

Dr. Jack's Wife.

(Continued from 1st page.)

He proceeds to push the heavy gate partly open, and Avis enters—the perfume of many flowers meets her—It is overpowering in the night air, and Doctor Jack's wife somehow feels a strange sensation come over her—she is in the place to which her husband has been lured, for some purpose as yet unknown, and she seems to associate the perfume of these flowers with the secret mission of her enemies.

Then, with the resolution that has characterized the Avis Morton of old, she recovers.

"Let us push on, cousin—see, lights gleam through the trees yonder. We will find the house there—the house of Don Rafael. I wish I had thought to ask that officer if by chance he saw Jack enter that street—he could not see him without remembering—but it is too late now."

They advance slowly, for although there is a wide path leading from the gate, a drive-way, in fact, under the shadow of the luxuriant trees, it is impossible to see distinctly, except for one keeping watch the lights that gleam beyond. Once Avis stumbles and nearly falls.

"By gad, my dear cousin—I was an idiot not to offer you my arm. I lean on me—you will find Larry Kennedy a tower of strength in an emergency."

"Do for heaven's sake take my arm, cousin. We are in the enemy's country, you know," she feels impelled to say, and he realizes that even a brave man may be indiscreetly dumb, he replies.

It is just as well, for the house looms up before them, and they find that they have had no glimpse of a living being.

Here are the stairs—they ascend, no longer groping in darkness, for the illumination is more than sufficient to scan close their surroundings. Should they meet any servants, Avis believes she will be able to manage them, first with magic silver, then by a glimpse of her fair face from behind the veil—women understand the power that lies in a grin better than most men suspect—and if all else fails an appeal to their sympathy, when valiant Larry will be given an opportunity to show his mettle.

Fortunately it happens otherwise, and they are not confounded by any Cerberus at the door, demanding their business.

A strange silence reigns in the house, and Larry listens it to a great tomb. Here are lights and flowers, where they can find the human occupants—why do they not hear the hum of voices or the notes of music?

So they pass into the great hall, where hang elegant paintings, relics of the chase, of war—many things that proclaim the proprietor a man of cultivation and wealth.

A spirit of unrest has assailed Avis—something seems to assure her that the man she loves and honors is under this roof and in danger. Putting this and that together—the note that came into Jack's hands, the apparently accidental conversation which she heard under the window at the hotel, and Larry's simple explanation regarding what he knows—her woman's wit has been able to figure out something like the truth. At any rate she believes her coming to be an inspiration.

A door on the right opens into a luxuriant drawing-room, and she enters, and holding her breath, looks in.

The gas is turned low, and not a sign of human occupancy does she discover. This is only a room, however, and other rooms remain which will undoubtedly prove of a more profitable nature.

As she turns, after sweeping her eager eyes around the richly appointed room, she catches the attitude of Larry Kennedy. The New York duke is a picture as he stands there like a statue, his heavy cane grasped in one hand while the other is raised with the finger pressing his lips. Evidently the little man has himself made a discovery of great importance—at least he holds such an opinion.

In an instant, as it seems, Doctor Jack's wife has flown to the side of her cousin—he says not a word, but points through the doorway close by, and Avis Evans, looking, is almost paralyzed with a sudden cold fear at the sight she beholds.

Imagine a loving, faithful wife being a witness to the caresses a rival bestows upon the man she loves with all her soul—that is what occurs in this grand Chilian mansion, which has been invaded by the Americans.

A woman sits in a chair—she half supports the head of a man seated very close to her, pats his face with gentle little strokes, and murmurs, while she thus caresses, words of love, devotion.

The light shines full upon his face, and Avis can see beyond all doubt the well-known features of her husband.

Under such circumstances even the mildest woman might well feel her blood leap like boiling lava through her veins, and Avis does not pretend to be an angel, even if Jack has many times called her one.

She forgets everything save that here is a woman usurping her rights. One thing she does notice instantly, and it gives her considerable satisfaction—he makes no movement to return the caresses thus bestowed—his face, as seen in the gas light, proclaims the fact that he is asleep, or else, God help her, dead—it is his pallor has alarmed her.

Obedying the impulse that urges even the weak to claim their rights, Avis starts forward, and she feels that her heart is like a faithful little dog—Larry who is ready to fight or flit at any hour of the day, such is the singular conglomeration of qualities that make up his composite parts.

