

(CONTINUED FROM TENTH PAGE.)

Audrey's head dropped, and her lips quivered.

"I don't know. Yes, ah, yes! she was thoughtful, and—cruel, if you think so. But—perhaps—she was going to say, 'she has been punished,' but stopped herself and said, instead—'but you—you are very proud of him signora.'"

"Indeed I am," assented Sylvia with a frankness which startled Audrey. "I think there is no one like him. I—I have never known any one so good and kind and self-denying, except—one other." Her voice faltered and died away almost inaudibly. "But Lord Lorrimore will be coming back directly, and then I hope he will meet with his reward!" and she smiled.

A terrible struggle went on in poor Audrey's bosom for a long, long minute, then she conquered the desire to rush out of the room, never to see this beautiful rival of hers again, and putting out her hand, she murmured:

"Yes; I am sure he will. Ah! I don't wonder at his loving you." Sylvia recoiled and opened her lovely eyes on her.

"Loving me—me?" she exclaimed. Then she burst out laughing. "Oh, how could you think that? Lord Lorrimore in love with me! Why he worships the ground this lady stands on. He thinks of her night and day. Oh, you do not know him, or you would understand how impossible it is for him to change. What, go all around the world, an exile, a wanderer, just to gratify the whim of a woman he loved, and then forget her for—me?"

Audrey went white to the lips, and her hands, lying clasped in her lap trembled. "I—I thought—I heard," she faltered. Sylvia laughed.

"Ah! you do not know the nonsense they write in the papers about us," she said. "They have told all sorts of fabulous stories about me, and I suppose they have about Lord Lorrimore. I never read the papers; and he would never let me; they said that the rubbish the people write would do me harm. You see what care they have taken of me. Poor Lord Lorrimore! I must tell him, when he comes back, of your mistake; he will laugh—"

"No, no," interrupted Audrey; and she attempted to rise, but sank back.

Then Sylvia saw that her visitor was pale and trembling.

"Oh, what is the matter? You are ill!" she said, bending over her.

"No, no!" said Audrey, breathing hard; "I am only a little faint. The room is warm, I think, and—"

Sylvia flew to the window and opened it and brought her a glass of water.

"Let me send for Mercy," she said; "she is the best nurse."

Audrey put up her trembling hand to stop her.

"Please, no," she said; "I am better now." Then the tears swelled into her eyes, and she hung her head a moment or two in silence.

"It is the heat," said Sylvia in that delicious tone of sympathy which women sometimes—only sometimes—feel toward one another. "And you have walked, have you not? I am so sorry!" and she gently took off Audrey's hat and smoothed the beautiful hair from her forehead.

Audrey put her arm round Sylvia's neck, and drew her face down and kissed her.

Sylvia blushed with pleasure, then shyly for she was not given to kissing returned it.

"I came, meaning to ask you to be my friend," said Audrey, still rather faintly; "but there is no need to ask, is there, signora?"

"No," responded Sylvia. "But you must not call me by that grand name. My name is Sylvia—Sylvia Bond. You must call me Sylvia."

"Yes," said Audrey, "and you"—she laughed and took both Sylvia's hands, "we are like two school-girls swearing an eternal friendship, are we not?—you will call me Audrey?"

Sylvia laughed and nodded. "How strange it is! we have only known each other five minutes, and yet we seem to be old friends."

"Yes," said Audrey. "We must see as much as we can of each other. How proud I shall be when I am looking at you on the stage, and all the people are applauding to think that you are my friend!"

"I—I thought you would be ashamed of knowing me," she said.

Audrey smiled.

"How ignorant of the world you are, Sylvia!" she said wonderingly. "I know what you mean, but all that is changed now. Before many days are out you will find how mistaken your idea is. But let us talk of your plans," she said, quickly, for the dreaded lest Sylvia should return to the subject of Lord Lorrimore and his search.

They sat side by side, and Sylvia related some of the incidents of her professional life, and of her plans for the future.

"I am going to work very hard," she said, almost gayly, almost like the Sylvia of old, for this new and strange friendship had brought a sweet joy to her sorrow-stricken young heart, "and make a great deal of money, and the moment I have made enough to retire on I intend to leave the stage, and Mercy and I are going to live in a little cottage in one of the sweet country lanes. Why do you smile, Audrey?"

