien, you would never have married had you not known that Oswald was dead?"

"Never," she replied. "I would never have married with that awful secret on my soul. But, Gerald, that is all past, do not speak of it. I have repented; I have prayed for pardon through long days and long nights; I have been kind to every child for the sake of that one. Do not speak of it."

She saw a gray, terrible look come over his face.

"You have been quite happy, dear, for the past few years?" he repeated. "Yes, Gerald," she answered; "but why do you ask?"

"You may hate me when I tell you—you may almost curse my name; but I loved you so I was determined that you should be happy, no matter what it cost me, no matter what I suffered, or how I sinned. I would have died over and over again to make you happy."

"But, Gerald," she asked, the same terrible, sickening fear overpowering her, "what is it—what have you done?"

"Do not hate me, Vivien. Stoop down lower that I may whisper. Love—my love—Oswald is not dead, but living!"

She threw up her arms with a terrible cry—a cry like that of one drowning—a cry so shrill in its agony and despair that the dying man was alarmed at it.

"It cannot be true," she gasped rather than spoke; "it is too cruel, it cannot be true!"

"It is true. I swear it before Heaven!" he said faintly, and then for some minutes there was silence between them—an awful silence, more terrible than the quietness of death.

The face she raised to him then was in that short space of time quite changed; the rich coloring, the happy light, the proud, serene calmness were gone, never to return. It was a terrible face, even ghastly in its pallor.

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"It cannot be true, Gerald," she repeated, "it is too cruel, it cannot be true!"

"It is as true as Heaven," he declared.

"But why did you act so? It was cruel, pitiless. Why did you deceive me?"

"Because I wanted you to be happy. I saw that you loved some one very dearly; and I saw that you would be wretched all your life away from that one."

"Not half so wretched as I am now," she returned. "It was cruel of you, Gerald."

"I did not mean it to be so," he said, faintly. "I saw that you were unhappy, and that you would never marry while this secret lay between you and the man you loved. You know, Vivien, that I would have died for you. When I saw you so miserable, I asked myself what I could do to make you happy; and I knew from what you had said that you never could be happy while the boy lived."

He lay quite still for some moments, and then he continued—

"May Heaven pardon me, Vivien, but I loved you so well that I could almost have destroyed him to render you happy. Another idea came to me—to make you believe he was dead. It was for that I went to America. I could not see any other way. I was very kind to the boy; he loved me very much—he loves me now. I took him away from my brother—he traveled with me; and then I deceived my brother as much as you, for I made him believe the boy was dead."

"How could you? How could you?" she sobbed. All her strength, all her courage, had given way at last, and she was weeping like a child.

(to be Continued.)

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