

A Fair Invalid

CHAPTER VIII.

Dr. Fletcher had gone with the two patients to the River House. He remained some little time longer with Miss Vane. We saw the wounded taken away to the different hotels and the hospital; we saw the dead carried in mournful procession, and we saw the few passengers who were unharmed, pale, trembling, hardly daring to believe that they were saved. We could do no more. Slowly and sadly I rowed down the stream to the River House. Miss Vane looked very pale.

"I shall never like the river again," she said to me in a frightened voice. "I used to delight in it; it was music and poetry to me. I shall never like it again, for it has been transformed into a grave."

"You trembled so violently and looked so ill that when we reached the River House I made her drink some wine and retire to her room."

"I went first to the north room, where the lady was lying. There was not much the matter with her; she had been stunned, terribly frightened, the maid who was watching by her said, but the doctor had given her a composing draught, and she was fast asleep. That was good news. I went gently to her bedside and looked at her."

"No, ma'am; I heard the doctor mention it, but I do not remember it. It was not of much importance, I thought. How little I guess of what importance it was! And then I went to the Blue Room, where the gentleman who had been in a cab, and who was far more solemn. The doctor, with a grave, troubled face, bent over his patient, engaged in counting the beats of his patient's pulse. I went up to the bed. One of the handsomest men I had ever seen in my life was lying on it, pale, exhausted, with closed eyes and parted lips. 'Is there danger?' I asked of the doctor."

"Yes," was his brief reply. "Danger! Was the shadow of death everywhere? I stood in silence, never remembering to have seen anything like the face and head before me. It was beauty of the purest masculine type—a noble head, with clusters of dark-iron hair—features that waved in a careless, graceful fashion—a broad, noble brow—a face oval-shaped and perfect in contour. 'What is the injury?' I asked. 'Brain concussion,' replied Dr. Fletcher briefly."

"Will you have further advice?" I inquired. "Yes, if no change takes place in a short time."

"No change did take place; the patient did not open his eyes. He seemed perfectly unconscious, and the doctor's face grew more and more anxious. I watched him as intently as he watched the sufferer. 'Do you think it will end fatally, Doctor?' I asked. 'I am afraid so, Mr. Neville. While there is life, though, we will hope.'"

"Had you not better try to find out who he is? If anything serious is likely to happen, his friends ought to be sent for." "The lady is his wife," said Dr. Fletcher. "She is sleeping soundly. Perhaps you are right, Mrs. Neville; it would be as well to know who he is."

"The clothes that had been taken from him were placed on a chair, and the doctor examined the contents of the pockets. There was a gold watch and chain, a purse well filled with gold, a pocket-book containing letters and bank notes, a card-case, and another packet of letters. The doctor looked carefully at them, and then came to me. 'Our patient is a gentleman of high standing, Mrs. Neville. He is Lord Clive Wynton.'"

"Oh, Mrs. Neville! I wish that I could forget the scene! Who are the people that were fortunate enough to help?" "We have been trying to find out. The doctor examined the gentleman's letters and papers. He is Lord Clive Wynton, and the lady is his wife."

"Never while I live shall I forget the awful, ghastly change that came over her face, lighting up its pallor only to deepen it again. The white lips sprung apart, the dark eyes had a wild, despairing look. Twice saw her try to speak, but all sound died away in a gasping sigh; and then she came over to me, and her fingers clutched my arm as though it were held in an iron grasp."

"Say that again!" she hissed. "Lord Clive Wynton," I repeated, wondering, and half alarmed, she raised her face, and I heard her groan: 'Merciful heaven!'"

"The beautiful face and restless eyes turned to the window again. 'Am I dreaming, or what?' Lord Wynton here—brought here to die! I cannot believe it," she gasped. "There are strange turns in life, I know—fortune plays us wild tricks—fate has unexpected things in store, but this cannot be—that Lord Wynton is brought to my home to die!"

"It is true—it is neither dream nor fancy, but truth." "Can you tell me," she asked—"is it a curse or a blessing? That man is my mortal foe—my greatest enemy. There is no curse that I have not heaped up on his head; for his sake I hate my kind, the whole human race. Is he brought here that I may see my curse fulfilled, or that I may do what angels do—'spite and forgive'?"

"She buried her face in her hands, and for the first time I heard her weeping like a child. The tears would benefit her, I thought. I made no effort to check them. Great sobs shook her frame. I waited until it seemed to me that she was exhausted, and then I bent over and kissed her. I shall never forget the face she raised to mine. 'Mrs. Neville,' she whispered, 'will he die?'"

