#### 'LADY ALICE.

Continued

'Two months,' she murmured; 'it seems like two years! Am I the same flesh and blood as the girl, who two, months ago, was in rags, and worked on the farm like the ploughboys? It seems like a dream! Perhaps I shall wake some day and find myself back in the farmfind all this gloomy splendor melted into mist, and hear Aunt Martha's voice scolding me as she used to do.

She moved from the fire, and walked up and down the room swiftly.

'I wonder if I should be happier if woke to find it all a dream-to be back once more in the old life. No, no; I could not do it. And yet'-she stopped-'it is terribly lonely here. All is so grand; but I grow oppressed with it. If only his mother would speak to me kindly! She is always so cold and courteous. But I know she scorns me in her heart; she loves Valerie Ross. She should have been his wife not a farm-girl, lowly born like me. Alice .- my Lady Alice, the name condemns me; it will cling to me forever. And he, what does he think of me now? All danger is gone, and he only remembers he is tied to me forever -tied to a low-born girl whose very presence drives him from his home.'

She paused an instant, her lips compressed as if with pain, then, with a sigh she drew up a chair to the table and took up a book.

She was pondering over the words thoughtfully, when a tap came to the door.

'Come in !' she said absently.

The door opened, and a woman vanced into the room, a tall elegant figure in robes of trailing black satin, cut low round the beautiful snowy shoulders. On the masses of red-brown hair gleamed stars of rubies and diamonds; a slender chain supported a glowing star throat.

It was Valerie Ross. She came in drawing on her long tan gloves slowly. Her face was pale, but her eyes flashed dark and glorious, and there was a strange

half-contemptuous smile on her lips. 'My Lady Alice,' she observed playfully, 'still buried in your books? What a store of learning will be in that pretty golden head when your lord returns!'

'I was not studying. I was reading for amusement,' she answered.

Alice flushed slightly.

Valerie walked to the window with her swift graceful carriage. The curtains were still undrawn, and out in the darkness the trees seemed liked moving phantoms.

'Amusement?' repeated Valerie with half a shudder. 'Indeed you want some! I wonder you are not dead of ennui and melancholia already!'

'I am quite content,' said Alice slowly: then suddenly remembering her duties. 'But will you not sit by the fire, Miss Ross? This chair is most comfortable.' 'Thanks.'

Valerie turned indifferently toward the fire. She did not take the chair, but stood buttoning her gloves, with one slender foot on the fender.

'You don't seem surprised to see me, she observed after a moment's silence. 'No,' answered Alice.

She did not add that she had grown used to Valerie's strange erratic visits during the last two months, and had ceased to wonder at them.

'Have you heard from those worthy people your aunt and uncle since they left the village?' next queried Miss Ross very lightly.

'No,' said Alice again, this time with a crimson flush on her cheeks.

There was a something in Valerie's tones that always made her wretchedbrought her low origin in glaring painfulness before her eyes.

'They are not considerate for their niece's welfare,' observed Miss Ross. Her gloves were buttoned; she let her hands drop, and gazed at the young

troubled face before her indifferently. Alice roused herself, she tried to smile. rid of me. She always looked on me as a

burden, and--" 'And was glad to see you happily and

well married,' finished the other; 'of course that was natural, was it not?'

Alice's face was white now, her hands clasped together, were cold with the humiliation she was enduring.

She knew how cruel was the woman opposite, and how powerless she was to fight her. The shame which sometimes overcame her fell on her heart now like a heavy weight.

She saw herself as Valerie thought her -a vulgar, common girl, the relative of people who were bought out of the village, out of the home they had lived in for years, so that their presence should not shock the eyes of the castle, nor recall how low its master had sunk in mating with one of their number.

None knew-none could ever knowwhat an agony of pain and shame lived in the young heart of Roy Darrell's wife She was utterly-completely alone!

The man for whose sake she bartered her freedom left his home two days after

the funeral of his murdered friend. His mother still inhabited her rooms in the Castle, but there was a chasm be-

tween her and her son's wife. She treated the girl with cerrmony and courtesy, her wishes were consulted in

every way, but the older woman-the proud descendant of an ancient race-refused to eat or be familiar with a girl, who, a few days before, had consorted with farm-help and laborers.

Occasionally the two Lady Darrell's met, and the older woman would always drop a deep courtesy to the shrinking timid form of the younger, but they exchanged no word.

