

The Coquette's Victim eBook

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CHAPTER I.

The Trial.

Mr. Kent was a very able magistrate. He had sat on the bench for many years and was considered a man of great legal attainments and skill. He very seldom erred in his judgment, and being gifted with a natural shrewdness, he saw the difference at once between a guilty and an innocent man.

He rarely erred; long practice had made him an adept in reading faces.

But on this morning, the fourteenth of May, he was puzzled. Many cases had been brought before him. Drunken men dismissed with a fine and a reprimand, thieves sentenced to weeks or months of imprisonment, wives with pale faces and bruised arms had given reluctant evidence against husbands who had promised to love and cherish them until death.

It was a bright May morning, and the sun did his best to pour through the dusky windows of the police court; a faint beam fell on the stolid faces of the policemen and ushers of the court, the witnesses and the lookers-on; a faint beam that yet, perhaps, brought many messages of bright promise to those present.

A little boy had been sent on an errand with sixpence and had stolen the money; with many sobs and tears he confessed that he had spent it in cakes. Mr. Kent looked at the tear-stained face; the untidy brown head scarcely reached to the table, and the good magistrate thought, with something like pain at his heart, of a fair-haired boy at home. So he spoke kindly to the poor, trembling prisoner, and while he strongly reprimanded, still encouraged him to better ways. The boy was removed, and then Mr. Kent was puzzled by the prisoner who took his place.

A tall, handsome young man, apparently not more than twenty, with a clear-cut aristocratic face, and luminous dark gray eyes. A face that no one could look into without admiration—that irresistibly attracted man, woman and child. He was a gentleman—there could be no mistake about it. That clear-cut Norman face had descended to him from a long line of ancestors; the well-built, manly figure, with its peculiar easy grace and dignity told of ancient lineage and noble birth.

His hands were white, slender and strong, with almond-shaped nails—hands that had never been soiled with labor, and surely never stained with crime.

He carried his handsome head high; it was proudly set on a firm, graceful neck, and covered with clusters of dark hair. He would have looked in his place near the throne of a queen, or, on the back of a war horse, leading a forlorn hope; but no one could understand his being prisoner in a dock. Mr. Kent looked at him, wondering with what

he was charged. Surely, with that noble face and gentlemanly bearing, he had never been guilty of a common assault. Magistrate as he was, Mr. Kent listened to the recital of the charge, with some curiosity.



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Jules St. Croix, Count of the French Empire, charged the prisoner at the bar with having broken into his rooms for the purpose of robbery. He had been discovered in the count's drawing-room, where he had forced open an ivory casket and stolen the contents, which were an ancient and valuable gold watch and a gold ring, also of considerable value. At the moment that the count, followed by his servant, entered the room, the prisoner had these articles in his hand. He dropped them immediately, but the count, hastily calling for the police, gave him in charge.

There was a smell of burned paper in the room and it was nearly eleven at night.

The magistrate asked if the prisoner had made any resistance. Policeman C. No. 14, answered, "No, he gave in at once; and came straight away."

Mr. Kent asked again: "Was there anything in the casket beside the jewelry?"

It seemed to be a very insignificant question, but the prisoner and the count looked steadfastly at each other and both answered: "No."

There were two witnesses. Robert Bolton, the count's servant, and C. No. 14, the policeman. The evidence of the servant was taken first. He said that the prisoner had called several times to see his master, always coming when the count was from home; that he had, before, made one or two efforts to get into the count's room, but that he, the servant, had always refused him permission.

On this evening the count went out early, and Robert Bolton having some errands to do, followed his master. About ten o'clock the prisoner called at the house, No. 24 Cambridge Terrace, and asked to speak to Count St. Croix. The landlady of the house told him the count was from home; then the prisoner said:

"I know. I will go to his room and wait there for him."

The landlady, believing him to be a perfect gentleman, allowed him to go up to the count's room. Robert Bolton returned home just as his master was at the door; when the landlady told him a gentleman was waiting there, it flashed instantly into his mind there was something wrong. He hastily told his suspicions to the count and they ran upstairs together. Opening the door quickly, they found the prisoner with the casket in one hand and the watch in the other. There was an odor of burnt paper in the room.

The count immediately opened the window and called for the police. C. No. 14 was just passing, and in marvelously quick time he ran upstairs.

"This man has gotten into my room on false pretences," said the count. "He is a stranger to me. I give him in charge for breaking open my casket and stealing a watch and ring from it."



“What did the prisoner say.”

“He pointed to the watch and ring, and said: ‘There they are;’ then he looked at the count with a smile.”

“Did he seem frightened?”

“Not the least in the world,” was the answer; “just the contrary.”



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“What happened next?”

“The prisoner told him he must consider himself a prisoner on the charge of stealing a watch. He laughed aloud and walked away.”

The landlady of the house, the policeman and the count all gave the same evidence. It seemed very clear against him.

“What have you to say?” asked, the magistrate of the prisoner.

He raised his luminous gray eyes.

“Not one word,” he replied, in a clear, refined voice.

“What is your name? I see you have refused to give any.”

For the first time the prisoner’s face flushed crimson, and the count smiled malignantly.

“My name is—John Smith,” he replied, and again the count smiled.

“Your address?”

He gave some number and street which every one knew to be false.

“Your occupation?” asked the magistrate again.

“I have none—that is, no settled occupation,” he replied.

“Have you no lawyer to defend you?” asked Mr. Kent.

“I require none,” said the prisoner; “I have no defense. All that Count Jules St. Croix says is true; he found me in his room with the open casket in my hand.”

“You had gone there for the purpose of robbery?”

“I have not a word to answer.”

“You can surely give some account of your presence there?”

The prisoner smiled again.

“I refuse to do so,” he replied, with great firmness, yet courtesy of manner.

“Then I must commit you for trial,” said the magistrate. “Have you no witnesses to bring forward in your own defense now, as to character—no referees?” he continued.



“None,” was the quiet reply.

“I am sorry,” said Mr. Kent; “to see one who is so evidently a gentleman and a man of education in such a position.”

But there was no shame in the handsome face; none in the proud eyes. He raised his head with haughty grace and made no reply.

“I can take bail,” said Mr. Kent, but the prisoner said, “I have none to offer.”

Then was the good magistrate puzzled. He had no resource but to commit the young man to take his trial at the Sessions. Yet looking at the clear, aristocratic face, and the firm, proud lips, he could have sworn that the prisoner was perfectly innocent of the theft.

He read pride, honesty, loyalty and chivalry in the face, yet there was nothing left for him to do but to commit him.

He looked very grave as he did so, and then John Smith was taken away by the policeman. As he left the dock he turned to his accuser, the Count St. Croix, who stood there with a dark frown on his face; he looked at him for one moment, then waved his hand, as one who had won a great victory.

“I have conquered,” he said, and the count’s sallow face grew pale with rage,

“Curse you,” he said, between his teeth, “I should like to stand with my foot on your neck.”



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CHAPTER II.

The Sentence.

John Smith—for the prisoner was known by no other name—lay in prison until the time for him trial. He had not long to wait, but he made no complaint. He seemed perfectly at his ease—much more so than was Mr. Kent. In vain the good magistrate said to himself that it was no business of his; that he had nothing whatever to do with the case, he had simply performed his duty—done what was required of him. Yet he could not feel satisfied; he was sure there was a mystery, and he longed to fathom it.

He resolved to go and see the young man, and ask him more questions, to try to ascertain who he really was. He went to his cell and the prisoner looked at him in utter surprise.

“I have come purposely,” said Mr. Kent, “to see if I cannot induce you to tell the truth over this affair. I will call you John Smith, if you like, yet I am sure you are a gentleman; you will not deny that?”

“I neither admit nor deny anything,” was the smiling reply; “I have made up my mind that there will be a certain punishment, and I shall go through it like a brave man.”

“Have you well considered what degradation that punishment will bring upon you as long as you live?”

His face flushed hotly.

“Since you ask me,” he answered, “I tell you frankly, no; I had not thought of that part of the business at all—it never even occurred to me; my thoughts were all otherwise engrossed.”

“You should take it into consideration,” said the magistrate. “I know nothing of what your position in society may be, but remember, you voluntarily cut yourself off from all association with even respectable people; a man who has been in prison cannot expect the countenance or fellowship of his fellow-men.”

“I suppose you are right,” replied the young man; “although, believe me, never a thought of this occurred to me.”

“Now, would it not be better to tell the truth? Have you done it for a wager? is it the trick of a foolish young man? or were you really tempted to steal the watch?”

Something like a smile curved his handsome lips.



“I cannot tell you,” he replied. “I am deeply grateful for your kind interest—indeed, I shall never forget it; but I cannot, in return, tell you one word.”

“Then I can do nothing to help you?”

“No,” he answered slowly; “you could not help sending me for trial. Will you tell me what the probable result will be, supposing, as a matter of course, that I am found guilty?”

“Most probably, six months imprisonment, without hard labor, if it be a first offence.”

“It is the first of its kind,” was the smiling reply.

“You will not let me help you, then, in any way?” said Mr. Kent.

“There is nothing you can do for me,” said the young man, gratefully.

“If you take my advice,” continued the magistrate, “you will send for some clever lawyer; tell him the truth, whatever it may be, and while preserving your incognito, he may be able to do something for you. I should certainly do so in your place.”



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"I think not," he replied; "the less stir made about it the better. Surely in the crowd of a criminal court and in the prison dress, I shall escape recognition?"

"An admission," thought the magistrate, "that he has concealed his identity."

"I cannot tell; I think it doubtful."

"Well, whatever comes, I shall always be grateful to you, Mr. Kent, for your interest in me."

"I am sorry you will not trust me," said the magistrate, rising to leave the cell.

"I am still more sorry that I cannot," was the reply, and then the prisoner was left alone.

He did not look much like a thief; there was a light on his face such as one sees in the pictures of the martyrs, a clear fire in the gray eyes.

"My ancestors have smiled with their heads on a block," he said. "Surely, with such a motive, I may bear six months of prison."

The day of his trial came. The report of it in the papers read as follows:

"John Smith, aged twenty, occupation unknown, was charged by Count Jules St. Croix with stealing from his room an ivory casket, containing a watch and an antique ring of great value. The prisoner, who refused to give any account of himself, pleaded guilty; he made no defence, and had retained no counsel. The judge made a few remarks to the effect that it was very hard to see a young man, evidently possessed of some education and refinement, in such a position, then sentenced him to six months' imprisonment without hard labor. Prisoner made no remark, and was then removed."

The papers did not tell of a little incident that occurred, simply because the reporters did not know it. During the hearing of the case, which did not last long, one of the leading barristers, Mr. Macfarlane, sat with his eyes riveted on the prisoner's face, his own growing very pale and anxious; then he wrote a little note, which he dispatched by a messenger, who soon returned, accompanied by Mr. Forster, one of the most celebrated lawyers in Lincoln's Inn.

He spoke a few words to Mr. Macfarlane.

"Nonsense!" he said; "the idea is incredible, impossible, even. What can have made you think of such a thing?"

"Stand here in my place; you cannot see over all those heads. Now look well at him. Am I right or wrong?"



A strange gray look came over Mr. Forster's face.

"I—I believe you are right," he said. "My God! what can this mean?"

"Look now! his face is turned this way! Look!" cried Mr. Macfarlane, eagerly.

"It is he!" cried the lawyer, and he stood like one turned to stone, then recovering himself, he said quickly:

"Why is he here? What is he charged with?"

Mr. Macfarlane whispered into the lawyer's ear:

"With stealing a watch and ring from the room of Count Jules St. Croix."

"Absurd!" was the reply, in accents of the deepest contempt; "what idiotic nonsense! He steal a watch! I could believe myself mad or dreaming."



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"Then," said Mr. Macfarlane. "he has pleaded guilty; he has made no defence, engaged no counsel."

"The boy is mad! completely mad!" cried the lawyer.

"Hush!" said the barrister; "the judge is speaking."

Mr. Forster stood in a most impatient mood, while the grave, clear voice of the judge sentenced the prisoner. Then he turned to the barrister abruptly.

"I tell you," he cried, "the boy is mad! Steal a watch! Why, he could buy one-half the watches in London if he liked. I must see him. Come this way."

"No," said Mr. Macfarlane, "he evidently does not wish to be known. I shall not go near him."

"If he got into trouble, why in the world did he not send for me or for some one else?" said the lawyer to himself. "It must be a young man's frolic, a wager, a bet. He has spirit enough for anything. He never could have been such a mad fool as to wreck his life for a paltry watch."

Mr. Forster went to the room, where with other prisoners, John Smith stood, awaiting his removal in the prison van. He went up to him and touched him on the shoulder.

"Is it really you?" he cried, and the luminous gray eyes smiled into his.

"Ah! Forster, I am sorry to see you. What has brought you here?"

"It is you," said the lawyer. "I was in hopes that my senses deceived me."

"I hope you will keep the fact of having seen me here a profound secret."

"But in the name of heaven, what does it mean?" cried Mr. Forster. "You know you have not attempted to steal a watch. Pardon me, but how dare you plead guilty? You will cover yourself with disgrace and infamy. You will break your mother's heart. You will be utterly ruined for life."