"I was thinking that there would be some one else beside Mercy who might have a different plan for you."

Sylvia pondered a moment till she understood, then shook her head.

"I know what you mean; but I shall never marry. Some day—her voice grew low—"I will tell you why. But about our cottage," she went on rapidly. "Mercy and I have already looked longingly at two or three. It is to stand quite alone, and have a nice garden in which we can work with gloves on. We saw the prettiest girl in just such a garden as we came from Southampton."

Audrey smiled.

"I hope there will be a spare room for a friend, Sylvia?"

"How sweetly you said that!" said Syl-

via. "I know now why I love you. Yes, there shall be a little bedroom for you; it will be very tiny, but it shall have the prettiest paper and whitest dimity hangings. Ah, you shall see!"

Audrey tore herself away at last, and Sylvia went down to the door with her and saw her walk away. Audrey turned into the park and sinking into a seat, clasped her hands tightly. She was alone, and could attempt to realize what had befallen her.

"What have I done—what have I done?" broke from her white lips. "So faithful, so true; while I—Oh, what will he think—what will he say?" She looked round wildly as one looks round for some means of escape from some great peril and finds none.

She knew Jordan too well to hope that he would release her; and, indeed, how could she, without cruel injustice to him, ask him to let her go? "Too late, too late!" she murmured, echoing Jordan's words, but with how different a meaning!

CHAPTER XXX.

It is not pleasant to know that while men are shaking you by the hand and uttering congratulations that they are hating you in their hearts. But Jordan did not mind. He had won; he had carried off the beautiful prize from men younger, better looking, better in every way—excepting, perhaps, in intellect—than himself. He was in a delightful glow of satisfaction; and while the men in the club windows were fervently cursing him as he walked by with a smile on his pale face and about his thin lips, he went on his way triumphant.

All the way down to Lynne he was planning out the future. He would enlarge the old house—as if it were not large enough already!—re-decorate it throughout; one of the best firms should have carte blanche in respect to the furniture. Audrey was fond of horses; the stables should be rebuilt; and—and that wing which had been shut off for so long, in which was the room his father had died in should be pulled down. He put this last but in truth it was the first thing he thought of and resolved upon doing. Yes, that room should disappear—be wiped out—forgotten. In fact, he would begin to forget it at once.

Frome, the solemn butler, was surprised at the novel cheerfulness which his master displayed. "Though, I suppose," he remarked in the servants' hall, "no man, even Sir Jordan, could help being up in spirits at the prospect of marrying Miss Audrey."

"He was singing—actually singing!"—for the first time since I've known him, while I was dressing him," said the valet.

"Shouldn't be surprised if he asks for a bottle of wine," said Frome, sarcastically. But though Jordan's cheerfulness did not carry him to this vicious extreme, he was in the best of spirits all through the dinner, which he seemed to enjoy.

He had gone over the house, inspecting the closed rooms, and had already formed a rough plan of the alterations. There should be a boudoir for Audrey facing south, and the lawn over which it should look should be laid out as an Italian flower-garden. He would build an aviary—Audrey was fond of birds—and he would have the old ball-room decorated and furnished.

Yes, he meant to make her happy. Why should he not? And he would fill the house with pleasant people—all the men who had wanted to marry her, for instance—and he smiled with enjoyment at the idea. What a wonderful man he was! Most men would have been content to settle down into a country squire, but he, Jordan, had gone out into the world and carved his way to fame. He would be Prime Minister, as he had promised Audrey. Yes, he was certainly a wonderful man.

This train of self-flattery made exquisite mental music for him during dinner; and when he had finished his dessert and drunk a glass of apollinaris, he sauntered out on to the terrace and looked at the moon rising above the trees, and felt as contented and satisfied as your truly virtuous man should feel.

Frome brought the candles, and Jordan returned to the dining-room. He looked up at the two pictures—his father's and Neville's—but he did not scowl or frown at them to night. Instead, there was a smile of defiance and mocking triumph on his pale face, as if he had won some victory over them.

He sat down and took out his letters, and wrote an answer or two, and then—well, then, the silence of the great house began quite suddenly and unexpectedly to affect him. If he had been given to the

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vice of smoking he would have lighted his cigar or pipe and got the better of the dullness which had so suddenly assailed him; but he did not smoke, and the singular drop in his spirits continued.