Valerie Ross alone appeared to notice the girl thrown so suddenly into this strange life, but though to the world her overtures of friendship seemed the essence of kindness and good nature, Alice knew to the contrary, and always suffered to torture during the visits she received shed a soft roseate hue from beneath from the beautiful woman.

About a month after Roy's departure. news reached the Castle that the Earl of Darrell, his elder brother, a man wno had been a wanderer from his home for many vears, was dead, leaving no heir, and Roy Darrell succeeded to the title and

the estates. The tidings were communicated to Alice in the most ceremonious manner, but the fact that now she was a countess. and moreover, entire mistress of the

Castle, did not appear to touch her. She was growing day by day more wretched as she saw how great a mistake it had all been, and how wrecked her life must be, hencforth passed in the gloomy solitude that appeared to be her lot.

Valerie Ross, standing by the fire watched her face blanch with pain, and extent of my power.' the smile on her lips deepened.

It was almost a pleasure to her to make through such tortures herself when her faithless lover died, that it seemed to have killed all the tenderness and womanliness in her.

Alice roused herself at last.

'Have you anything particular to tell me?' she asked hurriedly, turning to open her book with trembling hands.

'I bring an invitation from the Dowager Lady Darrell, to Margaret, Countess of Darrell—an invitation to dine in the Blue Chamber. You will refuse, of course my Lady Alice. Anchorites like you, never dine out, you know.'

Alice met the merciless glance of those golden-brown eyes. 'I accept with pleasure,' she replied

quietly. 'Pray convey my thanks to Lady Darrell. At what hour does she Valerie drew herself up and frowned.

She had come to torment and trouble this low-born girl, and now found herself treated with almost as much harteur and indifference as she herself could as-

Where did this girl get her manners and ways of speech? queried Valerie anof the same jewels round the swan-like grily. She was no ordinary common chair, and bent low before the girlish creature, but bore herself with a grace figure. and ease that might well have become a

'There will be guests,' she observed coldly, smoothing an imaginary wrinkle in her glove. 'And you will pardon me, ular about one's garments, so if I---'

ing you so much trouble on my behalf.'

Valerie's brows met again. It was the first time Alice had shown her spirit of determination, and Miss Ross resented it now most bitterly.

ing bitterness of her heart; but now she fingers. saw before her a woman, as beautiful as herself, and every whit as proud.

'As you like,' she observed indifferently; 'I thought I might have been able to give you some hints. The dinner-hour is eight, it is usually half-past seven, but and rich lace. Lady Darrell has it later to-night, on account of the earl's arrival. I forget what

wrote to tell you.' support; a mist clouded her eyes. One thought was alone in her mind-the earl else was forgotten; Valerie, her stings, herited her grace, her natural refinement,

voice, clasp that strong hand. enance as with glorious sunshine.

Valerie saw the transient gleam pass over her pale face, and her heart grew still more bitter towards this girl-bitter, hend, that Roy Darrell's low-born wife handsome debonair face.

'He has not written to you?' she broke mother of her son's wife. in. 'Ah, that was remiss! I thought he 'Aunt Martha is only too glad to get forgot all about that—at least, he said ment and admiration. nothing touching it in the letter I re-

ceived from him this morning.' Alice's joy died as suddenly as it had been born. She ffinched as though a blow had been struck her, but she said and she marvelled at it. nothing, and Valerie Ross walked grace-

triumphed easily. the chair, and buried her face in her tions?"

'Forget me!' she whispered. 'Yes, that is what she says; and she is right. replied; but I have a dim recollection of He can do nothing but hate me. And I a large house, and a beautiful face that help him. I must remain forever a bur- long years with Aunt Martha, and all her den and a tie.'

She rose and paced the room. 'How cruel she is! What shall I do? anything!' drawled Valerie, who was If I remain away she will triumph, and watching the older woman's interest with if I go -- But I must go.' She stood jealous eyes. 'We might have discoversilent, her arms crossed over her breast; ed a secret, or lost father—you might Roy Darrell when you had your chance a struggle was tearing her young heart. have developed into a queen; as it is--' I will go. I must be brave; better her stinging words than her contempt. If farm-girl, the young countess finished she thinks me afraid, she will taunt me forever with it, and that would kill me.