"My dear Forster, no one knows of my being here, and no one need know except yourself."

"You are mistaken; you have been recognized. I was sent for to identify you."

Then the proud face did grow pale, but the proud light did not die out of the gray eyes.

"I am sorry for it, but I cannot help it. I must 'dree my weird."



Mr. Forster stood looking at him like one stupefied.

“If the sun had fallen from the heavens,” he said, “it would not have surprised me more. Surely, surely you are going to trust me and tell me what this means?”

“I cannot. Go on with everything just the same. Tell my mother I have gone abroad for six months, and if you value my name, keep my secret from spreading, if you can.”

And then a rough voice called John Smith to the prison van.

CHAPTER III.

The Papers Again.

Mr. Foster went home in a terrible rage. His clerks could not imagine what had happened. He looked pale, worried, anxious and miserable. “I should not think,” he said to himself, “that such a thing ever happened in the world before.” His clients thought him bad tempered; he had the air of a man with whom everything had gone wrong—out of sorts with all the world.



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"The man is mad," he said to himself, with a shrug of his shoulders; "neither more nor less than mad to fling away his life and disgrace his name. It is useless to think it will never be known; those stupid papers are sure to get hold of it, and then there is little chance of secrecy."

He went about his work with a very unsettled, wretched expression on his shrewd face. Something or other had evidently disturbed him very much. While on his part John Smith, with the same light in his face and the same fire in his eyes, went off in the prison van.

He heard very little of what was going on around him. He seemed to be quite apart in some dreamland, some world of his own. When the coarse suit of prison clothes was brought to him, instead of the disgust the attendants expected to see, there came over his face a smile. To himself he said: "I could almost kiss them for her sweet sake."

"That man is no thief," said one of the warders. "I do not care if they did catch him with the watch in his hand, he is no thief! I know the stamp!"

How he passed that first day and night was best known to himself. The jailer who brought his breakfast the next morning said, "You look tired."

He smiled and said to himself, "I would have gone to death for her sweet sake! This will be easy to bear."

When that same morning dawned Mr. Forster was all impatience for his newspaper. Twice he rang the bell and asked if it had come, and when the servant brought it up he looked at it eagerly.

"Give it to me quickly," he said. Then he opened it, and was soon engrossed in the contents. Suddenly he flung it down, and almost stamped upon it in his rage.

"I knew it would be so! Now it will be blazoned all over England! What can have possessed him?"

The paragraph that excited his attention and anger ran as follows:

"We are informed on good authority that the John Smith tried yesterday on the charge of stealing a watch is no less a person than Basil Carruthers, Esquire, the owner of Ulverston Priory, and head of one of the oldest families in England."

"What can I do?" cried Mr. Forster; "it will break his mother's heart; she can never forget it. He is ruined for life. For a lawyer, I am strangely unwilling to tell a lie; but it must be done! He must be saved at any price!" He went to his desk and wrote the following note:

“To the Editor of ‘The Times’:

“Sir: I beg to call your attention to a paragraph that appears in ‘The Times’ of today stating that a man, tried under the name of John Smith for stealing a watch, is no less a person than Basil Carruthers, Esq., of Ulverston Priory. As the solicitor of that family, and manager of the Ulverston property, I beg to contradict it. Mr. Carruthers, himself, informed me of his intention to go abroad. Without doubt his indignant denial will follow mine. I am, sir, *etc.*,

“Herbert Forster.”



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“That may help him,” he said. “I do not like doing it, but I cannot see my old friend’s son perish without trying to save him. I may fail, but I must try. Perhaps my lie may be blotted out, like Uncle Toby’s oath. If I can persuade him to send a denial, and date it Paris or Vienna, he will be saved.”

Mr. Forster lost no time in applying for an order to see the prisoner. It was granted at once.

Basil Carruthers—we may use his right name now—looked up in surprise when Mr. Forster, with the paper in his hand, entered the cell.

“Back again?” he said.

“Yes; it is just as I expected; the papers have got hold of your name, and there is a grand expose.”

Basil held out his hand and read the paragraph.

“It is enough to make your father rise up from his grave,” said the lawyer; “I cannot understand what madness, what infatuation, has come over you, to drag such a proud name as yours through the dust.”

“So it is known,” said Basil, slowly. “Well, I cannot help it.”

“I have done my best,” said Mr. Forster. “I have never yet asked you if you stole the watch—the idea is too absurd.”

“They are so far right that I was found in the room; nothing else matters.”

“I can only imagine that the same folly which has brought you here will keep you here,” said Mr. Forster. “The only thing to be done is to send a denial to the papers. If you will write one, I will go to Paris myself to post it.”

Basil Carruthers laughed contemptuously.

“I shield myself behind a lie!” he said. “Never!”

“You are too late,” replied Mr. Forster; “I have already written, and sent, a very indignant denial, saying you have gone abroad.”

Basil’s face grew pale, as it had not done during that trial; then an angry fire flashed from his eyes.

“And you have dared to do this?” he cried. “You have dared to publish a lie to screen a Carruthers?”



“I would have dared a great deal more to have saved you from public ignominy,” said Mr. Forster.

“Do not apply that word to me!” said Basil, angrily.

“If I do not, every one else will. Your position is ignominious, Mr. Carruthers; the paltry crime you are charged with is the same; and the name that for centuries has been honored in England will be low in the dust, sir. I would rather have been dead than have seen such a day.”

The handsome young face changed slightly; evidently these thoughts had not occurred to him; he seemed to seek solace from some inward source of comfort of which the lawyer knew nothing.

“I must bear it,” he said, unflinchingly.

“There is but one thing you can do,” said Mr. Forster; “only one means of escape—write a letter at once containing a most indignant denial of the identity. I will go myself purposely to Paris and post it there.”

“My dear Forster,” said the young man with a smile of languid contempt, “I would not ransom my life, even, with a lie!”



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“In my opinion,” said the lawyer, bluntly, “you have done worse in pleading guilty—you have acted a lie, at least.”

“I know my own motive. I am the best judge of my own actions.”

“Certainly,” was the sarcastic reply. “I should not think any young man of your prospects was ever in such a position before.”

“Perhaps, as I said before, no man ever had the same motive,” and a look of heroism and high resolve came over his face which astonished the lawyer.

“In the name of your dead father,” he said, “who held the honor of his house so dear, I pray of you to write that letter!”

“Not to save my head from the block!” he replied. “I am here, and I must bear all that follows. I had hoped to preserve my incognito. If I cannot, well, I must bear the shame.”

“And your mother?” asked the lawyer.

“My poor mother! Perhaps, after all, you had better go down to Ulverston and tell her! She will begin to wonder where I am. Besides, the London house must be attended to.”

“If I know Lady Carruthers rightly,” said the lawyer, “she will never get over the blow.”

“Tell her that I am here, and why, but tell her also that I refuse to give an explanation to any human being. Tell her the honor of the Carruthers seals my lips; try to comfort her if she seems distressed; do all she wishes you.”

“How am I to comfort a mother whose eldest and only son has thrown all prudence to the wind; who has disgraced himself so far as to stand in a felon’s dock; who has wantonly laid his life bare and waste—for what?”

A strange smile came over the young face.

“Ah! for what! I know; no one else does. There is a reward, and it satisfies me.”

“If ever a Carruthers went mad,” said Mr. Forster, angrily, “I should say you were mad now!”

Basil paid no heed to the remark.

“The only thing I can do,” he said, “I will do. I will go to Vienna as soon as I leave here. I will not remain in London one-half hour.”



“I fear your compliance will be too late then,” he said. “I must leave you, if I go to Ulverston this evening. I have several matters that I must attend to. Will any persuasion of mine induce you to alter your mind?”

“No; though I thank you for your interest.”

And the lawyer left the young man’s cell with something like a moan upon his lips.

CHAPTER IV.

Ulverston Priory.

During his walk from the prison to his office, Mr. Forster was stopped several times.

“Is this rumor about young Carruthers true?” asked Sir James Hamlyn, anxiously.

“No,” replied the little lawyer, stoutly, “the paragraph is a joke, and if we can find out the author of it, he will be punished.”

“Serve him right. I told Lady Hamlyn there was some absurd mistake. Very glad to hear it. Good morning.”



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“Mr. Forster, stop one moment!” cried Major Every; “surely this tale of Carruthers stealing a watch is all false?”

“False as the foul fiend himself,” said the little man, in a rage.

“I knew it—I said so. Young men with twenty thousand a year do not steal. A likely story! What does it mean, then?”

“Some one who owes him an ill-turn has played this sorry jest upon him; but we shall pay him.”

“He deserves transportation. I do not know a nobler young fellow in all the world than Basil Carruthers.” A fashionable carriage was standing at his office door when he reached it.

“The Countess of Northdown waiting to see you, sir,” said the clerk.

Entering his private room he saw a lovely lady, fashionably attired, who greeted him with exquisite grace. Her face was very pale and her lips quivered as she spoke to him.

“Good morning, Mr. Forster. You will be surprised to see me, but knowing you are the family solicitor, I called to ask you if this shocking story about Mr. Carruthers is true.”

“Heaven have mercy on me this day,” thought the lawyer, “my soul is steeped in lies.”

“Certainly not, Lady Northdown. Mr. Carruthers is abroad. The fact of the matter is, the prisoner resembles him, as a vile caricature does, at times, resemble the original, and some would-be wag who saw it, thought the writing of this absurd paragraph a great joke.”

“He deserves shooting,” said my lady, angrily.

“That may be his fate, when Mr. Carruthers catches him,” was the grim reply.

“I told Lord Northdown it was all nonsense,” she continued. “I am much obliged to you for your kindness, Mr. Forster.”

There was a rustle of silken robes, a stirring of sweet perfume, and then Lady Northdown was gone, only to be succeeded by another and another, until the lawyer gave himself up for lost on account of the many falsehoods he had told.

“Tomorrow my contradiction will set all this straight,” he thought; “especially if it be followed by a letter from my lady, and I must compel her to write. I would as soon try to drive wild oxen as to persuade a Carruthers.”



He was not able to start for Ulverston until the end of the afternoon. It was full two hours' ride by rail from London, and all the way there the lawyer was worrying himself with conjectures, and trying to solve what he thought honestly the greatest mystery he had ever known.

It was six o'clock on a bright May evening when he reached Ulverston.

He ordered a fly, and drove at once to the Priory. More than half that busy town of Rutsford belonged to the Carruthers. They were lords of the manor, masters of the soil. To them belonged also the fertile lands, the profitable farms, the hop gardens, and broad meadows that stretched between Rutsford and the Priory.

As the lawyer drove through this rich inheritance, his wonder increased.



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What could possess any man blessed with such a birthright to place himself in so false and degraded a position?

Then the carriage entered the Ulverston woods, said by connoisseurs to be the finest and most picturesque in England. Such a glorious sight on this May evening as made the lawyer's heart beat, though many years had passed since the fountain of poetry flowed for him. The hawthorn and chestnut trees were all in flower; the maple and ash wore their most luxuriant foliage. The grand old oaks in their leafy boughs concealed myriads of singing birds; underneath the shade of the trees, the blue hyacinths stretched out like the waves of the azure sea, the violets hid their modest heads, great golden primroses shone like stars from the midst of green leaves. The air was sweet and warm; the music of the birds and the whispers of the wind were full of melody.

"A man possessed of all this," thought Mr. Forster again; "he must be mad."

Then the carriage stopped before the grand entrance of one of the most magnificent mansions in England. Ulverston Priory—whose beauty has been described, in prose and in verse, by pens more eloquent than mine.

"Is Lady Carruthers at home?" asked Mr. Forster of the stately old butler.

"My lady is at home, sir."

"Will you ask if it is convenient for me to see her? I have come hastily from London on important business."

With all the solemnity an old family retainer displays on such occasions, the butler led the way to the library.

"I will send your message to my lady at once, sir."

He went away and soon returned.

"My lady is dressing, but she will be with you in a few minutes." He placed a decanter of the famous Ulverston sherry on the table, and withdrew. Mr. Forster gladly helped himself to a glass. "I would take that or anything else to give me courage," he said to himself. "How am I to tell her? I know not."

In a quarter of an hour the door opened, and a stately lady, magnificently dressed, entered the room. She was very dignified, of queenly presence and bearing, with the remains of great beauty in her face.

She bowed most courteously to the lawyer, and held out her white, jeweled hand.



“Good evening, Mr. Forster,” she said; “your visit has taken me by surprise. You are well. I hope?”

“Quite well, Lady Carruthers, myself. Quite well, I thank you.”

But his manner was so confused, his face so flushed, that the stately lady looked at him in wonder.

“And my son, Mr. Forester! Have you seen him lately? Have you left him well?”

“He was in perfect health, Lady Carruthers, when I saw him last,” replied the lawyer, stiffly.

“I am glad of it. I have no wish to complain, but I have not heard from my son lately. He has not time to write, I suppose.”

“There will be no use in beating about the bush,” the lawyer thought. “I had better speak plainly at once.”

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“Lady Carruthers,” he said, “have you seen today’s ‘Times’?”

“No,” she replied; “I have been so deeply engaged with visitors, I have really not opened it.”

