

"A Sorrow's Crown of Sorrows."

CHAPTER XIX.—Continued.

It was six months later, in the middle of the London season, when Aubrey de Vaux saw Lola for the first time since her marriage.

After that sudden seizure in Bruce's rooms, Aubrey had gone back to Oldford, listless, gloomy, and silent. Concerning the incidents of his stay in London he would say nothing; and his mother, learning to question him, learned from her servants, and not from him, the news of Lola's marriage, and of her attendance with her husband at Dr. Marsden's funeral.

She made arrangements, therefore, to accompany Aubrey on a visit to Dr. Merimee, in Algiers, and only informed him of her plans when they were completed.

In the society of his mother and of his most valued friend, among new scenes in a strange country, the young man's unworldly sadness seemed to fall away from him, and his old sunny nature to reassert itself.

He never mentioned Lola, and at any reference to Dr. Marsden's family he would instantly relapse into silence. Otherwise he seemed to all intents and purposes the same Aubrey as before—a little older in appearance, perhaps, and with a certain strained, melancholy expression in his eyes when his face was in repose, but sufficiently cheerful to satisfy his mother's tender watchfulness and Dr. Merimee's practical vigilance.

In short journeys to the neighbourhood of Algiers, and in yachting excursions along the coast, the spring passed pleasantly away. Late in May, family affairs called for the doctor's return to Paris, whether Aubrey would have accompanied him, but that his mother urged him to go back with her to England.

Paris, for the quiet of her country home, Paris, for his association, was desirable to her, nor could she bear the thought of Aubrey being a resident in the same city that sheltered his father.

She therefore induced her step-son to accept an invitation from his step-sister, Lady Mordaunt, to pass the remainder of the season in her house in London; and here, in the beginning of June, she left him, herself a little tired with two weeks of sight-seeing and with the weight of sixty years.

So things had fared with Lola's former lover until a certain night in mid-June, when, as he sat just behind his step-sister in a box at the Lyceum Theatre, Aubrey, whose glass was raised to his eye, arrested it suddenly to gaze fixedly upon the party entering another box on the opposite side of the theatre.

About the same time the curtain rose, and the entertainment began for the rest of the audience, while for Aubrey a fair woman in white took her place where she could watch her, and the whole theatre with all its other occupants, became merely the framework for that one beautiful face.

Lola's companions were an elderly lady and three men, all strangers to Aubrey. Lola's husband was not there, and Lola herself looked sad and preoccupied. That a man should be married to Lola, and let her go out of his sight, was of itself wonderful to Aubrey.

She was dressed well, even handsomely, and her white silk gown was made in a style at once so conspicuous and so appropriate to her type of beauty that, when the act-drops fell, Mrs. Laidlaw attracted as much attention as if she had been a political celebrity.

The full sleeves and high Venetian collar of her square-cut gown, the hair dressed high, and the twisted pearls round her white throat, accentuated the glowing picturesqueness of her appearance; sitting there, against the dark colouring of the box, she suggested I know not what of Venetian romance, of gondola love-songs, and of dead-and-gone beauties from the canvases of old Italian masters.

"What a pretty woman! And what a delicious get-up! Why, I declare, Aubrey, it is little Lola Marsden! Married, isn't she, to Bruce Laidlaw the writer, with the face of an Antinous and the manners of a Zulu? I would give anything to know him. He is not with her, is he?"

"No." "I must find out where she lives and call upon her; I should so like to meet him. I adore his books; they are so delightfully unconventional. There, she knows me, and is bowing. She is sweetly pretty, but I don't think she'll war. She looks five-and-twenty already. How she blushes! Oh, there was a little affaire de coeur between you and her once, wasn't there?"

"No," Aubrey answered abruptly. "But I know her very well, and I should like to speak to her." A few minutes later he was holding Lola's hand in his.

"At last!" he said, so low that only she could hear him. She blushed deeply, and withdrew her hand. Then she introduced him to her aunt, Mrs. Marsden, and to her cousins. They had come to town from Yorkshire to attend certain family meetings on the subject of the Doctor's property, which, from the number of relatives daily putting in claims, promised to become reduced to an infinite amount of tiny legacies.

face warned her that it would be better to avoid all reference to the past, and to treat him as a mere everyday acquaintance.

One of the young Marsdens having given up his seat behind Lola and gone to the front of the box, Aubrey was enabled to sit quite near her, and to assure himself of the fact, which he had detected from the other side of the theatre, that the bright joyousness had faded from Lola's face, that her eyes had acquired a plaintive expression, and that round about their settings certain thread-like lines were faintly traced.

"Do you like living in London? Are you quite well and happy here?" he asked.