"I fear so; the doctor does not give much hope," I replied. She looked at me with pleading eyes. "Suppose that anyone injured you—mortally injured you, blighted your life, killed the heart within you, although your body lived on—and you cursed them; if danger or deadly peril came to them, should you think it was your curse fulfilled?" "Hardly," I replied. "Heaven is very merciful."

"A great sorrow came to me," she said, dreamily—"greater than falls to the lot of most people. I knew when it came that there were two ways of meeting it. One was to bow my head in lowly submission, to pity, to pardon; the other was to curse the hand that had snatched in twain the very chord of my life, to harden my heart against my kind, to render myself forever for the wrong done to me. I chose the last."

"It was the wrong one," I said, gently; "but it is wrong too late to repair an error." "My mortal foe," she continued, speaking in a low, pleading voice, "brought here under my roof! Is it a curse or a blessing?" "I whispered to her some sacred words—sweet, gracious words of pity, pardon and infinite compassion. When she raised her face again it was so changed I hardly knew it being softened into an inexpressible loveliness."

but she does not wish him to recognize her. I have suggested that she should dress herself in some of your clothes. Will you help her?" "Ah, my poor lady, that I will. My poor mistress! This will kill her—my poor lady."

"So, moaning and lamenting, the faithful old servant hurried to her lady's dressing-room, and I went to the doctor. 'There is better news,' Mrs. Neville said the doctor, 'I can see an improvement. I want you to attend to these used clothes, and see that they are applied regularly. I must go home—I want several things which no one but myself can find.'"

"I will remain until you return, Dr. Fletcher," I promised, thinking that his absence would give Miss Vane a fair chance of seeing the invalid. He went. Some twenty minutes afterward I heard a sound outside the door. I opened it hastily, and there stood Miss Vane, so skillfully disguised that at first sight I hardly recognized her. Her lips were white and trembling, and her eyes appeared piteously to me."

"You must be brave," I said, "if you break down the consequences may be serious." "I never break down," was the laughing reply, and then she stepped into the room. She had disguised the loveliness of her face, but she could not disguise the immortal beauty of her stately figure. As she went up to Lord Wynton's bedside she seemed to grope with her hands as one suddenly blinded, and then she sank on her knees by his side, and buried her face in his hands. There some time she raised her head slowly as she looked at the white face and closed eyes, a great, gasping sob coming from her lips. The sound must have reached him, for he moved uneasily."

"You will be very careful!" I whispered. (To be Continued.)

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OUR MARRIAGE Laws Held Good in State of New York. Buffalo, April 26.—The question of whether a marriage solemnized in Canada can be annulled in New York State was decided by Justice White in a special term of the Supreme Court today, when he handed down his decision in the case of Frank J. Donohue against Ada Donohue, in which he dismissed the plaintiff's case to annul the marriage, which was performed in Ridgeway, Ont., on August 18 last. Both of the people were residents of Buffalo, and neither is yet eighteen years old.

Justice White holds that so long as the license was issued in good faith and the marriage performed it is indissoluble in Ontario because the people have lived as man and wife since then. In arguing the case the attorney for the defendant stated that the laws of Ontario should govern, and Justice White's opinion upholds this contention, stating that the laws of New York State upon the question of annulling marriages have no effect. If the marriage had been performed in this State the contract would have been voidable. Justice White stated that a marriage that is valid in the country in which it is performed is valid here. He adds that the plaintiff created the conditions from which he now seeks to escape and was aided by the defendant, and that he must leave them as he found them. Costs are assessed to Donohue.

BURNED THE BOOKS. Tramp Who Spent Night in Cedar Spring's Schoolhouse. Clatham, April 26.—On opening the door of the Union School at Cedar Springs early this morning the janitress discovered a disreputable-looking, red-whiskered tramp in possession, who declared that a doctor told him he could stay there over night. Before the woman, seized by his profanity, could give the alarm, the man escaped along the railway track. To keep himself warm the tramp had burned the school dictionary and also the pupils' text-books.

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WOMEN MURDERERS. Bloodthirsty Gang Arrested in a Russian Village. St. Petersburg, April 26.—A band of female cut-throats, which for many months past have been committing a series of murders, was discovered and arrested yesterday in the village of Kurchino, thirty miles from St. Petersburg. The principal culprits are a mother and her two daughters, who kept a tavern. Assisted by other women in the village, they murdered travellers who stopped at the inn the night, disfigured the bodies beyond recognition, and then threw them into a rapidly-moving stream that passed near the inn. Many of these corpses were found, but the distance of the village was so great that suspicion never centred there.

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