“Then I must ask you to prepare yourself for something very disagreeable. I wish I knew how to save you from the knowledge—but I do not.”

The diamond necklace rose and fell as though she breathed heavily; her face grew quite white.

“Does it concern my son, Mr. Carruthers?” she asked.

“Alas, that I must say yes, Lady Carruthers,” he answered; “I am not a man of sentiment, but I would give many years of my life to spare you this pain.”

“Is he dead?” she asked, hoarsely.

“No, it is not so bad as that,” he replied.

“Not death; and I know it is not disgrace. I can bear what you have to tell me, Mr. Forster.”

He took both papers from his pocket and laid them before her.

“Read this paragraph first,” he said; “and then this.”

She did as he wished. When she read the second, her proud face flushed, and she drew her figure to its full height.

“What does this mean?” she said, contemptuously. “My son, Mr. Carruthers, charged with stealing a watch? What does it mean, Mr. Forster?”

“Lady Carruthers,” said the lawyer, “it is true. I was in court when your son, under the name of John Smith, pleaded guilty to the charge of getting in the room belonging to Count Jules St. Croix, and I, myself, heard him sentenced to six months’ imprisonment.”

She sat for some minutes, silent, mute and motionless. Then in a low voice she asked: “Is he mad?”

“That was my first thought. It is some weeks since I had seen him, and yesterday morning a note was brought to my office, from a gentleman in court, telling me your son was in the dock. I hastened there and found it true. You may imagine how quickly I followed him and implored of him to tell me the mystery, for mystery I feel sure there is. Instead of looking ashamed of himself and miserable, he had a light in his face that



puzzled me. I blamed him, told him the consequences—how his life would be useless to him after this, but he only smiled; my words made no impression on him; he evidently derived comfort and support from some source known to himself and no others.”

“And is it possible?” asked Lady Carruthers, with ghastly face; “does he lie in prison now?”

“He does indeed, and there he must remain until the six months are ended.”

CHAPTER V.

Lady Carruthers.

My lady rose from her seat with an air of almost tragical dignity.

“My son in prison!” she cried; “I cannot believe it. What has come over him? Can you explain the mystery to me, Mr. Forster?”

“I cannot—the only thing that occurs to me is that he has gone to this count’s room for some purpose that he will confide to no one, and that he has taken the watch in his hands and was discovered with it. He asked me to tell you that the honor of the Carruthers sealed his lips.”



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“Did he say that—my Basil, Mr. Forster? If that be the case, rest assured—although I blush to say it—there is a woman in it. I can imagine Basil capable of suffering anything from a mistaken motive of chivalry. Do you know with whom Mr. Carruthers has chiefly associated since he has been in town?”

“I do not. I know that he has been in a very fast and fashionable set; he told me as much; also that he has spent a good deal of money. One check for three thousand pounds vanished in a day, and he gave no account of it.”

“Three thousand pounds!” cried Lady Carruthers; “yet he neither drank, betted nor gambled.”

“No,” said the lawyer; “Mr. Carruthers told me he had never touched a card and never would. I know he did not care for betting.”

The proud, anxious mother raised her eyes to the lawyer’s face. “How, then, do you think he has got through it?”

“I cannot tell. You must pardon me, my lady, if I remind you that although I am family solicitor, agent and manager of the property, I am not the guardian of your son.”

“I know,” she said, clasping her hands. “I little thought he would ever need a guardian; he seemed all that was honorable and upright. I cannot imagine what has changed him. I regret so bitterly that I let him go to London alone.”

“It is a terrible position,” said the lawyer; “the only thing is to clear him as much as we can. The moment I read this I wrote an answer and sent it to the ‘Times’ to the effect that Mr. Carruthers had gone abroad.”

A slight frown came over the delicate face.

“I implored Mr. Carruthers to write an indignant denial, and to let me go to Paris to post it, but he would not hear of such a thing; the very idea seemed offensive to him, I hope, Lady Carruthers, to induce you to write such a letter.”

“What kind of a letter?” she asked.

“One to the editor of the ‘Times’ denying the report, and saying that your son has gone abroad.”

“But that would be grossly untrue,” she said.

“Yes, yes! I know that, still if we can save him, we should.”



“I will try any honorable means you choose to suggest,” she replied; “but not even to save my son from death could I consent to write or publish a lie.”

“Of course you know best, Lady Carruthers,” said the lawyer, with a shrug of the shoulders. “Words are but words, and very few of them might have saved your son from public shame.”

“I have never yet believed in the success of a lie,” said her ladyship.

“Pardon me,” said Mr. Forster, grimly, “then you have forgotten the pages of history. I came down purposely to persuade your ladyship to do this. I am well aware that at first sight it seems contrary to all one’s notions of truth and honor, but there is so much at stake. My denial, couched in strong terms, will appear tomorrow. If it were succeeded by a letter from your ladyship, written in the same strain, people would laugh and believe that it was a great mistake. I had so many inquiries this morning before I left London, and I gave the same answer to all, that it was the sorry jest of an evil-disposed person. If your ladyship would but second my efforts, all would be well; we could get him through in safety.”



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But Lady Carruthers had risen from her seat and stood with her proud figure drawn to its utmost height.

“I will do anything you propose, save tell a lie. If my son can be rescued by no other means, he must bear his punishment.”

“Then my journey is in vain,” said Mr. Forster. “I may return to London at once.”

“No,” said Lady Carruthers; “I cannot allow you to return after that long journey—you must stay and dine with us. Pardon me,” she said, seeing that he looked hurt and uncomfortable. “I have spoken strongly, but truth has always been far dearer to me than life. I do full justice to your motives. I appreciate your kindness, but in this manner I cannot help you. Stay and take dinner with us; then we can consult as to what is best to be done.”

“May I give your ladyship one piece of advice?” said the lawyer. “Have the papers—yesterday’s and today’s—destroyed, so that no rumor of anything amiss can reach your servants; also say nothing of it—it may possibly die away, as some rumors do. Your visitors and friends will not broach such a subject to you, I am sure.”

“I shall not mention it,” she replied; “although Marion will be sure to suspect something wrong.” At that moment the last dressing-bell rang.

“You will join us in a few minutes,” said Lady Carruthers; “never mind your traveling-dress; Miss Hautville and I are quite alone.”

No one who saw Lady Carruthers leave the library with stately step and dignified air, would have believed that she had received a blow which laid her life and all her hopes in ruins—as the lightning smites the lofty oak. She went back to her sumptuous bedroom that she had left half an hour ago, so calm and serene, so unconscious of coming evil. Looking in the mirror, she saw her face was deadly pale—there was no trace of color left on it, and deep lines had come on her brow that had been so calm.

“It will not do to look so pale,” said Lady Carruthers; and from one of the mysterious little drawers she took a small powder puff that soon remedied the evil.

Then she went to the dining-room. Miss Hautville and Mr. Forster were talking together like old acquaintances, and the three sat down to dinner together.

Mr. Forster was, as he himself often said, a grim old lawyer, without any poetry or romance, but even he could not sit opposite the pale, pure loveliness of Marion Hautville unmoved; there was something about her that reminded one irresistibly of starlight, delicate, graceful, holy veiled loveliness. She was slender and graceful, with a figure that was charming now, but that promised, in years to come, to be superb; the same promise of magnificent womanhood was in the lovely delicate face. The pure profile,



the delicate brows, the shining hair, braided Madonna fashion, were all beautiful, but looking at her, one realized there was greater beauty to come.

She looked across the table with a smile.



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“And now, Mr. Forster, you have told me how London looks; tell me something about my cousin, Mr. Carruthers.”

He made some indifferent answer, and as he did so, he thought to himself:

“Can it be possible, that with a chance of winning this lovely girl—one of the richest heiresses in London—that Basil Carruthers has given his heart to some worthless creature, who has spent his money and helped him to prison?”

A question that, if our readers will kindly follow us, we will answer in the succeeding chapters.

CHAPTER VI.

Youth Full of Beauty and Promise.

There was no man of greater note in England than the late Royston Carruthers, Esq., Lord of the Manor of Rutsford. He was one of the ablest statesmen and finest orators in England. He had been returned for the Borough of Rutsford for many years, without opposition. To hear him make a speech was a decided treat; a handsome man of stately presence, he invested every word with new dignity. The grand volume of sound rolled on in one continuous stream; the ideas he expressed were noble, the sentiments patriotic and exalted; his gestures were full of animation and grace.

Royston Carruthers had done great service to his country in his time. He had advocated several important measures; his eloquence had facilitated the introduction of several bills; his country thought well of him, and for a wonder, was grateful to him.

Government offered him the title of Baron Rutsford of Rutsford, and he had declined it, saying that his ancestors had for years asked no higher title than that of Lord of the Manor, and he valued his name—Carruthers of Ulverston—too highly to ever exchange it for another.

In the very pride and zenith of his prosperity he married the Lady Hildegarde Blenholme, the only daughter of the Duke of Blenholme. She was a very beautiful and accomplished woman—proud to a fault, but generous and noble in disposition. They had one child, Basil, and while he was yet a boy, his father died, worn out with work and over-exertion. He left his wife, Lady Hildegarde Carruthers, sole guardian of the boy, expressing a wish that she should bring him up to resemble herself in mind and disposition as far as it was possible.

Three years after the great statesman's death, a cousin of Lady Hildegarde died, leaving her only child, Marion Hautville, under the sole care and guardianship of the mistress of Ulverston Priory.



“Bring her up as you would a daughter of your own,” wrote the dying mother. “She has a large fortune—save her from fortune-hunters.”

And Lady Carruthers, scrupulously carried out her kinswoman’s wish. She took the girl to her own home, Ulverston Priory; she superintended her education; she brought her up in simple, refined habits—succeeded in making of her a perfect lady and a noble woman.



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Then the dearest wish of her heart was to see her son, the heir to Ulverston, marry Marion Hautville, one of the loveliest girls and wealthiest heiresses in England. She was far too wise ever to express such a wish openly, none the less it was deeply engraven on her heart. They were warmly attached to each other and Lady Carruthers fancied that she already saw some signs of liking on the part of Marion for Basil.

While Miss Hautville pursued her quiet, ordinary course of education under Lady Carruthers' roof, Basil went through Eton and Oxford; at both places he gained high honors and at both places he succeeded in puzzling his tutors and masters. He was of such a peculiar disposition; chivalrous, romantic, brave, yet with something about him—they could not define what, but quite unlike other boys.

He did not evince any taste for any particular branch of study; he had no inclination for the navy, for serving his country as his father had done before him. In fact, it was difficult to tell in what direction his taste really lay. Still, he left college with high honors, and his masters prophesied great things for him.

"He will make himself famous some day," they wrote to his anxious mother. "In the mean time, let him see something of the world, and you will know in what direction his talent lies."

So, crowded with honors, he came home to Ulverston. He was eighteen then and one of the handsomest young men England could boast. No barber's beauty; strong, comely, of noble bearing, with a face that had come to him from the crusaders of old.

Then Lady Hildegarde set herself to work to discover what manner of man her son was. She was puzzled; he was brave, generous, full of high spirits, truthful, even to bluntness. She could not discover any grave fault in him. She thanked God he had no vices, no mean faults, no contemptible failings.

"Basil," she said to him, one evening, as the three sat around the drawing-room fire. "Confess now, do you not like and admire the olden times better than these?"

"Yes," he replied; "I always did."

"I knew it," said Lady Hildegarde; "I understand now what has always puzzled everyone who has had the care of you. You were born two hundred years too late; the ancient days of knight errantry and chivalry would have suited you better than these."

"It is your fault, mother," he replied. "When I was only twelve years old, you gave me a beautiful edition of Froissart's Chronicles, and everything else has seemed dull and tame to me since."

"I thought as much," she said, quietly; "you make the same mistake others have made before you; you live in the past, not in the present."



“You are right, mother; in these days, there seems to me nothing to do.”

“Your father thought differently,” she said; “he died from overwork.”

“Ah! my dear father was a genius,” said the young man, thoughtfully, and for some minutes there was silence between them.



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“I can understand you,” said Lady Hildegarde, with a smile; “you would like to have been a knight, always looking out for some romantic adventure; you would have fought giants, released distressed princesses.”

“Overthrown all wrong and upheld all right,” he said; “that would have been my vocation.”

Lady Hildegarde went over to him and laid her hand on his head. “My dearest boy, you are young yet, but will live to see that there is as much to be done in the way of redressing wrong now as there was in the days when knights rode forth to do battle for lady fair.”

“I want some romantic adventure,” he said; “I cannot see much in the plain, common ways of man. I should like to do something that would make me a hero at once, something brave and glorious.”

“My dear boy,” she said; “God grant you may learn to distinguish true from false, true romance from mere sentiment, true gold from mere glitter.”

He looked so eager, so handsome, she kissed him with passionate love.

“I should like to have been one of King Arthur’s knights,” he said, musingly.

“My dear Basil,” said his mother; “your mind is chaos. I tell you there are giants to be fought, hydra-headed ones—the giants of ignorance, of wickedness, of injustice, and they call for a sharper, keener sword than that wielded by the knights of old.”

