







LOLA CRAWSHAY.

By A. W. Marchmont, B. A. Continued from 1st Page.

"Now we are all unconventional people, thinking of nothing but our three selves, and we two, the mother and I, have made a great compact that the love we both bear you and the love you bear to both of us are to bind us together always in a love for each other. Kiss me both, Jaffray, in witness of it all, and then let us all three promise to do whatever lies in our power to make that compact the chief cornerstone of our lives. Is not that right, mother?" Sir Jaffray stooped and kissed them both.

"It's the best news you could give me, mother," he said when he kissed Lady Walcott. "You know that." And the earnestness of his tone proved to her what he felt.

"It is true, Jaffray," she said. "It shall be so with me."

Then Lola, knowing that if she seemed a moment too long his sentiment would be spoiled, jumped up quickly and said lightly:

"Now we can be again the great people of Walcott manor, who ought not to be troubled with hearts and feelings and passions. Sir Jaffray," she cried, assuming a very grand air, "will you give me your arm? I will take the air in the park. We will leave the lady mother to her thoughts."

"Come on, Lola," cried the baronet, and they went out of the room together, laughing.

And the chief thoughts of the "lady mother" were that her son's wife was an exceedingly clever young woman, whose wit was as sharp as her face was beautiful.

During the next few days she had ample evidence of this in Lola's treatment of Lady Walcott was tactful and clever to a degree, and the old lady, despite her sharpness and shrewdness and tendency to suspicion when she was alone, could not resist the girl's charm when they were together. Thus the intimacy between them ripened quickly enough to surprise and please Lola herself, who wished that it should be as close as possible by the time that the blow fell which she was daily expecting.

It came all too quickly. She had been home less than a week and had ridden one morning with Sir Jaffray to a county meeting at a town a few miles away when on her return she was told that a gentleman was waiting to see her.

She knew without glancing at the card who it was.

She had served herself to be always ready for the meeting, however, and without staying to change her habit she went at once to the library, where her visitor was waiting.

There was not a sign of embarrassment on her face or in her manner as she passed the servant and entered the room, and no one could have detected even a quiver in her voice as she went up to the man whom she looked at with a deadly looking and said as quietly as a stranger:

"You wish to see me, I understand. What is it?"

Pierre Turrian looked in silence until the servant had closed the door, and then he stood thus looking steadily into each other's eyes.

CHAPTER IX. PIERRE TURRIAN'S SCHEME. The two stood looking straight at one another for some time after the servant had closed the door and left them alone, and Pierre Turrian was the first to break the silence.

He turned from her, and, looking all round the room and then glancing back at her, a smile parted his lips and he raised his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders as he said in a tone of mock praise:

"You've done well for yourself, Lola, a very lovely case for a very pretty girl—very lovely indeed." And he emphasized his words by another comprehensive glance round the room. "You're a devilish clever woman."

Lola assumed an expression of indignation.

"I don't know what you mean, sir," she said, drawing herself up. "It was told by my servants that a M. Turrian

wished to see me, and I have understood from my friends that that person is a foreign musician who wishes to interest me in some musical scheme. When I heard you were here, I concluded that that was your object, and I came at once to see if I could help you. But it seems I have been mistaken, and you have found your way into my house to offer me some kind of music."

"You are apparently under some strange delusion. I have never seen you before in my life," she said firmly, "and so long as you hold any delusion to the contrary I decline absolutely to speak to you."

"You are a magnificent liar," he exclaimed, "and I know what you mean. I don't consent. I want my wife, and I'll claim her."

"I know nothing about your wife, no more than about you. If that is all you have to rave about, you had please not to come here again, or my servants will refuse you admission by my express orders. If, on the contrary, there is any business I can help you with, I shall be ready to do what lies in my power."

"Do you mean that you dare to deny you are my wife?"

"Absolutely. You are mad to think of it. I am Lady Walcott, the wife of Sir Jaffray Walcott, and though I have heard of you as a fiddler," she spoke the word contemptuously, "and may have had a lesson or two from you in singing or music, in any real sense I have never seen you before in my life."

The splendid audacity of her manner almost took away his breath. He was prepared for any other reception than this.

"You are a devil!" he exclaimed in French. Then he added in English, "Do you mean that you were not married to me in Montreal four years ago and that you have revealed half over the continent with me as my wife?"