As she enters the room perhaps the sweep of her garments reaches the ear of the dreamer who thus sits and caresses the face of the senseless doctor. At any rate she looks up in astonishment, for never a suspicion has entered her head that witnesses are present.

Avis Evans looks upon the face of her rival, the Chilian girl who loves her husband, and whose strange notions of right allow her to plot against the peace of a wife. She shivers as she looks—the wonderful beauty of that face astounds her; but never for one moment does she doubt the faithful love of her husband—that long ago been tried in the fire and found to be pure gold without alloy.

"Senorita, I will relieve you from further trouble—allow me to take charge of my husband," she says, quietly.

"You!" grasps the other, her eyes dilated with surprise, and growing fury—"cousin! I know you—the woman he does not love, but calls his wife!"

CHAPTER V.

It is a cruel stab, mercilessly aimed, but the shield of perfect trust and love still protects the heart of that American wife and turns the barb aside.

Avis winces under it, but her self-possession returns, and this makes her mistress of the situation. Even in the house of her rival, which she has invaded without an invitation, Avis proves her superior powers.

"What you insinuate is entirely false. You lured him here with a letter in which you promised him certain information respecting the business that keeps him in Chili. Under the name of Don Rafael you did this. He came, fearing nothing, and ready to take risks in order to learn more. You failed to move him while he had his senses, and you steal these away in some manner so that you may win. But you forgot one thing—Doctor Jack's wife, she has a mortgage on his affection, which you nor any other woman dare not raise—she is here to press her claim—to prove herself worthy of the love and devotion of a man who never in all his life has done a dishonest deed. Once again I tell you to leave that seat—I am present to cure for my own!"

Her words are cool and clear—they do not speak of passion, such as a Chilian girl might naturally exhibit under similar circumstances, but at the same time there is a light in her gray eyes that warns Senorita, Merilla, to beware.

At first she assumes a defiant air—she is in her own castle, and that gives courage. Then her mood changes—perhaps she sees Larry, who struck by her wonderful beauty, has assumed an air of powerful admiration, just as a sun-worshiper might gaze upon the object of his adoration—his singular face when thus set is enough to dazzle one's mind.

So that as it may, she allows Jack's head to fall upon the side of the chair, as she springs to her feet to face his wife—the shock has some power to partially dispel the effect of the subtle drug which, given in the cigarette, has stolen the doctor's senses away from him, catches his eyes, stares vacantly about him, catches sight of Avis, smiles in perfect content, and sleeps again.

"This incident gives hope, however, that he may be overcome by the drug, which has not laid hold of him quite as powerfully as was anticipated."

"How did you come here?" asks Merilla, curiously rising above her—It is a moment—she has been almost stupified at this sudden drop in her plans, this unexpected appearance of the brave American wife of the man with whom she has become enamored.

"My cousin brought me"—it might be more correct the other way, since Larry makes a poor leader—"we put one thing and another together and—well, we arrived, you see, in time to relieve you of your responsibility," and she bends over Doctor Jack, raises his head, caresses his brow, and then gently shakes him to see whether he may not be aroused.

"What have you done to him, woman—why does he act this way?" she demands, pausing in her efforts, to look up into the face of the daughter of Don Rafael, who, having recovered her senses in a measure, now shrugs her plump shoulders as she replies—

"Carumbaba! how should I know—we were talking of business, she draws his chair closer to mine so that he can look in my eyes—turning aside, unable to meet the disapproving gaze of his wife—"I feel his breath on my cheek, that I hear a groan, and his head falls on my shoulder. Well, I am surprised, but I am not afraid—I say to myself, 'this man loves me—I will be his to his senses with my touch upon his face.' Bah! you are so rude as to disturb me before I quite succeed, but I do not despair. He is mine—I cannot take him from me!"

"What brazen assurance!" Avis cries—she has never known his equal.

"Ah! you are Doctor Jack's wife by law, but look at me—do you think he is blind—does your plain face compare with mine—I have been called the belle of all Chili—at my feet have knelt great men—one only I encourage, and he is my devoted slave. You may hover over him, madam, you may force him to deny the truth, but hark you, he loves me!"

What blasphemy this seems in the ears of that wife—and yet not for one moment does her pride waver—she knows the man whom she loves, she has read the depths of his heart, and found there an integrity that all earth cannot swerve. If all else fails an appeal to their sympathy, when valiant Larry will be given an opportunity to show his mettle.

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