And there came into her heart a great fear lest her boy, who had too much imagination, too much ideality, would waste his life in dreams.

“I will tell you, Basil,” said Marion Hautville; “what I call a great hero. The man who does his duty perfectly in the state of life in which God has placed him.”

“We all do that,” replied Basil.

“Indeed we do not—you do not, to begin with. You ought now, instead of dreaming about Froissart and his barbaric times, you ought to be studying hard how to make a good master of this large estate—how to employ the vast wealth given to you—how best to serve your God, your country and those who will depend upon you.”

“Solomon in petticoats!” cried Basil, gaily, and Marion joined in his laugh.

That conversation gave Lady Carruthers many uneasy moments. She understood so well the dreamy, yet ardent, romantic temperament of the boy.



“What shall I make of him?” she said. “Will he ever learn to live contentedly here at Ulverston, doing his duty, as Marion says, to God and man? My poor Basil, he lives too late!”

She asked advice from those best fitted to give it. One and all said the same thing; there would be nothing so useful for him as a tour on the Continent, seeing plenty of the world and going into society.

So Lady Carruthers, who loved home very dearly, gave up its peaceful tranquillity, and went with Basil and Miss Hautville to Paris, where they remained some months until they saw all that was most brilliant in that brilliant capital; from there to Berlin; then on to Vienna, and Basil lost much of his dreamy nature.



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He was eager, ardent, impetuous, longing, as is the fashion of young men, to do brave deeds, to be a great hero, and not in the least knowing what to do.

He was just twenty when they returned home, at the commencement of the year; Lady Carruthers, worn out with travel and excitement, longing for rest. There was more to be done—her son had been presented at most of the courts of Europe; he must attend the first levees held in London this season.

The Carruthers had a magnificent mansion in Belgravia. Miss Hautville begged for one year more of seclusion and privacy, so that Lady Hildegarde and her son went to London alone. She remained there for a week, and then, finding her son afloat in London society, she returned to Ulverston.

And Basil Carruthers, the dreamy, ardent, romantic boy, remained in London alone.

CHAPTER VII.

A Modern Bayard.

Perhaps Lady Carruthers never did a more unwise thing than when she left her son, with his peculiar temperament and notions, to go through a London season alone. She honestly believed herself to be doing right. She was ill and unable to bear the whirl of fashion and gaiety. She could not withdraw him from town to spend the gayest month of the year in seclusion.

“Leave him to me, Hildegarde,” said her cousin, Colonel Mostyn. “I will pilot him safely through the rocks and deep waters; nothing makes a man as self-reliant as feeling that he is trusted entirely.”

And knowing that Colonel Mostyn was an elderly man, who knew about as much as there was to know of life in all its phases, Lady Hildegarde had no scruples.

The colonel and the young squire were most luxuriously established at Roche House, the Carruthers' family mansion in Belgravia. Lady Hildegarde made every arrangement for keeping up the establishment in all bachelor's comforts. There was an excellent housekeeper, one who had been at Ulverston Priory for many years.

“You will be able to give some good dinner-parties,” she said to her son; “bachelor dinners—bien entendre—for Mrs. Richards is an excellent housekeeper.”

Assured and satisfied that all would go well, she left London. She hesitated as to whether she should give her son any warning about love or marriage, then decided that it would be quite useless.



“The boy is naturally so fastidious and refined,” she thought; “he will never love beneath him. He will see no one so nice as Marion.”

So Lady Hildegard Carruthers went to her stately home, little dreaming of the fatal news that was to follow her.

Basil cared little for the fashions and frivolities of the day; Colonel Mostyn tried to laugh him out of his romantic and chivalrous ideas.

“You are behind the age, Basil—quite unfit for it,” he would say to him. “Chevalier Bayard would not be appreciated in these times.”



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He listened with a smile on his face, while the young man talked of something to do—some grand action to fill up his life, some heroic deed with which to crown himself.

“Utopian, Basil—all those are Utopian ideas. Progress is the order of the day.”

“Is there nothing?” asked Basil, “no way in which a man may distinguish himself after the fashion of the heroes of old?”

The colonel smiled sarcastically.

“My dear boy,” he said, “between ourselves, some of those heroes of yours were unmitigated ruffians, I hardly like to give utterance to such a sentiment, yet I believe it. You cannot defend a bridge after the fashion of Horatius—you cannot conquer worlds like Alexander. I fancy you will have to be content with being one of the best lords of the manor Rutsford has ever known.”

“You are sentimental, Basil,” he said to him one morning, “but not practical. A man is nothing unless he is practical. Why not give up all these foolish notions of being a great hero? Go down to Ulverston, build schools, almshouses, mechanics’ institutes and all that kind of thing. Marry and bring up your family to fear God and serve the queen. One ounce of such practice is worth all the theory in the world.”

But Basil could not see it—he longed for the unattainable, the ideal. What lay plainly before him was a matter of great indifference to him.

Colonel Mostyn, the keen, cynical man of the world, was, perhaps, the best companion he could have had. But the colonel had many anxious thoughts over him. At last an idea struck him.

“The finest thing that could happen to Basil would be a very decided flirtation with a beautiful, worldly woman, who would laugh him out of these fantastic ideas and make a modern man of him.”

So thought the colonel, and so has thought many a one before him, little dreaming of the danger of playing with fire.

But Basil did not seem to care much for ladies’ society. He went to two or three grand balls and pronounced them stupid, on hearing which, the colonel raised his eyes and hands in horror.

“A young man of twenty who finds a ball stupid is past hope,” he said.

There had been a great flutter in the dovecotes when it was known that Basil Carruthers, the heir of Ulverston, son of the great statesman, a young man whose income was quite twenty thousand per annum, besides the savings of a long minority,



was in London—free, disengaged, and, as a matter of course, wanting a wife. Invitations literally poured in upon him—he accepted them at first, but soon grew tired.

“A tres dansantes at Lady Cecilia Gorton’s,” he said, holding out an invitation card at arm’s length. “Go, if you like, colonel. I do not care for it.”

The colonel was engrossed in the buttering of his roll, an operation which he always performed himself, but he was sufficiently astonished to pause in his proceedings and look at his nephew with a very horrified face.



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“You do not mean to tell me, Basil, that you are tired of ladies—young ladies?”

“My dear colonel,” said the young man, quietly, “I am very sorry to tell you that I find one chignon very much the same as another.”

Colonel Mostyn sighed deeply. What Mentor could make anything out of such a Telemachus? He resigned himself, thankful that what he called one civilized taste remained—Basil enjoyed the opera.

“I would really sooner see him fall in love with an opera dancer than remain what he is,” thought the man of the world.

One evening they went to the opera. It was “Lucretia Borgia,” and, as usual, Basil Carruthers saw nothing but the stage. In vain did the unwearied colonel call his attention to Lady Evelyn Hope, the lovely blonde; the fascinating Spanish Countess Rosella; to the twin sisters, the Ladies Isabel and Marie Duncan—he looked at them without interest.

“I wonder,” thought the colonel to himself, “if the woman be living who could touch that cold, icy heart!”

The opera was nearly over when he saw Basil looking intently at the occupants of a box on the grand tier. He even raised his glass, and sat for some minutes oblivious of everything and everyone except one central figure. Very quietly and without attracting Basil’s attention, Colonel Mostyn raised his glass and looked at the box. His gaze was steadfast for some minutes, then he gave utterance to a prolonged sigh.

“That will do,” he said to himself.

Like the diplomatist that he was, Colonel Mostyn said never a word, but when the act was ended, he turned to Basil.

“I see a lady, an old friend of mine, and I am going to spend a few minutes with her.”

He went to the box, and had the satisfaction of seeing that Basil never removed his glass. When he returned to his own seat, the heir of Ulverston said, somewhat eagerly:

“Who is that lady, colonel, with whom you have been speaking?”

“My dear boy,” he replied, “one chignon is just like another; which do you mean?”

“There is no chignon in this case. I mean the lady with whom you have been speaking.”

“That is Lady Amelie Lisle,” he replied, briefly.



“Amelie Lisle!” repeated Basil; “but who is she?”

“If you wish to know her pedigree, you must consult Burke’s Peerage. I can only remember that she is the daughter of Lord Grayson, who married a French duchess, and rumor says she is the loveliest and most accomplished woman in England.”

“Is she married?” was the next question.

“Yes; she married Lord Lisle, and rumor, always busy with beautiful women, says again that she is not too happy. Do you know Lord Lisle?”

“No; I do not remember having ever seen him.”

“When you do, you will realize what it is for a man to be all animal. He eats well, sleeps well, drinks well; he rides out a great deal in the fresh air; he is tall and portly, never, perhaps, read a book through in his life, good humored, generous in his way, but obstinate as a—well, as a woman.”



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“And is that lovely lady married to such a man?”

“Yes; the lovely lady was very young, and perhaps his fortune tempted her. She is all fire and poetry, plays with passion as children play with sharp knives.”

“Will you introduce me?” asked Basil Carruthers.

“My dear Basil,” replied the wily diplomatist, with an air of assumed frankness, “I really do not think you would like her. She is fond of balls, of dancing, of all sorts of amusements that you despise. If I introduce you to anybody at all, it must be to Minerva in disguise.”

“I should not like Minerva,” was the abrupt reply.

“Well, as you seem anxious, I will undertake it. We are going to the Duchess of Hexham’s ball tomorrow evening. Lady Amelie Lisle is sure to be there—no grand ball is complete without her. She is so surrounded now. I hardly like to interrupt her. Are you going to the Hexham ball?”

Now Basil had said no, he should certainly decline the invitation, but he seemed to forget it.

“Certainly I shall go,” he said.

“Ah, then we shall see her there,” replied the colonel, and his long mustache concealed the triumphant smile with which he listened to the words.

CHAPTER VIII.

Lady Amelie at Home.

The poets of old must have been thinking of a woman like Lady Amelie when they wrote of circes and sirens, and women whose beauty has proved fatal to men. It is perhaps quite as well that they are very rare—the power of a beautiful woman is great. If she be good, and use it for a good purpose; the world is the better for it. If she be bad, and her beauty is simply used as a lure, the world is the worse for it.

Either for good or evil, the power of Lady Amelie was great, for a more royally beautiful woman had seldom been seen. She was the very ideal of glowing, luxurious loveliness, and her beauty was perhaps the least of her charms. She had that wonderful gift of fascination which makes even a plain woman irresistible. Allied to beauty so wondrous as hers, it was fatal.



It is morning, and Lady Amelie, fresh and radiant as a June rose, is in her boudoir, an exquisite little room, hung with pink silk and white lace; the windows were draped with pink silk, and the light that came through was subdued and rosy, the fairest of all lights in which to see a fair woman.

A gem of a room, from which a painter would have made a room glowing in luxurious color. The air was heavy with the perfume of white hyacinths and daphnes—the jardinières were filled with the sweetest of flowers; Lady Amelie loved them so well; she was never so pleased as when in the midst of them. There was a marble Flora, whose hands were filled with purple heliotropes—in fact, every beauty that money, taste or luxury could suggest, was there. Pale pink was a color that Lady Amelie loved—her chairs and couches were covered with it. She is sitting now in a pretty, fantastic chair, the subdued rosy light of the room falling full upon her. She is reading the fashionable daily paper, smiling as some on dits meet her eye. Surely such beauty as that should be immortal. No wonder that Basil Carruthers, whose eyes had never rested long on a woman's face before, should not weary of hers.



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It is the beauty of an empress, royal, commanding, statuesque, yet radiant and full of grace. Her figure, as she reclines, is perfection; the soft, flowing lines, the gracious curves, the free, unfettered grace, the queenly dignity, all combined, enchant one. The head, whose contour is simply perfect, is crowned with a mass of dark hair, shining like the lustrous wing of some rare bird. The brow is white, rounded at the temples and clear as the leaf of the lily. The brows are straight, delicate and have in them wonderful expression. But it was Lady Amelie's eyes that drew men so irresistibly to her feet. They were irresistible. Black, with a languid, golden light in their wondrous depths; full of veiled fire and repressed passion. They could melt and flash, persuade and command, as no other eyes did. No man ever looked into their depths without losing himself there. Her mouth was no less beautiful, tender and sensitive; yet those lovely lips could curl with scorn that withered and pride that crashed.

She knew that she was beautiful, and she rejoiced in her beauty, as the lion in his strength or the serpent in its cunning. Men she looked upon as her natural vassals, her subjects, her lawful prey. She never once, in the whole course of her triumphant life, paused to think whether or not she inflicted pain. If any one had said to her, abruptly, "You have made such a person suffer," she would have laughed gaily. The ache and pain of honest hearts is incense to a coquette.

And Lady Amelie Lisle was a coquette to the very depth of her heart! She could have counted her victims by the hundred. Who ever saw her and did not love her? She delighted in this universal worship; it became necessary to her as the air she breathed. Universal dominion was her end and aim; but once sure of a man's love or admiration, it became worthless to her and she longed for something fresh. Like Alexander, she would have conquered worlds.

Not, be it understood, that Lady Amelie, as she expressed it, "ever went in for anything serious." She had never been in love in her life, except with herself, and to that one affection she was most constant. She accepted all, but gave none. Once or twice her flirtations had been on the verge, but Lady Amelie was one of those who can look very steadily over the brink but never fall in.