"I think London is rather dull and sad," she answered. "I suppose that sounds absurd, but then I go out very little. I mean, that in the country even the clouds, or the wind in the trees, make a change, and if it rains everything shows so fresh and green that one hardly minds. But here it is black mud and grey fog; and the poor assert themselves—they are everywhere, and while in the country they looked soiled and dirty, but healthy and strong, in London they are fierce and wretched. And they are so many one can do nothing. Then, in the country, people often look stupid and half asleep, but here everyone in the streets seems to wear the same hard, worried look. Right and left one has always to feel sorry for troubles one can do nothing for, and grinding poverty one cannot relieve."

There were tears in her eyes as she finished speaking. Aubrey was not in the least clever, yet by his sympathy he noted two things in her talk: one, that Lola was leaning to think an accomplishment of her wish for happiness leaves little time; and again, that when a man or woman is constantly impressed solely by the sorrow of the world, then the sadness of the observer's own heart has something to do with the sympathy which dwells on the woes of others.

"Do you don't like London?" he said. "Not to live in. I think there are too many strangers in it," she said, with a smile that was a revelation of her own happiness. "But of course I myself am very happy," she added hastily. "My husband quite spoils me with his attentions. He designs all my dresses, and it makes me wear such magnificent clothes that I can hardly ever walk about myself. And I get so tired of cabs."

"Doesn't he go out with you?" "When he can, of course," she answered, blushing scarlet. "But he is very busy writing two novels and a play. You see, he spends so much on me that he is obliged to work hard, because, although he is so clever, he is not rich yet and I can do nothing."

She seemed glad of the opportunity of chatting to an old friend. In truth, her life was far more sad and lonely than even Aubrey's jealous love could conceive. Bruce detested society of all kinds. "Falling-silver," he was not going to put up with electro-plates. This he intimated that until the highest people in the land came to entertain his company, he preferred solitude to giving himself the trouble of being civil to persons in his own rank of life.

As to Lola she might go where she pleased, beautifully dressed, as became his wife. Money he gave her for more than he could really afford. Her beauty was of the kind that required a luxurious setting. He considered, but of the love and sympathy, for which her woman's heart was breaking, he preferred nothing.

There had been no explanations between them. After Lola's first overwhelming grief for her guardian's death had subsided, she came back to the belief that her husband had been Ella Granville's lover, and that at heart he was still Bruce, on his part, retained the conviction that he had been duped into marrying an artful coquette, who accepted him in a fit of pique, after being forced to dismiss the man she really loved; and when once these ideas had become firmly rooted in their minds, a hundred little incidents occurred to make assurance doubly sure.

Living in apartments—with no household to direct, with no friends outside to visit, and no country pleasures to occupy her—Lola in despair took to tidying and dusting the great slovenly rooms in Bloomsbury, to which Bruce and she had returned after the funeral. He had at first suggested that they should proceed to Paris, but he made the proposal in so cold and half-hearted a manner that Lola to whom the idea of enjoyment so soon after her guardian's death appeared something like sacrilege, received the offer as indifferently as it was made, and the subject was dropped much to her husband's secret annoyance.

Had Lola humbled herself before him—had she begged his forgiveness for keeping silence on the subject of her engagement with Aubrey, and assured him that, however inconsistent her conduct appeared, her love for him had never wavered—there is little doubt that Bruce, after due severity, would have relented altogether, and unasked, would have explained to her what the true relations between himself and Ella Granville had been—merely a chivalrous friendship; for Bruce, with all his overbearing temper, could be just and gentle enough on occasions, and he certainly cared for Lola more than he had ever done for any other woman. But her very silence on the subject with Ella Granville proved to him her indifference towards himself. Lola never alluded in the most distant manner, either to her own conduct after Bruce's departure from Oldford, or to Ella Granville, and from this silence Bruce drew the worst conclusions, until at length, plunging himself into a very vortex of work, he left off thinking of his wife altogether.

But Lola had no such resource to break up her sadness, and had out existing discomforts. The root of the evil lay in the fact that she was terribly afraid of Bruce. Cruel words from him wounded her so deeply that she felt even his stony silence preferable to such another scene as had taken place between them on their wedding-day.

She loved him with all the strength of her nature; but her very love was beginning to be swallowed up in fear, and in a smouldering sense of the injustice of his conduct towards her. Her apologies, her prayers for reconciliation and forgiveness, must come sooner or later, so Bruce decided, and in the meantime his work occupied him solely, and he became so deeply interested in the story he was planning of a sundered man and wife, kept apart by a somewhat similar misunderstanding, that he failed to notice how his wife's blue eyes grew sadder every day, and how little lines of discontent and unrest began to mar the fairness of her face.