No; I will-I must do this, whatever hap-She rang the bell quickly, and Davis

appeared, 'Light the candles in my room, Davis and unpack those dresses that came the other day from London. I dine with the earl and his mother to-night, and I must

The maid bowed and left the room with a mind full of wonder and admiration. Never had she seen the young countess look so be cutiful, yet she was

There was something different, something that told she had passed from a girl into a woman, that life had begun with all its storms and joys, its trials and

In the Dowager Lady Darreli's apartment, the waxen lights glimmered in profusion from their silver stands, and their silken shades.

Valerie Ross was alone, she was walking to and fro the whole length of the pet, her rubies and diamonds gleaming their brilliancy.

beautiful mouth was set and hard.

She was thinking of Alice, and the thought brought vexation. 'But for her,' she muttered, 'how

changed it would be. How blind I was. But Eustace wove the veil round my eyes. Fool that I was to believe him love me, but does he still? Two months Count of Jura.' are not a lifetime. We shall see. And that puny creature shall yet learn the

The dowager came in slowly while she was still musing. Valerie smoothed the meet the older woman.

gravel, said Roy's mother as she sank tempt will kill me! into her chair, 'it is getting late-nearly eight, and he has not come.

him? I fancy I heard you mention something about guests.. you know him. The other is a man he met in Italy, a Count Jura-from Roy's woman is Valerie Ross. Beware!' letters, a most delightful companion. I am glad, Valerie, he has brought guests,

prove too trying.'

Valerie turned at the last words. told that someone had entered. It was and happiness. the young countess. She had heard the last sentence from her husband's mother's lips, and her face whitened a little as she put her own construction on it.

otherwise the life here at first might

Lady Darrell had been thinking Captain Rivers, his terrible death, and the maddening anxiety that had come to Roy, when she spoke. She rose from her

'Welcome, countess,' she said haughtily and coldly. Alice courtisied low, while Valerie

gazed at her in speechless vexation. Roy, before he took his departure, had perhaps, but Lady Darrell is very partic- given his wife to understand that she was expected to comply to society's laws, 'Thank you,' answered the young count- and had left instructions with Davis, a ess quietly; 'I have my maid, Davis; she most experienced lady's maid, to have will assist me. I could not think of giv- everything obtained as befitted her mistress's position.

The woman had obeyed him well. Dresses and many numerous things were sent down from London, though, until this evening, Alice had seen none of their Hitherto she had looked upon Alice as marvels, contenting herself with wearing a plaything, an amusement, an object on none but the simplest and most inexpenwhich she could pour out the overflow- sive garments made by Davis's own

To-night she had abandoned her Cinderella robes, and stood before the cold unappreciative eyes of the two women, a perfect vision of loveliness, draped from head to foot in black gossamer material

Her masses of dead-gold hair were coiled and gathered in picturesque contrain he is to come by; but of course he fusion on her dainty head; her shoulders rose white, fresh, and round from her Alice's right hand grasped a chair for black gown, her fair young throat was encircled by gems.

Once again the question rushed to was coming-the earl, her husband. All Valerie's mind: Where had this girl inthe long lonely months-all but the one her pure beauty? She was no farm-girl, thought, she should see once more that as she stood before them, her figure handsome face, hear that deep manly drawn up to its graceful height, her tiny well-gloved hands holding her plumed A joy seemed to come to her so swift fan; she was a lady, every whit as dainty, and sudden that it illuminated her count- as beautiful, and as proud as one of their own favored class.

> Valerie bit her lips, and turned her back on the young countess.

Alice took no notice of this coldness: and then triumphant, for in that glance she was listening, listening, yet dreading she had read Alice's secret, the secret the first sound of that step, the first that Alice herse!f as yet did not compre- glimpoe of that tall well-built form and

'Will you not sit down?' asked Roy's

Alice moved towards the chair she inwould have fixed to dine with you in- dicated, and sank into it, while Lady stead of his mother. But I expect he Darrell gazed at the girl with astonish-

Valerie was beautiful, but this girl was peerless in her strange young loveliness. In all her long life Lady Darrell never recollected a more purely patrician face,

'Have you any recollection of your fully from the room, feeling that she had childhood?" she asked, suddenly and ininvoluntarily. 'Did you always live with Left alone, Alice flung herself down by your aunt? Which side are your rela-

Alice looked up, strangely surprised. 'I can remember nothing clearly,' she -oh, what shame is on me!-I cannot seemed to bend over me; then came the

angry words.' 'What a pity you cannot remember 'As it is, I am only Alice-Alice the

Lady Darrell's face clouded at the

'Roy is late,' she said again.