The world spoke well of her. "She was certainly a great coquette," people said, indulgently, but then she was so beautiful and so much admired. She smiles as she reads the fashionable intelligence; there is a paragraph describing her appearance at a ball given by one of the queens of society. The paper speaks of her beauty, her magnificent dress and costly jewels. She remembered all the homage, the sighs, the whispered words, the honeyed compliments, smiled and thought how sweet life was.

At that moment her maid entered. "My lady," she said. "Colonel Mostyn would be so much obliged if you could see him. It is on important business."



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“Certainly. I will see him here,” she replied. “What can he want with me?” thought my lady. “He was very empresse last night; surely he is not going to make love to me.”

And the notion of a gray-haired lover piqued her and made her smile again.

The colonel entered with the most courtly of bows, and she received him graciously. He talked of the opera, of the ball, of the last new novel, of the latest marriage on the tapis, and all the time Lady Lisle’s beautiful eyes were looking at him. “It was not for this you came,” she thought. At last the colonel spoke openly.

“I have come to ask of you a great favor, Lady Lisle,” he said. “You have perhaps heard of my young kinsman, Basil Carruthers?”

“The heir of Ulverston?” she said. “Certainly. He is one of the prizes in the matrimonial market at present, colonel.”

Colonel Mostyn drew a very animated and interesting portrait of his young charge.

“He wants modernizing; his ideas are dated two hundred years back. Lady Lisle, there is no one who could work such wonders for him as you.”

“What could I do?” she asked, with a conscious smile.

“You could modernize him and humanize him. Will you allow me to introduce him to you? And will you take him in hand a little—teach him something of life as it is, not as he dreams of it?”

“What if he burns his wings, like many other silly moths?” she asked, laughingly.

“It would do him all the good in the world,” he replied, with enthusiasm. “Will you believe, Lady Lisle, that he never admired any one, not even Lady Evelyn Hope? He never admired any face until he saw yours last evening.” That piqued her. “I have never seen anything like his indifference to all ladies. Dear Lady Lisle, you are the brilliant sun that alone can melt this icicle. I assure you, that his mother and myself are in despair.”

“You must not blame me,” she said, “for whatever happens. You choose to run the risk.”

“Nothing can happen but what will be for his greatest good,” said the colonel, gallantly.

“You may introduce him to me,” said Lady Amelie, “and I will do the best I can for him.”

“You will be at the Duchess of Hexham’s ball this evening?” he asked.



“Yes,” she replied. “You have described your charge, Colonel Mostyn; now I know the carte du pays. It would be better not to mention having seen me.”

“Certainly not”—

“Let me see,” she interrupted. “I am to teach him what life is like in this nineteenth century, to try to inoculate him with modern ideas; to teach him how to appreciate the society of ladies; he shall learn his lesson well.”

There was something in her peerless face and her brilliant smile that made Colonel Mostyn pause, and wonder if after all he had done a wise thing.

“The boy cannot be hurt,” he said to himself; “he has too much sense to fall in love with a married lady. A violent flirtation will do him good, and cure him of his absurd ideas.”



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“Your ladyship will be the benefactress of the whole family if you can rescue our young hero, and help us make him in some degree fit for the age he lives in.”

Lady Amelie smiled; there was not much fear in her failing in anything she undertook.

“It is not often that young men err on the side of originality and singularity,” she said; “I have always considered realism the sin of the age. I am quite curious to see your hero, Colonel Mostyn.”

“I believe he is quite as anxious to see you. Lady Lisle; he positively asked me to introduce him to you, and that is a request he has never made before, though I have shown him some beautiful women.”

“I ought to feel flattered,” said Lady Amelie, and again there was something in her smile that made the colonel wonder whether he had done amiss.

“We are quite in a conspiracy,” he said, and Lady Lisle laughingly assured him that all women were fond of plots.

“Your sex, my dear colonel, are so strong and so wise that it is a real pleasure to any poor weak woman to outwit you.” And Lady Amelie shot him a glance from her beautiful eyes that made the colonel again half pity his young kinsman.

CHAPTER IX.

Weaving the Spell.

The Duchess of Hexham bore the reputation of being a most accomplished woman; if she excelled in anything it was certainly the giving of balls. She had the largest, loftiest and best ball-room in London. It was never overcrowded.

“As many flowers as possible,” she was in the habit of saying; “but we must limit our guests.”

It did not matter either who was fashionable and who was not, the duchess would have nothing but beauty and grace at her balls. You were sure at Hexham House to meet the most beautiful women in London and the most eligible men. It was consequently agreed on all sides that her grace gave the best balls during the season. This one at which Lady Amelie was to be present, promised unusual splendor.

An archduke of one of the European courts was just then the guest of the queen, and he had promised to honor Hexham House with his presence.



“He shall see such lovely women,” said the duchess to her husband, “that he shall go back to his own country in despair.”

To Lady Amelie she had said, laughingly: “Look your very loveliest. I want you to make a conquest of the archduke.”

And that queen of coquettes thought to herself that her hands on that eventful evening would indeed be full. Not one word did the diplomatic old colonel say to Basil, but that young man was not quite himself. He had been wonderfully attracted by Lady Lisle’s face; he read poetry, love of romance and everything else beautiful and piquant in it. Of all the women he had seen she was the only one who had interested him. He wondered whether the mind matched the peerless face. She must be clever, witty, brilliant, he thought, or she would not have kept all those men enchained as she did. He was very anxious to see her again.



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“If she is like everyone else,” he said, “I shall soon be disenchanted, but if she speaks as she looks, she will indeed be peerless among women.”

He longed for the evening. He said nothing of her, but he talked so incessantly of the Duchess of Hexham, that the colonel understood exactly where his thoughts were, and smiled again most knowingly to himself.

He looked at his young kinsman in his faultless evening dress, and said to himself that there was not in all England a more noble or handsome man.

Lady Amelie called all the skill of the milliner to her aid; her dress was superb and effective—gold flowers on a white ground—a dress that irresistibly reminded one of sunbeams; it fell around her in statuesque folds that would have driven a sculptor to despair. Her beautiful neck and white arms were bare. She wore a diamond necklace of almost priceless value; her dark, shining hair was crowned with a circlet of the same royal stones; a diamond bracelet clasped one rounded arm. As she moved the light shone on her dress and gleamed on her jewels, until one was dazed with her splendor.

Lady Amelie was very particular about her flowers. On this evening, with her costly dress and magnificent jewels, she would have nothing but white daphnes. Did she know that the sweet, subtle fragrance of a daphne reaches the senses long before the odor of other flowers touches them? As she surveyed herself in the mirror, she felt devoutly satisfied.

“I shall be able to convert Basil Carruthers, Esq., to anything I like,” she said; “if he has resisted all the world, he will yield to me.”

So she drove off, resplendent, happy, animated, ready for the weaving of her spells.

Any good Christian, seeing her pass by with that triumphant smile on her lovely face, might have prayed their nearest and dearest should be kept from harm.

Lady Amelie never arrived very early at a ball. She liked to make her entree when most of the other guests were assembled. It was sweet to her to see how sorry and shy the ladies looked at her arrival, and how the faces of the men brightened. The first thing, of course, when she arrived at Hexham House, was the archduke. It was wonderful to watch the various phases of character that she could assume at will. With the archduke, she was the brilliant woman of the world, witty, sarcastic, adorable. He was enchanted with her; he declared that she combined all the charms of English and French women; he danced with her and would fain have lingered by her side, but that etiquette called him away.



Then Lady Amelie, already the belle of the ball, looked up, for Colonel Mostyn was standing before her, and by his side one of the handsomest and noblest young men she had ever seen. He introduced Basil Carruthers to his fate.

She looked in his face with a smile, and drawing aside a fold of her sumptuous dress, made room for him to sit near her.



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He thought her even more dazzlingly beautiful than when he had seen her at the opera. The perfume of the white daphnes must have touched his senses as those most lovely eyes smiled into his; his brain seemed to reel; he was intoxicated with her beauty as some men are with the fumes of rare wine.

Colonel Mostyn lingered for a few minutes, then, well satisfied, went away, leaving Basil and Lady Amelie together. She had taken her seat under the shade of a magnificent mass of gorgeous, blooming flowers, with wondrous leaves and rich perfume. As she sat with her gleaming dress and jewels showing to perfection, from against this beautiful background, Basil was completely charmed. In all his life he had never even seen such a picture. She turned to him, when they were alone, with the sweetest smile on her lovely lips; her eyes seemed to rain down light into his.

“This is a brilliant scene, Mr. Carruthers; the duchess excels in the arrangement of her rooms.”

He made some reply; he never quite knew what it was. It was enough for him to watch the charm of that irresistible face as she spoke. “Of course, everything depends on taste,” she continued; “I quite expect you to laugh at me, but do you know what scene I should find much more brilliant than this?”

“I cannot imagine,” he replied; “but I shall not laugh.”

“Ah, well. I am peculiar in my tastes. In place of this brilliant ballroom, I should like to be seated at a tournament. I should like to see the knights with their banners and waving plumes, in the lists—the ladies in their balconies all hung with cloth of gold—the queen of beauty with the prize. Ah, me! in those days, ladies had knights and men were heroes.”

As he looked at her, his whole soul shone in his eyes.

“And I, too,” he cried. “I love those days ten thousand times better than these.”

“Do you?” asked her ladyship with admiring eyes, “how strange! It is not long since I was speaking to one whom I may call a young man of the period, and his reply was, ‘Horrid bore, those kind of things were, Lady Lisle,’ and I thought most young men were of his opinion.”

“I am not,” said Basil, “I love those knights and heroes of old! great men and grand men who were content to ride forth, and to battle unto death for a woman’s smile.”

She raised her radiant eyes to his.

“Would you do that much for a woman’s smile, Mr. Carruthers?”



He paused a moment before speaking, then said: "For one such woman as those men loved, I would." She sighed deeply; the jewels on her white breast gleamed and glistened.

"Ah, you think, then, that the glorious race of women heroes loved and died for, have disappeared?"

"I thought so, until I saw you," he replied.

"You are wrong," she said. "You will live to tell me that you are wrong. There may be no Helen such as she who lived at Troy, and no Cleopatra such as Egypt's dusky queen, but there are grand women living yet, worthy of heroes' love."



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“I am sure of it,” he said, “now that I have seen you.”

But she made no reply; she did not even appear to have heard his words.

“I can understand you,” she said, gently. “Women have sometimes the rare gift of entering into the minds of reserved men. I understand you as though I had known you for years.”

His face cleared, his heart beat, his eyes brightened for her as they had never done for any other woman.

“I can remember,” she said, “when I had many similar opinions. I used to think these, our present days of steam and progress, quite unfit for heroes; I used to long for olden times again, when, by one great deed, a man made a great name.”

His eyes shone with new fire as he looked at her; it seemed to him that he had found his other soul at last. His mother laughed at him; Marion Hautville was sarcastic to him, but this beautiful woman—this magnificent queen at whose feet men bowed—she not only sympathized with him, but she had the self-same ideas.

“The great thing that I complain of,” said Lady Amelie, “is that there really seems in these days nothing to do. You, for instance, supposing that you were ambitious, how would you distinguish yourself?”

And as she asked the question, my lady gave a sidelong look at her victim and was charmed to see the progress she had made.

CHAPTER X.

Deeper and Deeper Still.

It was not possible that the queen of the ball should be allowed to sit apart from the dancers long. Many curious glances were bent on the pair who sat before the grand tier of fragrant blossoms.

“Who is that with Lady Amelie?” asked one of another.

“Mr. Carruthers of Ulverston,” was the, reply; and great was the indignation felt by young ladies and their mammas.

Poor Lady Masham had five marriageable daughters, and none had as yet received even the faintest shadow of an offer. In her own mind she had thought of Mr. Carruthers as especially eligible for one of them, and had resolved, when he did go more into



society, upon a decided mode of attack. Her dismay, when she saw the state of things, can be better imagined than described.

“My dear,” she said to her friend and confidant, Mrs. Scrops, “look, only look! Lady Amelie has victimized Mr. Carruthers.”

“She cannot do him any harm,” replied Mrs. Scrops; “she is married, I am thankful to say.”

“There will be no good done with him this season,” said poor Lady Masham. “I would rather he had fallen in love than that she took possession of him.”

But Basil was not allowed to remain very long *tete-a-tete* with his charming queen. The Duchess of Hexham, alarmed lest her most brilliant star should be eclipsed, came to the rescue. Lady Amelie was soon surrounded, and then was carried off by the archduke.

Not, however, before she had managed to turn round to Basil and say to him, *sotto voce*, “You must call and see me. We shall be friends, I can foretell.” And he was more charmed than ever by those words. Friends with that enchanting woman, that proud, peerless queen, that radiant beauty! Be friends with her! It was more than he had dared to venture to hope. That he might worship her in the distance seemed to him honor enough.

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He had dreamed of such women, but he had not thought they existed; they belonged to the heroic ages, past now and dead. Here, in the midst of the days he considered so degenerate, he had found the very ideal of his heart.