"That is precisely what I mean," returned Lola coolly, firmly and deliberately. "Precisely. It is quite ten years since I was in Montreal, and I traveled with my poor dear father alone up to

the time of his death in Neuchâtel, two years ago. Obviously you have made some surprising mistake."

"You are mad!" he cried. "You can't set me at defiance. I have proofs—irrefragable, complete—that you are my wife."

"Proofs? Of what?" she answered more quickly. "Proofs that you married some one else in my name, maybe. Bring the priest who ever made me your wife and then talk of proofs."

"You say you know he's dead, but I can bring a thousand people to swear to you. Beauty like yours, my girl, can't hide itself or be forgotten. But what better proof is wanting than this—that you stand here bandying words with me over a matter of this kind?"

"You recall me to myself. I have been too indulgent to one who, I was led to believe, is mentally afflicted. I will listen no longer."

"If you repeat the same stammering tale that you have told, I will have you pitched neck and crop out of the house and kicked down the drive. Do you understand me? Now, what do you say?"

"You are my wife, and I have come to claim you," he replied, solemnly and dogmatically.

"You make your own choice. In one minute after I ring that bell the servant who is waiting for you have not retreated that slender before he comes I will order him to turn you out of the house."

"You are my wife," he answered between his clenched teeth.

Lola crossed the room in silence and stammered tale that you have told, I will have you pitched neck and crop out of the house and kicked down the drive. Do you understand me? Now, what do you say?"

"What terms do you offer?" he said. "I make no terms with handkerchiefs, and from what you say that is what your wife seems to be."

He took no notice of this, but walked up and down slowly, smoking vigorously and inhaling and puffing out the light blue smoke of the cigarette with much vehemence.

"I am inclined to agree with you," he said at length, "though I got to the same point by a very different route. I can conceive that I might in the way you mention work out a very pretty revenge. If my wife, for instance, who is in a position to help me with this scheme, to help me with money, you understand," he said, glancing at her as he turned his head a moment in passing, "with money, I could make my life what you call it, one of ease and comfort, and I could do more."

Here his voice sank and his countenance became slow and deliberate, and he rolled some of the words as if the mere utterance of them gave him some pleasure. "I could watch her, holding over her the knowledge that I could crush her at any moment with a single word. I could see her live her cheerless life of children, maybe, to the man whom she has fooled, and then I could snip the thread of the jewel which she has made me wear, and she would stab the whole of her dupes in the very marrow of their honor and self-esteem. I could play that part."

"But she could kill you first!" cried Lola, maddened by the cruelty of his words.

He stopped and looked at her and smiled coldly.

"I thought you took no interest in anything that concerns my wife," he said, with a shrug and a laugh.

"That is not a tactful reason," he said, with a shrug and a laugh. "You must do it, if you do, I shall stop your allowance."

"That is the case. We may be criminals, but at least we should be polite." And he bowed with affected courtesy.

"Give me your real reasons," he continued, with a shrug. "If it is only your pique, I shall not pay the slightest heed to it. You chose this life, not I. I did not like the first, and I have grown accustomed to it, and I find it pleasant enough—for a time, while my plans develop and I am looking forward."

"There are people coming here who may remember a certain notorious gambler and cheat who was at one time known in half the houses in Europe."

"Ah, that is most interesting and most enticing. If there is one thing that I do not like about this existence, it is what you call it, husband, dead alive, and respectability. A man runs in such a place. There is no risk, no danger, where people's lives are so stupid as here. Why, even a murderer might live here with his life untroubled."

"Not a word!" he cried, looking at her with his eyebrows raised. They were walking on the terrace before dinner, and he was making a circuit of the Grindstone Fixtures.

"No, I say no," said Lola energetically.

"And why not?"

"Because I don't choose to allow it."

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He could be an excellent companion, having a rare capacity of adapting himself to the surroundings of the country. He was a man, picked up in the course of his wanderings over all Europe. He possessed an endless fund of anecdotes, with a clever knack of inventing them to suit any occasion and time and company, and as he speedily and accurately gauged the baronet's character he was able to make himself welcome in half a hundred ways.

Gradually the "musical" side of Sir Jaffray began to call it laughingly, was allowed to fall more and more out of sight until it was rarely mentioned, and Sir Jaffray came to the conclusion that, as the Frenchman seemed to have plenty of money, it had been taken up as a sort of hobby and was to be dropped as easily.

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