'He is here,' announced Valerie, and at that moment the door was thrown open and Alice saw once more the man who had stood beside her that bygone morning and vowed his life to hers.

Roy kissed his mother and introduced the two guests, then turned to Valerie. and the girl standing by so quietly saw his eyes dialate as with a glow of unrestrained passion and happiness, and noticed their hands lingered as they were clasped.

Alice's heart seemed to grow cold, but there was no sign on her fair face, and it pretty soon, he said quietly. the next moment Roy, Earl of Darrell, was before her, greeting her with a low ceremonious bow.

and chatting to Lord Radine, but she was Lady Darrell had written often pressing watching the husband and wife, and me for a visit, so I embraced the opporknew her triumph was yet to come.

room, her long train trailing on the car- and began to converse about his journey. for Eustace. All my life was for him. on her neck and hair like fireflies in while he talked his dark glowing eyes him no encouragement. Then Eustace

deserted.

He turned to Roy.

countess.' The earl started, his face flushed. 'I beg your pardon; of course. Counand lose my chance with Roy. Roy did tess, permit me to introduce to you the

suffering an agony of shame and pain.

this young heart suffer. She had gone from her face as she advanced to may be free. Oh, why did I come? Why can I not leave it all? It is too fore the feet of one unworthy.' 'I have not heard the wheels on the much for me. Their scorn and cold con-

deepen into sadness with a strange in- but---' 'You are over-anxious, dear,' replied terest in his dark eyes.

Valerie. 'Does Roy bring anyone with has no eyes for anyone save Valerie- sense, as you call it. You must be quick 'Yes; he will be accompanied by two how dangerous she looks, her eyes flash or someone may see us, and it will do gentlemen-one, Lord Radine. I think like daggers! Poor Lady Alice! She is me no good to let the servants observe your deadly enemy-a foiled jealous me walking in the early morning with

girl and led her into dinner. Roy followed with Valerie, and a sigh But you do not keep to the truth. You reached Alice's ear, telling plainer than do not mind the servants; you fear Roy words how bitter was his sorrow, and Darrell. What would he say to see you The doors had opened, and a soft rustle how great a burden was she to his life

CHAPTER V.

Alice awoke early the next morning She had indeed slept but little. Her wounded pride and aching heart proved

veritable thorns in her pillow. She was haunted by the vision of Rov' fair handsome face bending over Valerie's head, gazing into her eyes with an eternity of love.

She did not like Valerie, yet she was

'It is I who keep them apart. What can I do-what can I do?' was the thought that raged in her mind, and to this she could find no answer,

She rose and took her bath, then ro ed herself in her simple grey gown, and wrapping a mantle round her, for the morning was chilly, she left her apartment and stole through the silent corridor to the gardens and grounds.

Through the two months that had elapsed since the strange and terrible episode that had changed her whole life the girl lived entirely alone.

She gave herself up to study, and books and for recreation walked a while in the park, till she knew every nook and corner by heart.

No thought of pride or joy that she was part owner of this proud estate came to her mind as she passed through the avenues of leafless trees, and caught glimpses of the castle, standing like a grey sentined in the background. Instead, she wished now, day and night, Queen for something that should free her from her husband, and take away the shame that hung over her.

She walked on quickly. The wind was sighing in the trees, sounding mournful and weird to the trees.

At last she reached a spot she frequented most. It was thickly wooded, and even now, though autumn was at hand, the leaves were scarcely thinned. It was quiet and secluded, and Alice

loved it. She flung herself down on an old trunk,

and gave way to her thoughts. She heeded not the chill wind or the mournful rustle of the trees, but after she had sat some time, she became conscious of the approach of some person or persons-and roused herself to listen.

The voices came in the air. 'I tell you, Paul, I can do no more; have nothing-nothing now but my few jewels, and you know I must keep them. even if they were worth much, which they are not.

'Can't you ask the old lady?' spoke the deep tones of a man. 'Impossible-utterly impossible, Paul!

'Then the devil knows what is to become of me, Valerie.' Alice grew uncomfortable, she did not care to listen to more, yet disliked even still greater to rise and discover herself

to Valerie. She was surprised, and a little alarmed, but thought it wiser to sit still, and perhaps the speakers would pass.

'You know,' went on the man surlilyyou know how I am situ ated. I consented to wait while you came here, but time has gone, and now it is two months,

and you have done nothing for me.' 'Have you forgotten how I am placed?' asked Valerie angrily. 'Have you forgotten the murder?'