The brilliant scene before him seemed to fade away. Ah! if there was but some faint chance of distinguishing himself for her sake!—if she were but a princess in distress!—a lady for whom he could enter the lists and fight until he won! What was there in this prosaic century that he could do for her?—literally nothing but give her flowers.

“Basil! Basil! my dear boy,” said a voice near him. “Pray excuse me, but what are you doing here? Dreaming in a ballroom? This will not do.”

And Basil, aroused from his dream, looked up to see the face of Colonel Mostyn, wearing an expression of perfect horror.

“Do rouse up, Basil! Do, for heaven’s sake, try to be like every one else! Lady Masham wishes to know you; come with me.”

Basil followed, like a victim. Lady Masham received him cordially, mentioned casually that she had been to school with his mother, therefore felt called upon to take a special interest in himself, and then, very kindly, introduced him to her youngest daughter, Miss Nellie, whom she pathetically called the flower of her flock. Miss Nellie was a pretty girl, as were all the Misses Masham, or they would not have figured at her grace’s ball. She wore the regulation chignon, golden brown in her case, her eyes were blue, her lips rosy and sweet, her face fair as the lilies and roses of summer. They had all been brought up after the same pattern; they all knew exactly what to say in every case and how to say it. As a matter of course, and not, it is to be feared, because he felt the least inclination, Basil asked the young lady to dance, and Miss Nellie, with the prettiest pink flush on her cheek, consented.

She talked about the rooms, the opera, the archduke, until Basil almost groaned aloud. There was his beautiful queen, with her face full of poetry and her eyes of love. Yet if he could but have had both hearts, he would have seen that pretty, simple Nellie Masham, who talked innocent little commonplaces to him, was worth a thousand of such women as Lady Amelie Lisle. But it is not given to men to see clearly; anything but that. When Basil Carruthers had finished that dance he longed to escape, lest he should be compelled to go through another. Then came another moment of rapture for him, when, from the midst of a crowd of courtiers, Lady Amelie summoned him to take her to her carriage. Already they seemed like old friends. Basil drew the lace shawl around the white shoulders and held her flowers.

“You have told me I may call,” he said; “will you tell me when?”



“I am visible any time after two,” said Lady Amelie. Not for any amount of love or homage would she forego her comforts. Then it seemed to him that the world stopped until two the next day. He went back to the ballroom, but its beauty had all departed—there was no soul in the music, no fragrance in the flowers.



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“Colonel,” he said, “I have had quite enough of the ball. Are you ready for home?”

The colonel, who was quite satisfied with the result of the night’s work, declared that he also was ready, and they went.

“A very pleasant ball,” remarked the diplomatist, as they drove home.

“Was it?” said Basil dreamily. “I did not notice much—the only part of it I enjoyed was the conversation I had with Lady Lisle. Ah, colonel, if the ladies of the present day resembled her, there would be some hope for chivalry.”

“God forbid,” thought the colonel to himself. Aloud he replied: “Yes, she is a very beautiful and most accomplished woman.”

“She is more than that; she has a touch of genius and fire and poetry. I have met no one like her.”

“I can only hope,” thought Colonel Mostyn, “he will not take the disease too severely. I want a difference, but I do not care to have a case of raving love and madness on my hands.”

At breakfast time the next morning, Colonel Mostyn was pleased to see that, for the first time, Basil eagerly opened the papers and spoke anxiously of the evening engagements.

“Better rest at home, tonight,” said the colonel; “you were out last evening, and going out much tires you, I know. What do you say to a quiet game at chess?”

“I cannot say positively. I shall not know what my evening engagements are until dinner-time.”

And then the colonel felt quite relieved. “He is going to call on Lady Amelie,” he thought, “and wherever she goes this evening he will follow. I shall soon see him like other young men.”

As for Basil himself, he simply lived in one longing for two o’clock. My lady was perfectly ready to receive him. She had arranged a little scene and smiled to herself as she thought how sure it was to succeed.

“He saw me all magnificence last evening; now I will play a different role.”

She wore a plain dress of some white flowing material, with a knot of scarlet ribbons on her fair neck; her shining hair was drawn from her white brow and fell in luxuriant waves; in it she wore one rose half shrouded in green leaves, and never in all her gorgeous magnificence had Lady Amelie looked one-half as fair. She was seated in her



own boudoir, where the white daphnes shone like stars in the rosy light. A picture that would have ravished the heart of any man that gazed upon it, and Lady Amelie knew that it was perfect, even down to the graceful attitude and half sad, half languid expression of her face.

It was not much after two when he came. Her reception of him was perfect—unstudied, graceful, natural; and he looking at her, thought her more beautiful than ever.

“You were reading,” he said; “have I disturbed you?”

“No; Owen Meredith is a favorite poet of mine; there is something very unworldly and beautiful about his verses.”

“That is why you like them—you are so unworldly yourself.”



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“Perhaps so, in one sense. I have just sufficient tinge of it about me to teach me that whatever are my thoughts and opinions, if they differ much from other people’s, I must keep them to myself, unless, as is the case now, I meet a congenial soul.”

A view of the subject which was quite new to Basil.

“I thought originality was a sign of genius,” he replied, “and that people admired it.”

She smiled with an air of superiority that left him miles behind.

“My observation teaches me that there is nothing worldly people disapprove of so highly as originality,” she said. “To be more clever than your neighbor is a crime they never pardon.”

Basil, drinking in the beauty of that marvelous face, and the light of those lovely eyes, learned more worldly wisdom in one hour from the lovely lips of Lady Amelie than he had ever learned before.

CHAPTER XI.

How the Plot Succeeded.

Colonel Mostyn had no longer any reason to complain of his young kinsman; it was a month since he had been introduced to Lady Amelie, and he had lived in one long dream. He no longer found the time wearisome, or longed for something to do. He was in the power of a beautiful and heartless coquette, who took care that he should not lightly wear her chains.

He no longer showed any indifference to his evening engagements; to be with her was the one wish of his life; where she went, he went—to ball, opera, soiree, concert, fete, to dinners at Richmond, to water-parties; whoever saw the beautiful Lady Amelie, saw her last victim with her.

Colonel Mostyn began to think that really matters had been carried quite far enough; all the good he had anticipated was done; he did not wish evil to follow, and he was beginning to scheme for his young kinsman’s rescue, when he was suddenly summoned to join his regiment, just ordered abroad, and Basil was left to his fate.

He gave him some parting words of advice, but they fell on deaf ears. Even had Basil quite understood them, he would have asked how was it possible for a matter-of-fact, prosaic soldier like Colonel Mostyn, a man of the world, to understand such transcendental beings as Lady Amelie and himself.



During the whole of this time, believe me, he had no thought of harm or wrong; he never dreamed of being in love with Lady Amelie. What was she to him? His queen, his lode-star, his inspiration to all that was great and glorious, the Lama to his Petrarch; but of anything less exalted, he had no notion. Basil Carruthers, with all his eccentricity, would have shuddered at the bare notion of dishonorable love or sin. He was an enthusiast, a dreamer, a poet in heart and soul, but he was not the man to betray a woman; he scorned the notion of such a sin; it was utterly beneath his lofty nature. How skilfully she managed him! How artfully she contrived to lead him on, to engage his whole thought, time and attention, yet never to lose her influence for one moment!



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Take a scene from her life and his. A bright, beautiful summer day, when, with a large party of friends, they had gone down to Richmond. When dinner was over, and the sweet, soft gloaming lay over the earth, Lady Amelie left the room, where the guests were lingering over the wine and grapes, and went out into the balcony that overlooked the green park and the smooth, clear water.

Seeing that, and feeling tired of the conversation, Basil followed her. She was leaning over the stone balustrade, and the green foliage wreathed round the balcony formed a beautiful frame-work for a lovely picture. He went up to her, and stood in silence by her side.

“How different these two worlds are!” she said. “The world in there, all heat, noise and frivolity; the world out here, so calm, so grand and still. Look at the shadow of the trees in the water! Look at the floating clouds of rose-colored light in the sky!”

But he thought nothing in that outside world so beautiful as she herself.

“Are you fond of German stories?” he asked her, suddenly.

“Yes, some of them. I like the mystery and the spirituality, the poetry and the romance.”

“I read a book of Fouque’s last night that charmed me—Minstrel Love. Do you know it, Lady Amelie?”

“No,” she replied; “tell me what it is.”

“Only the history of a poet-knight who loved the lofty Lady Alcarda. She lived with her husband, a German warrior, in an old castle, and the poet was her knight.”

“Do you know, Lady Amelie,” he whispered, “that book made me ambitious?”

“Of what?” she asked.

“Dare I tell you? The Lady Alcarda was beautiful, gifted, pure of heart and soul, lofty and spiritual—like you,” he added, passionately, “and she accepted the poet’s service—she made him her knight.”

“There are no knights in these days,” she said, half sadly.

“Ah! let me prove to you that you are wrong. You are like Lady Alcarda. Let me be your knight. I would be content to serve you in all chivalry, and in all honor, until death, if you would reward me with a kind word and a smile.”

His handsome young face looked so eager, so wistful, that the coquette’s heart smote her for one half moment. Knowing what was before him, was it not too cruel to lead him



on? But the short-lived feeling of compunction soon died. She bent her head and the perfume of the flowers she carried reached him.

“Would you be my knight?” she said; “would you go through danger and peril to serve me?”

“I would die for you,” he replied, simply; “quite content, if you smiled on me as I died.”

“Do you mean it, without any romance or nonsense? Seriously, would you, to serve me?”

“Yes: and count all loss as gain.”

“Then you shall be my knight, my friend. I am not a queen. I have no sword to lay on your shoulder, but I place my hand in yours, and I accept your loyal service.”



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She laid her white hand in his, and the touch of those slender fingers thrilled him as nothing had ever done before.

"I am your sovereign liege," she said, with a smile. "If I come to you in distress you are sworn, remember, to help me. If I require your service, it is mine."

"Yes," he said; "at all times and at all hours."

"I shall go through life the more happily for knowing that I have so true and chivalrous a defender," she replied.

And they sat in the flower-wreathed balcony, watching the sun set over the river, and the simple, dreaming boy believed himself in Paradise.

It seemed to him that the spell was broken when the other guests came out and joined them. As he could no longer talk to Lady Amelie, he was content to stand by himself and think over his own happiness. To him it was like a beautiful page from some old romance, that this lovely lady should have smiled upon him, and have laid her gracious hand upon him, calling him her knight. How insufferable the empty talk of the men around him seemed! Ah, if they knew how he was sworn to do the lady's service!

It was more than an hour afterward when Lady Lisle was free again; then he enjoyed the felicity of helping her with her shawls, and of sitting by her side while they drove home in the moonlight.

Lady Amelie was the very queen of coquettes. In the course of all her long experience, she had never, through all her flirtations, said one word too much. But no other woman living could imply so much by a gesture, a look or an exclamation. One morning Basil had called early, in the hope of escorting her to an exhibition of paintings. He found her alone, and while he was talking to her, a gentleman entered the room—a tall, portly, sensual-looking man, whom Basil disliked at first sight. Lady Amelie introduced him to her husband, Lord Lisle, who was very cordial in his greeting.

"Lady Lisle has often spoken of you," he said; "but this is, strange to say, the first time I have ever had the pleasure of seeing you. I met your mother, Lady Carruthers, a year ago, and have a most pleasant recollection of her."

Lord Lisle sat down, and Lady Amelie gave a pretty little sigh, expressive of her resignation to something unpleasant.

And truly a conversation with Lord Lisle was about as unpleasant a matter as one could well experience. His language was coarse; his ideas coarser still. There was very little to redeem it. He mistook slang for wit, told stories that made his wife shudder, and misbehaved himself as only such a man can do.



Basil looked at him in dismay. Could it be possible that this man was the husband of that queen of beauty? What a life for her! No wonder she looked sad as she sat listening to him! The young man's heart ached for her.

"Are you engaged this evening?" asked Lord Lisle; "if not, dine with us. I expect Sir Harry Vere, and he is the most amusing character I know."



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He would have refused, but that he met the imploring glance of Lady Amelie's eyes.

"I will come with pleasure," he replied; and her eyes thanked him.

Then Lord Lisle, thinking he had been most amiable and charming, rose from his chair and quitted the room. In some vague, indistinct way the atmosphere seemed clearer after he had gone.

Lady Amelie made no comment; a woman less gifted than herself might have done so; she merely raised her hands and eyes and gave one deep sigh. Will you believe me that that sigh meant more than any other woman could have put into words? It meant "Pity me! see how I am wasted on this boor of a man! think how uncongenial he is, how wretched I am."

No one could sigh so effectively as Lady Amelie Lisle; thus it was with difficulty she refrained from smiling. Basil looked so wretchedly anxious and uncomfortable, she saw that he was longing to say something, but dare not.

"I shall not be five minutes," she said, with a graceful little smile; "and then we can spend a long hour with the pictures."

CHAPTER XII.

Caught in the Snare.