She was a disappointment to him. Her love for him had been her greatest attraction in his eyes, a warm, passionate love which would kindle an answering fire in him. At Oldford he had been charmed and interested by her wonderful freshness and picturesqueness, but he had asked for her in marriage because he wanted to be loved, and felt that he could return the love of such a woman. The loss of her little fortune had hardly crossed his mind at all; if anything, he was glad that she was now wholly dependent upon him. But that she should have engaged herself to another man as soon as his back was turned; that she should be in despair when this engagement was broken off, and take him, Bruce Laidlaw, out of pique; these were, in Bruce's eyes, offences which only deep humility and repeated shy overtures of affection could induce him to pardon.

And Lola offered none of these things. She was barely twenty; she had no knowledge of the world or of men; she underrated her own beauty and charm, and overrated the loveliness of Bruce's character; she imagined that he hated her; that he would never forgive her; she was miserably unhappy, and lonely and friendless in London, like a transplanted flower fading day by day in its un congenial surroundings. Totally unused to unkindness, she regretted the loss of her sympathetic and affectionate guardian every hour of her life, and Bruce, when he found her in tears, ascribed her grief to the loss of Aubrey, and not to his own neglect. Her very fear of him made him impatient, and the discovery of a wretchedly written letter in his wife's desk, where, too, that perturbed, eager, and a few other little gifts Lola had not had the heart to send back, were stored, tended to widen the ever widening gulf between them.

Yet he meant to be kind and forgiving some day when this press of work was over, and Lola had been sufficiently punished. But Lola meanwhile had made her discoveries too. Bruce, who was so unmercifully careless, never took the trouble to destroy letters or bills, and in course of tidying his nameless trunks, portfolios, and hat-boxes, Lola came upon remembrances of Mrs. Granville, which would have inflamed the jealousy even of the most implacable of wives. So the days went by, and these two, who loved each other in varying fashions, lived on side by side, estranged and dissatisfied—the proud, unfeeling man, and the emotional, tender woman; he absorbed in his work, she eating her heart out in restless sorrow which was nearing despair—not absolutely quarrelling, but living unasily through the sombre hours of an impending storm.

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On the very day following Lola's meeting with Aubrey Bruce, after glancing through his letters, turned to his wife with unwonted gentleness. "I am going to Manchester for a fortnight," he said, "to release and promote 'The Wreck Ashore' with Barington Hicks. Hicks has been there for several days, the company is engaged, and everything arranged. Will you come too? You look very pale and as if you wanted a change."

He came over to her, and his hand affectionately on her shoulder. The tears came into her eyes at this unexpected kindness, but with them a sudden doubt shot through her mind. "You tell me so little about your affairs, that I know nothing of all this," she said. "And have you got together all the people who are going to act in it?"

"Yes, all!" She turned in her chair and looked up into his face. "Who will play Nell?" she asked. Bruce withdrew his hand from her shoulder. "Why do you ask?" he enquired coolly. "Because I know whom the part was once offered."

He looked at her with cold displeasure, and then, turning away with a disagreeable laugh, he tossed towards her a piece of paper on which the names of the company were inscribed opposite those of the characters they were to represent. "Miss Amy Gordon."

Lola read this, but was hardly satisfied. "Who is Miss Amy Gordon?" she asked. "A woman I have never yet seen in my life," he answered. "Are you coming to Manchester?"

"Do you want me?" she asked desperately, with a sob in her voice. He shrugged his shoulders. "I want you to please yourself," he answered. "Then I shall stay here," she said, and rose on the words to cry her eyes out in her own room.

She hardly thought that he would take her at her word. But when, an hour later, she re-entered the sitting-room, Bruce was not there, and the maid who was clearing away the breakfast things informed her that Mr. Laidlaw was just getting into the hansom in waiting at the door. Lola tore down the stairs, that she might at least say goodbye, but as she gained the door the cab doors were pulled sharply to the direction given. "Euston," and without a word of farewell Bruce Laidlaw drove away, leaving his young wife standing on the steps of their home, alone.