The man laughed. 'No, I forget nothing; but I, none the less, am angry. Why did you not grasp What fool's nonsense was in your head? 'What? Love,' said Valerie quietly.

The man laughed again. 'Pooh and bah! You, Valerie Ross, stayed by love. No, no, my sister; some other tale-not that.'

'It is the truth, nevertheless,' broke in Valerle's voice, broken, harsh and agitated. 'I loved Eustace Rivers. Ah, you may shake your head; you did not see, you were blind as to what was going on in our little cottage home in Everleigh, when Eustace's regiment was quartered near; you little chought of the dreams that came to me for one brief moment of my great happiness.'

Alice sat motionless; she heard the man strike a match against a tree as if to light a cigar.

'If I had known it I should have ended

'When I came to the Castle,' said Valerie, 'you thought I did so to to please you. It was to follow Eustace. I had Valerie was radiant, she was laughing grown jealous, he was altering to me tunity. Roy did at once what you pro-

Roy uttered no word to Alice. After phesied he would-fell in love with me. his bow he turned from her to his mother but I was blind to it then. I cared only The other guest joined in the chat, but Roy haunted my footsteps, yet I gave were fixed on the girlish figure in the and I quarrelled. I pressed for our mar-She had a frown on her brow, and her rich black dress, standing so lone and riage, he demurred again and again, and a coolness arose between the two men over me. I know not how, but-God for-'I crave, milord, that I may have the give me-I believe now Eustace maligned conor of presentation to your beautiful me to his friend, and that Roy in his love for me resented the affront. But let that

> The day before the murder Roy sought me, begged for my love; he asked no questions, but gave me two day to con-Alice bowed again, and scarcely glan- sider. I wanted no time, I was bound to ced at the man before her. She was Eustace for ever. Then-then came his death, and then my eyes were opened. 'He wishes me dead,' said her heart I was no longer a fool; I knew that what over and over again; 'dead, so that he I had thought love was a pastime to him -that I had thrown my heart's best be-

pass. I shall never know the truth now.

'If you had confided in your brother you would have known in good time Count Jura watched her expression what class of man was Eustace Rivers;

'But I did not,' answered Valerie's 'So this is the young wife,, he mused. voice: and now let the past go, it is dead But mon Dien, how beautiful! And he and buried, and with it my fool's nonmost questionable-looking scoundrel like So ran his thoughts as he spoke to the you!

> 'True sisterly affection, upon my word. walking with a man-a questionablelooking scoundrel?"

'Paul, you are absurd! Do you forget

he has a wife.' 'No,' answered Paul very slowly; but I fancy you will be tempted to do so before long.'

'What do you want?' broke in Valerie sharply. 'Money is scarce with me. I cannot keep on this constant supply.' 'You have a good banker to go to-

'Paul!' 'Well-well, Valerie, desperate cases need desperate ends. I tell you money I must have to get me away from here. Dalton is on my track. Only fifty pounds.

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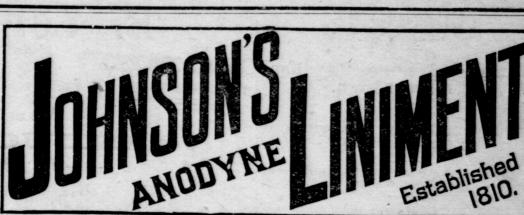
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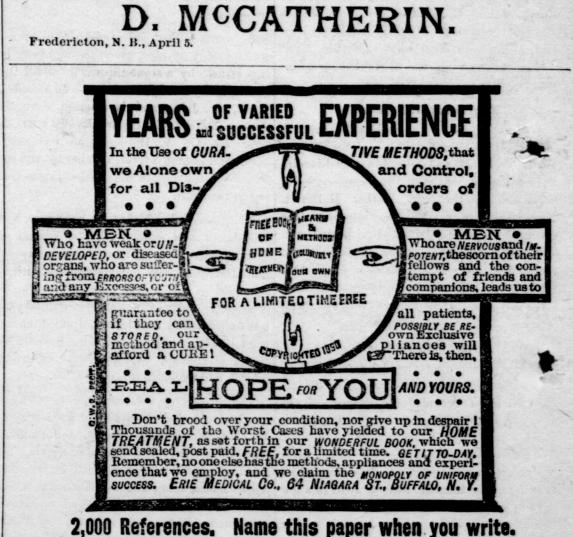
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