The first part of that hour was charming. Basil never forgot it; the rooms were not crowded, the pictures beautiful, and Lady Amelie in one of her most graceful moods. They both stood before a little gem by one of our first English artists, called "The Coquette's Decision," a very pretty picture that told its own story. A young girl, standing, half hesitating between two gentlemen. They looked anxious, she smiling and triumphant. She inclined ever so little to the fair-haired youth on the right, her eyes and lips smiling on him, but her hand was extended to his dark-haired rival on the left.

"I do not like that kind of picture," said Basil, "it lowers one's ideal of woman. I do not think there is one-half so much coquetry in the world as people would make you believe."

"Perhaps you never knew a coquette," she said; and the look she gave him from underneath those long lashes was quite irresistible.

"No," he replied; "indeed, a coquette could never charm me. My ideal of woman is some one as lofty, grand, beautiful and gifted as you."

"Yet there are coquettes," she said, gravely.



“I do not doubt it. I only say there would be no charm for me in the fairest of them all.”

Just then two gentlemen entered at the other end of the room, and the slight noise made by their entrance caused Lady Amelie to look up. Basil, who was watching her every movement, as he always did, attentively, saw her turn very pale and a sudden cloud of fear dimmed the radiance of her eyes.

“Lady Amelie, you are ill!” he cried; “or tired.”

“I am tired,” she said, and they sat down on one of the seats, placed in the middle of the room. It struck him that she was anxiously trying to conceal herself from observation, yet the idea seemed absurd.



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In the meantime, the two gentlemen advanced slowly up the room. They, too, paused before “The Coquette’s Decision,” and laughed. Then one, leaving his companion, came hastily to the seat where Lady Amelie was sitting. He held out his hand as though surprised and delighted.

“Lady Amelie!” he said. “I felt sure that I was not mistaken—that it must be you.”

There was no answering delight on her face; nothing but constraint, embarrassment and confusion.

“How do you do, Count Jules?” she said, coldly. “This is an unexpected surprise. I thought you had left London for some years.”

“L’homme propose, Dieu dispose,” said the count. “I only reached England last night, and have hurried to London.”

“It is strange that I should meet you here,” she said.

“My friend, Monsieur Le Blanc, has a picture here, and I have been criticising it for him.”

Then Lady Amelie seemed to remember the laws of politeness, for she introduced the two gentlemen, who looked very unpleasantly at each other.

Basil did not like the count, although at first sight he was certainly a very handsome man, essentially French, with a quick, shrewd, handsome face and dark hair, eyes black as night, yet bright and eloquent. It was those very eyes that Basil disliked; they were not clear, true nor honest. In fact, a sudden hatred to the French count sprang up in his heart, he could not tell how or why. They exchanged a few words, and then, under pretense of drawing Lady Amelie’s attention to a picture, Count Jules said to her:

“Can you not dismiss your young cavalier? I have come to London on purpose to see you—I must speak to you.”

“I cannot dismiss him,” she said, curtly. “He is not a footman to be sent away at my pleasure. Tell me in few words what you want.”

“I want money!” he said, with a very dark frown; “and money, Amelie, I must have.”

“I can give you none—you have no conscience. How much have you had already?”

“I have kept no account,” he replied; “and really what I have had is not of the least consequence—it is what I have to get.”

“That will be nothing from me,” she replied. “I gave you a thousand pounds three months ago, and you promised you would ask for no more.”



“I did not foresee the present necessity,” he said. “Amelie, I must have money.”

“Count Jules,” said Lady Lisle, “you are a villain, who trades upon a woman’s fears!”

“My charming lady shall call me anything she will, but I must have the money.”

“I tell you,” she replied, angrily, “that I have not got it, nor is it any use asking my lord for it; he was angry the last time, and I shall ask him no more.”

“Then get it from some other source.”

“There is no other source open to me,” she replied.

The count’s face darkened angrily.

“There need not be so many words about it, Lady Lisle. I must have the money.”



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“By what right do you incessantly demand money from me?” she asked.

“You promised, in those happier days, to be my friend always; and as a friend you have lent me money often. As a friend, I ask you for it again.”

“And as a friend,” she retorted, “I refuse.”

“Then I shall be obliged to adopt the very unpleasant alternative of asking it from Lord Lisle.”

“Lord Lisle would refuse it.”

“He would give it to me as the means of purchasing my silence,” he said. “You forget, Lady Amelie, what I have to show Lord Lisle, if he does refuse?”

“You mean my letters?” she said, indignantly. “You are coward enough to threaten me with showing my husband the letters I was so mistaken as to write to you?”

“I should be deeply grieved, indeed,” he said, “but I have no other alternative.”

“And I mistook you for a gentleman,” she said, with calm scorn.

“You were very kind to me, Lady Amelie,” he said, with a polite sneer.

“I do not believe you have those letters,” she said.

“I have, indeed. I have locked them up with the only two family heirlooms I possess—a watch and a ring—in an ivory casket, and I go nowhere without it.”

“You must do your worst!” said Lady Amelie.

“Nay,” he said, “I do not wish to do that. My worst would be to bring the honored name of Lady Amelie Lisle into the divorce court, and that I should not like to do. Do not decide hastily. I cannot remain in England very long. Take a week to decide in and let me know when I am to have the money.”

She turned from him with the scornful gesture of an outraged queen.

“We shall see,” she muttered between her white teeth. “We shall see.”

She spoke no other word to him, but went back to her seat. Count Jules bowed and quitted the room.

“You do not like that man, Lady Lisle?” said Basil, as he looked at her fair, flushed face. Before she had time to answer, they were joined by some ladies of his acquaintance,



and were not able to exchange another word on the subject. As he was leaving, Lady Lisle looked out of the carriage.

“Mr. Carruthers!” she said. He was by her side in a moment. She was pale and agitated, not quite herself.

“You are my sworn knight,” she said, laying her hand on his.

“Until death!” he replied.

“You promised to help me at any risk, in any difficulty, and now I am going to ask your aid.”

“It is yours. My whole life is yours,” he cried. She smiled, sadly.

“There are some things more valuable than life. Perhaps what I ask from you will cost you dear.”

“I do not care in the least what it costs,” he said.

“You are coming to dine with us; we do not dine this evening until eight. Come soon after six. I have a story to tell you.”

“I will not fail,” he replied. “Do not be anxious, Lady Lisle, you look distressed. Trust in me; far as human aid can go, mine is yours.”



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His clear blue eyes lingered on her perfect face, and again, for the second time in her life, the queen of coquettes felt something like pity for the man she was luring to his doom. She leaned back in the carriage after he was gone, with a most triumphant smile on her lips.

“What wonders a pretty face can work,” she thought. “I feel quite safe, now that my troubles are to rest on his broad shoulders. How I should like to see that Jules trampled upon and crushed. My knight will save me.”

She never remembered that he was the only son of his mother—a widow. She cared little that he was the head of a grand old race. She thought still less of his talents, his honest enthusiasm, his simplicity, except so far as it answered her purpose.

CHAPTER XIII.

Ladie Amelia’s Story.

A few hours later, and Lady Lisle was seated in her boudoir, exquisitely attired. She, who knew so well the effect of every fold in her dress, of every flower she wore or carried; she, who had studied the art of looking beautiful more completely than any other woman, had not neglected her most potent charm. She wore a dinner dress of white silk, with crimson flowers, that suited her dark, glowing beauty to perfection. An elegant toilet! No jewels, but a massive golden bracelet on one arm, and a golden chain of exquisite workmanship round her neck.

“I knew you would come,” she said, looking up with a smile as Basil was shown into her boudoir; “I knew you would not fail me. We shall have time for a long conversation. Lord Lisle never reaches home until a quarter of an hour before dinner, and then he has to hurry. Our guests will not arrive until nearly eight, so we shall not be interrupted.”

He looked round that little fairy nook, wondering at its elegance, wondering at the soft, rosy light, at the fragrance of the white daphnes, but more than all at the queenly loveliness of the beautiful woman before him.

She sat in the very heart of the crimson glow, her glistening silken dress sweeping in rich waves, and quite sure that her attitude, like everything else about her, was perfect. She held out her hand to him, with a smile that would have bewildered any man older and wiser than he.

“Sit down here,” she said, pointing to a velvet fauteuil; “I am going to make you my judge. Ah, Basil, for this one night I may call you Basil; perhaps after you have heard what I have to say, you will never be my knight again; it may change you.”



“I shall belong to you, and ask no greater happiness than to serve you until I die,” he replied,

A fan lay on the table by her side, with jeweled handle, and made of white, soft feathers. She opened it and quietly stirred the warm, perfumed air.

“I could only tell my trouble to you,” she began, in her soft, caressing voice. “You will understand me, because you know what it is to have wishes, hopes and aspirations that are never realized. You know what it is to be unworldly and unlike others.



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“I was but a girl when I was married, Basil—an innocent, unsuspecting girl, just seventeen. I might plead, in excuse of what followed, that I was married without my own inclination being consulted—unwillingly sacrificed to money that never has done me any good, and never will. I might plead my youth, my unhappiness, the utter want of congeniality with the man I married; but I will not. You shall judge me without excuses. I must, however, tell you that at first, for the first two years of my married life, I was in despair. There seemed to me no hope, no respite—nothing but despair. Now I have grown accustomed to my misery, and can wear it with a smile; then it was otherwise. At that time I was first introduced to Count Jules *Ste. Croix*. I hate myself,” she continued, passionately, “when I remember how that man duped me. I did not think him handsome, although other ladies raved of his *beaux yeux* and his classical face.

“But I liked him, Basil, because he had the art of expressing silent sympathy for me. He said nothing—if he had done so, my pride would have taken fire and I should have been saved—but all that other men say in passionate words, he conveyed to me in passionate looks. He was very kind to me; he used to visit us a great deal, and on several occasions he stood between me and Lord Lisle’s fierce anger.

“He knew all my distress, my troubles, my misery, as well as I know them myself. Let me tell you briefly, Basil, that at this unhappy time I wrote to him three letters—only three. I was so miserable, so wretched, that, unless I had opened my heart to some one, I must have died. Now listen, Basil, and do not wonder if I have ceased to believe in men. He answered them, and then, after a time, presumed upon my having written to him. Oh, Basil, if I could but spare myself the shame of telling you! He made a compact of friendship with me that nothing was ever to break. I was but a frightened child, and I made it. He asked me to lend him money. Oh, Basil, I was but a frightened, terrified girl, and I lent it! Then he tried to make love to me—he flattered me; he followed me like my shadow. But there I was firm; he could, not frighten me into anything I thought wrong.”

“Why, the man is a villain!” cried Basil; “an unprincipled, cowardly villain!”

“Wait,” she said, laying her hand on his arm. “Wait; you have not heard all. He uses the three letters as a means of extorting money from me. Now he threatens that if I do not lend it to him, he will show them to my husband.”

Basil sprang from his seat, with a hot flush on his handsome young face.

“I will shoot him!” he said. “Such a man is not fit to breathe the air of heaven.”

“Hush!” she said again. “You cannot help me unless you are calm. My husband does not love me, Basil. The least whisper of this, and, innocent as I am, I should be separated from him and disgraced. It is from this I want you to save me. If I were married to a noble, generous man, I should go to him at once, and tell him the truth. If



Lord Lisle knew it, he would use it as a pretext for separating himself from me. Basil, you are my knight—you must save me; you must get those letters.”



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"I will," he replied, "at any cost."

"I tremble to think how much money, I, in my cowardly fear, have lent him. He will want more and more, until he has drained a fortune, and I shall be no safer in the end. I will lend him no more money, Basil; but you, my only friend, shall get the letters."

"I will. How shall I do it! Oh, Lady Lisle, let me fight him—let me punish him as he deserves!"

"No," she said; "he is too cunning. If you were to offer to fight with him, he would know it was for my sake, and he would so place the letters as to fall into my husband's hands if anything happened to him."

But the hot flush did not fade from Basil's face.

"I must thrash him," he cried.

"No; for my sake, and because you would do me true service, you must not," she said.

"I will give him all my fortune for the letters," he said.

"That would not do—he would take your money first, then, holding the letters, would still want more. I will tell you the only plan by which you can help me. Go boldly into the room and bring the letters away."

"But that looks so much like stealing them," he said. "Let me fight him and take them because I win."

"No," she said, sadly. "If you will not help me, as I wish, I must forego all aid, and suffer on."

"You have but to command," he cried, "and I will obey."

"This is the count's address," she said. "Go into his rooms; you will find there an ivory casket; he keeps the letters there; he told me so."

"I will do it," he said, quietly.

A beautiful light came into her eyes.

"I knew you would save me, Basil," she said, tenderly. "When will you do it?"

"I will make my first essay tonight. I shall not rest again until it is done."

"Go to his rooms," she said; "ask for him; if they tell you he is not in, say you will wait for him; then, while you are in the room, open the casket, take out the letters, destroy them



at once, and send word to me when it is done. Do not stop to think whether I am right, whether it is the better plan, but do it at once, because I have said so.”

“I will do it,” he replied. Then she saw a shadow fall over his face. “There is nothing really in them, I suppose, Lady Lisle?”

“Nothing,” she said, “but the cry of a woman’s breaking heart! Enough to ruin me, should my husband ever come to know it.”

“That he never shall; they shall be destroyed. If I die for it, they shall be destroyed.”