CHAPTER XX. Four long June days were passed by Lola in complete loneliness after her husband's departure. Her sole interest in London life was centred in the postman's visits: her one hope lay in a kindly letter from Manchester. To say that she missed Bruce would be understating the case. His was so potent a personality that the very lodging-house servants, who saw him hardly at all and were unutterably in awe of him, missed him greatly. His habitual sadness and the abstracted reserve of his manner, together with the odd mingling of distant ceremoniousness and an almost savage frankness which

characterised him, all these things combined to emphasise Mr. Laidlaw's importance and to make those about him treasure the lightest word of commendation that fell from his lips. His temper, which rose on comparatively slight provocation to a white heat of hard anger, and his power of scathing reproof, kept the women about him perpetually on their best behaviour. Lola, who adored him, and watched and worshipped each line of his face all day, understood him least of anyone, and vexed him continually. Ella Granville, who had never tried to understand him, and whom he had never loved, managed him far better. Yet of Ella, Bruce never thought at all, while the image of Lola haunted and reproached him through the whole duration of his journey northwards.

"She should not have been so silly. She should have some trust in me. And if she wanted to come with me she should have said so." Thus he reasoned within himself, but his innate sense of justice told him that he had been unwarrantably harsh towards the beautiful girl he had made his wife, and that for any follies or inconsistencies she had committed before her marriage she had been amply punished. Through all the press of business which greeted him in the north the found his thoughts reverting to Lola as he first saw her—the sleeping beauty in the tower of Donmilltorpe, rosy, sunny-haired, dreaming by the fire—and to Lola as he had left her, with the wistful trouble in her blue eyes, and a break in her voice as she asked her husband "if he wanted her."

She was extremely tiresome, certainly. She who had been so joyous, so tender, had grown unendurable and silent. She could not keep still in the room while he was writing, and when her restless movements irritated him, she would burst into tears and leave the room, to reappear with blurred features and red-rimmed eyes at meal-times. And all the while he was only working for her, striving every nerve to earn money enough to buy her a house and garden, that she might have something to occupy and amuse her, and a position worthy of his life. Yet as the hours separated them went by, the faults of his own treatment of her became more and more apparent to him, until when four days were past he was almost ready to take the entire blame for their unsuccessful married life upon himself alone. One timid letter had reached him from Lola. In it she made a request: might she visit Lady Mordaunt? Bruce had long ago forgotten the name of Madame de Vaux's daughter, and therefore failed to connect it with Aubrey, and in a long and very gracious letter to his wife he accorded her his full permission to visit anyone she knew in town, except Madame de Vaux.

(To be Continued.)

KIND WORDS. Loving words will cost but little. Journeying up the hill of life: But they make the weak and weary stronger, braver for the strife. Do you count them only trifles? What to earth are sun and rain? Never was a kind word wasted: Never one was said in vain.

When the cares of life are many And it burdens heavy grow For the ones who walk beside you, If you love them, tell them so. What you count of little value Has an almost magic power; And beneath that cheering sunshine Hearts will blossom like a flower.

So, as up life's hill we journey, Let us scatter all the way Kindly words to be the sun-shine In the dark and cloudy day. Grudge no loving word, my brother, As along through life we go; To the ones who journey with you, If you love them, tell them so.

Origin of "Whig." Several reasons have been assigned to account for the word "Whig," universally known to all English speaking people, says the St. Louis Republic. By some the word is supposed to be a contraction of a longer one, "whigganore," which in parts of England and Scotland, especially Scotland, signifies a drover or herder. It was in 1679 that the word first became common in the British Isles, when the struggle was in progress between the peasantry and aristocracy to have or not to have the bill passed by Parliament to exclude the Duke of York from the line of succession. All who were opposed to placing the duke in the line of succession were derisively called "whigganores" or "drovers," just as the city duke of to-day speaks of the "grangers" the "grays," the "whin whiskers" and the "hay seeders." But Scotch tradition gives altogether a different reason for the word. It is this: During the early religious wars in Scotland the weakest of the factious used the words "We Hope in God" as a motto. The initials of these words were placed on their banners, thus, "W. H. G." and soon all the followers of that clan were given the title of "Whig," which was afterwards attached to a party nickname.

Excuses. No wiser remark was ever made by Dr. Benjamin Franklin than a severe sentence which he once uttered to a young man who had an appointment with him and missed it. Next day the young man came and began to make a very fluent excuse to the doctor for his absence the day before. "Stop!" said Franklin. "You have said too much already, my good boy; for the man who is good at making an excuse seldom goes to anything else." An excuse made by a delinquent for a flat error or failure to do a duty seldom, indeed, softens the heart of an employer or superior, or earns an account of the reasons for failure should be given when a demand for them is made, but they should be given simply and briefly, and without any attempt to make the case appear any better than the plainest statement of the facts made it. A youth who is beginning a round of duties in any place which has any responsibilities as well as make up his mind that his employer will look with some disfavor, if not with suspicion, upon his explanation of failures. He must be perfectly honest about them, and never seek to admit his mistakes. And there are few employers who are not willing to allow a beginner a liberal number of blunders and failures as a part of his education.

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