“Ah, me,” she said; “had ever liege lady so true a knight? Basil, how shall I thank you?”

“The pleasure of serving you will be thanks enough,” he replied.

“Ah, generous knight, noble knight, who shall say true chivalry is dead?” And she praised him, she flattered him, she thanked him until the slight doubt that had occurred to him died away and he was ashamed of it.



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He thought of nothing but obeying her. It was sadly against his high English spirit to steal into a man's room and take from it; he would have preferred fighting until one or the other lay dead. But she had said nay, and it could not be. That very evening he called and was told the count was not in; the day following he repeated the call, and the servant, as he had said at the trial, was suspicious, not recognizing him as one of his master's friends.

He called another evening, and, owing to the fact of there being a new servant, he was admitted into the count's room. It was empty, although the gas was burning. He saw the little ivory casket, and with one stroke of his strong, young hand, opened it.

There lay the letters, underneath a watch and ring. He obeyed her; he did not lose one instant. He emptied the casket, carried the letters to the lighted gas, and burned them! Just as he had raised the watch and ring in his hand to replace them, the door opened and the count, with his servant, entered the room.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Trap Closed.

The count did not utter one word. He saw at one glance what had been done. He recognized the young gentleman whom he had sneered at as Lady Amelie's victim. He understood at once what had been done.

"She had asked him to destroy the letters, and he has done it," he said to himself. In one moment he had formed his scheme of revenge. He would give the young man in charge for stealing his watch and ring. If he cleared himself at all, he must tell the truth. He must tell that he had not come there to steal a watch, but to destroy Lady Lisle's letters.

"If he confesses that," said the quick-witted count to himself, "she will be doubly disgraced; if he declines to confess, I am at least revenged upon him." So, until the entrance of the policeman, the two men stood and glared at each other.

"You can save yourself," said the count, "if you will confess what you came for, and if you will write that confession down."

Basil smiled contemptuously. "Of what do you charge me?" he said.

"I shall charge you with stealing my watch and ring," was the reply.

"Knowing I am innocent?"



“The alternative lies before you. Confess, as I have said, and Lady Amelie suffers; deny, and you go to prison for stealing.”

It seemed to him far easier. “I will go to prison,” he thought, “I can give a false name; no one will know me. There will be no fuss, no stir, nothing known, and she, my queen, will be saved.”

Of course there was no common sense in such a proceeding, nothing but enthusiasm and romance. He certainly had not calculated upon the fact being known. He had really believed the false name would shield him. He found means through a heavy bribe to send one word to Lady Amelie; it was merely the word, “Destroyed.—B.C.” But it gave the queen of coquettes a sense of security she had not enjoyed for long. While Basil still lay in prison, Count Jules sought her.



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“You have baffled me, my lady,” he said.

“Yes,” was the calm reply, “I have checkmated you, count. You will extort no more money from me, nor will you threaten me again.”

“Well,” said the count, “I confess myself beaten, and I am not a good man, either, my Lady Amelie, but sooner than have blighted that young man’s life, as you have done, I would have suffered anything.”

“My dear count,” said Lady Amelie, philosophically, “some men seem, by fate and by nature, destined to be used as a cat’s-paw.”

Count Jules was baffled; his only hold upon the rich and beautiful Lady Amelie was broken. What those letters contained was known only to the lady and himself. If simply the written expressions of her own unhappiness, he placed more value on them than they were worth. The chances are that they held more than that.

He was entirely defeated—they had been his last resources for long. He had never failed, by means of them, to extort money from Lady Lisle at pleasure. It was useless to threaten any more. She had but to dare him to bring forth his proofs, and he had not one word to say.

His only consolation was, that in revenge, he had completely blighted the young hero’s life, for hero he was, although his heroism was of a mistaken kind.

And Lady Amelie—did she feel any regret for the young life tarnished? She missed a very pleasant companion, an enthusiastic adorer, but as fortune would have it, there came to England a young Roman prince, who was both artist and poet, handsome as a Greek god, and wealthy beyond compare. His appearance created a perfect furore in fashionable society, and he, as a matter of course, fell in love with Lady Amelie, so that she soon forgot the young knight who languished in prison. When the season was over, she persuaded her husband to go to Rome, and never left even a line or a message for the mistaken young man who had done so much for her.

She only did what suited her; she was the queen of coquettes, and she made him useful to her; nothing else mattered.

The lonely months wore on very slowly for Basil. At first the notion of heroism and the conviction that he was performing a most noble and chivalrous deed sustained him; but there was a fund of common sense in his character, and this common sense suggested to him that instead of being a hero, he had been the dupe of a wily coquette. Not at first did this idea strike him; not until long, dreary weeks had passed, and she had never sent him even one message of thanks or sympathy. He was very angry with the idea at



first, thinking it quite a false one, but gradually he awakened to the conviction that it was true.

Then his fortitude forsook him, and it was some consolation to hear from Mr. Forster that what the kind-hearted lawyer called his misrepresentations had been effectual. People had almost forgotten that little paragraph that had one morning taken London by storm.



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“I have denied it so constantly and emphatically,” he said, “that my words have been believed. As soon as you get out of here, make haste abroad, then all may be well.”

Even he could not help seeing how entirely the light and brightness had faded from the young face.

“I have never said anything to you,” said Mr. Forster, one morning, “but I have a certain conviction, Mr, Carruthers, that there is some woman in this; you are here for a woman’s sake and to screen her from blame; if so, it is useless asking you to tell the truth, I know, but make the best of it; get out of this as soon as you can.”

He did so. When the six months were over, “John Smith” was discharged and did not linger many hours in London; he went at once to Paris, and there made out where Lady Amelie was.

“In Rome,” replied the gentleman of whom he asked the question. “Her last caprice was a young Roman prince, and they are settled there for the winter.” To Rome he resolved to go. He would see for himself whether she was all that his dreaming fancy had painted her, or whether she was what men said—a heartless coquette.

He went to Rome, and found her, as usual, queen of all that was most brilliant and gay.

It was at a soiree given by the Duchessa Sforza. He saw her again, beautiful, radiant and magnificent. By her side stood a young man, who was handsome as one of the grand old statues that ornamented the galleries of Rome. He watched her, thinking bitterly of the time that had passed since he looked his last on that radiant face, and all the bitter shame that had been his portion since then.

He crossed the room and went over to her. Whatever dismay she may have felt, she showed none. She looked up with a bright, cold smile, as though they had parted but yesterday.

“Mr. Carruthers!” she said. “I hope you are well. I really believe that half of England is coming to Rome.”

“Can you wonder,” said the prince, “when England’s fairest queen is here?”

Lady Amelie introduced the two gentlemen, and after a time the prince went away. Then she turned her lovely face to the young man she had duped so cleverly.

“How do you like Rome?” she asked,

“I cannot talk commonplace to you, Lady Lisle,” he said; “I have come from England purposely to see you,”



She looked slightly impatient.

“Ah,” she replied. “Of course I am very much obliged to you; but you must have been terribly imprudent. Could you not have managed without being discovered in that suspicious attitude? I was so grievously distressed. You are too quixotic—you seek needless dangers.”

That was the extent of her gratitude to the man who had saved her reputation, character, and fair fame.

“I did not compromise you,” he said. “I preferred imprisonment to that.”

“Yes; but it was quixotic; there was no need for anything of the kind.”



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“I am very sorry to have erred from excess of zeal,” he replied, sarcastically. “It is a comfort to me to think that I shall not so offend again.”

“I hope,” she said, more anxiously, “that it will not injure you—that no one will know about it. It was really too shocking. Prison for a young man of your position! It was absurd.”

“I thought so myself, before I came out; it was absurd; but you will be comforted to know, Lady Amelie, that no one seems to have known of it but my mother, Lady Carruthers, and my lawyer, Mr. Forster. So far as the world is concerned, I am safe.”

The prince returned, looking slightly jealous, and then Basil amused himself, after a bitter fashion. He watched Lady Amelie playing off all her airs, graces, and fascinations on the young prince, as she had played them upon him. He was cured. It was a bitter lesson, but it lasted him. He began to understand the difference between romance and reality—between dreaming and doing. It had been a hard, bitter, almost shameful, lesson, but he was thankful in after years that he had learned it.

He found, after a time, that the world was wiser than he thought.

“There is some story about Mr. Carruthers,” people would say, but no one ever knew exactly what it was. He remained in Rome for a whole week. Before it was over he was quite cured of his liking for the queen of coquettes.

CHAPTER XV.

The Denouement.

Then Basil Carruthers set himself busily to work to discover how he might best undo the effects of his folly. The duties he had thought so lightly of rose before him now.

“I will go down to Ulverston,” he said to himself, “and with God’s help I will be a wiser and a better man.”

He saw what his mistaken notions of chivalry had done for him—how completely they had misled him—how near they had brought him to ruin and disgrace. The meeting between mother and son was not the most pleasant in the world. Lady Carruthers, stately, sensitive, and proud, could not forgive the dark disgrace under which her son had lain. He saw how deeply she felt it.

“Mother,” he said, “you must judge me leniently. I own myself mistaken. I think, sometimes, I must have been mad, I cannot tell you precisely what took me to prison. Will you believe me that it was for a woman’s sake?”



“I knew it!” she interrupted.

“It was to screen a woman’s folly,” he continued. “And, indeed, wrong as I was, I believed myself to be doing a most chivalrous deed.”

“It is a great pity, Basil,” said Lady Carruthers.

“Yes,” he said, quietly; “but I was a woman’s dupe, and I have suffered enough. It was one false step, but I shall spend my life in trying to redeem it.”

He kept his word. In four years’ time the name of Basil Carruthers rang through the land with a pleasant sound; he had, indeed, found something to do.



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He was returned for the borough of Rutsford, and his fame as an able and eloquent orator spread over the country.

Then he studied to become a model landlord; he built large, airy cottages and schools; he paid the attention that every landlord ought to pay that the land be well drained, well cultivated. He was a friend to all his tenants, a benefactor to his dependants. In the course of time people forgot to whisper there had been some story about Mr. Carruthers; they only mentioned him in terms of praise. The very quality that his mother once thought would be against him now proved to be in his favor. If he was more romantic, more enthusiastic than other young men, he employed the superabundance of his gifts to excellent purpose.

After some years there was a grand wedding at Ulverston. Basil Carruthers won Marion Hautville for his wife. Before they were married he took her one afternoon for a long ramble in the green summer woods and told her this story. Marion was shocked at first; it seemed to her impossible that a man could be so foolish as to mistake a deed like that for chivalry.

“And what has become of your lovely Lady Amelie now?” she asked.

“She is still the queen of coquettes,” replied Basil; “but, Marion, although it was a terrible mistake, and I suffered so bitterly for it, I cannot be altogether sorry that it happened. I should have been a useless dreamer until the day of my death if this had not taken place. It was a rude, rough, but sure awakening.”

“I shall never call you my knight,” said Marion. “Why, Basil, dear, a schoolboy would not have been taken in by such nonsense.”

“But, Marion, I was not so wise as a schoolboy,” he replied.

“She only used you for her own purposes. She simply made a cat’s-paw of you, Basil.”

“I can see it now, darling, I did not then. But you will forgive me, Marion?”

“Yes; because, after all, though you were so greatly mistaken, still the faults that led to your mistake were almost virtues.”

Lady Carruthers was rendered very happy by her son’s marriage. When Mrs. Carruthers went to London, she proved to be Lady Amelie’s greatest rival. She was quite as beautiful, as witty, as clever, but in place of coquetry, she was gifted with honest simplicity, that men pronounced charming, while Lady Amelie, to her great chagrin, began to find her attractions on the wane. Men grew tired of her vanity and her cruelty. Women disliked her for her selfish disregard of everything but her own triumph.



Basil Carruthers bows his head in shame and contrition when he remembers this episode in his career. Then Marion, his wife, kisses him with a smile, and tells him he is not much the worse for having been once upon a time a coquette's victim.

The end.

[Illustration]

GOLD MONOGRAM DINNER SET FREE



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YOUR OWN INITIAL—DISTINCTIVE—INDIVIDUAL—ELEGANT

BIG 42-PIECE SET

These dishes are not the kind you see every day, but the exquisite, ultra-fashionable kind; the pure white, lovely decorated and dainty set such as we offer you herewith. We have hunted a long time and have searched the country over to find a set of dishes we could offer the lady readers of this paper as something so far above the ordinary that all other dish offers would pale by comparison. Here is a set of dishes you will be proud to put on the table when "company comes." A set of dishes so exquisite in design, so beautiful in finish that every one who sees them will exclaim in admiration. Every piece in this set (there are 42 in all) is decorated in gold. Every piece except butter plates will have your monogram initial in gold. This makes the set as distinctive and original as if made to your special order. Heretofore only the highest priced and most expensive dishes in the world were made with the owner's initial. You can get this set of initial dishes free, without one cent of your own money.

Free offer—Send No Money

Just name and address, and we will send 32 sets of our new art pictures to distribute on a special 25c offer. Send us money collected and for your trouble we will send you *this grand 42-piece dinner set*. Write today. You will be surprised and delighted.

E.D. *Life*, Dept. G.E. 337 W. Madison St., Chicago, Ill.