He tried the self-flattery again, but it would not repeat itself; and before long he found himself pacing the room very much as we have seen him pace it before.

For there had fallen upon him the weird, ghastly desire to visit that shadow-haunted chamber, and he knew that he should not be able to resist it.

"It will be as well, perhaps, to—to look round once more before the wing is pulled down," he muttered, trying to persuade himself that he was acting of his free will; and when his valet had left him in his own room, and with the rest of the servants had gone to bed, Jordan took the unlighted candle and matches and stealthily made his way to the closed chamber.

As he turned the carefully oiled key in the thick door he cursed the weakness which prevented him from resisting the impulse; but he knew that the strange craving which was urging him would not be denied, and he did not even struggle.

He closed the door noiselessly behind him, and lighting the candle, raised it and looked round.

Everything was as he had seen it and left it on his last visit, and with a shudder, as his eyes fell upon the huge funeral bed he put the candle on the table and commenced his search with the air and manner which characterized him on the last occasion; but he seemed to take more pains and display more patience, for not content with going up the bureau, he, as if suddenly struck by an idea, tore up the edge of the thick carpet and examined the boards beneath.

It was covered with dust—his hands were grimed; but so absorbed was he that he did not notice it—so absorbed indeed that he did not know that the candle had turned down to the socket until he heard it splutter.

He got up from his knees and hurried across the room and stood for a moment asking himself whether he should relinquish his search or go on and get another candle.

The candle flickered down, and as its light waned he saw that the moonlight was shining through a chink of the shutters.

He extinguished the candle, and feeling his way to the window, carefully and cautiously unbarred the shutter and opened it just wide enough to allow the moonlight to stream in and fall on the floor which he had been examining. It was impossible that it could be overlooked, and the plan was safer and easier than going to and from his bedroom for another candle.

He went back to the carpet, knelt down, and felt along the surface of the boards with his big white—now dirty—hands. Suddenly he heard a slight noise behind him, and his heart leaped heavily; but he remembered the fright he had suffered on his last visit by the bat against the window, and he would not look round, but remained with his head bent over his task.

But the noise was repeated—became more distinct—and setting his teeth hard, he turned his head and looked over his shoulder.

Then, with a suppressed cry, he sprang to his feet and stood recoiling, white with terror, for a hand was sliding slowly and cunningly round the edge of the shutter.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Jordan's blood ran cold in his veins. He would have rushed from the room, but terror rendered him incapable of motion; he could only stand and watch the hand as it slid along the shutter, like the hand of a ghost, and wait. Neville would have sprung at it and seized its owner, but the great statesman was very different to his "vagabond" brother, and his nerves, already tried severely by the ghastly stillness of the room and its associations, were completely wrecked by this fearful apparition.

The hand pushed back the shutter, and a man sprang into the room, dashed the shutter close, and at the same moment turned the light of a bull's eye lantern full upon Jordan's white, distorted face. Jordan could see nothing behind the fierce stream of light, and stood panting and trembling, longing to spring, and yet too terror-stricken to move.

The awful silence was broken at last.

"Given you a start, eh, Sir Jordan?" said a dry, harsh voice behind the light. "Didn't expect to see me, I imagine?"

Jordan started, and put his trembling hand to his lips.

"Banks! You?" he exclaimed, huskily.

The man chuckled at the baronet's confusion, and set the lantern on the table. As he did so the light fell upon his face.

It was the face of Lavarick, with its thin lips twisted into a sneer of insolent contempt, as he looked sideways at the shrinking Jordan.

He wore a broad-brimmed hat, which nearly hid his unprepossessing countenance, and was dressed in the style of a mechanic. He sat on the small table and folded his arms as if he desired to enjoy the sight of Sir Jordan's discomfiture at leisure.

Jordan had recovered himself a little by this time, and assumed an indignant and haughty air. "What do you mean by forcing your way into the house?" he said still rather huskily.

Lavarick smiled insolently.

"Thought I'd give you a pleasant little surprise, Sir Jordan," he said. "Besides, it's too late to disturb the servants. Don't know that I should have dropped in this evening, but I happened to be in the room that Sir Jordan keeps shut up so closely. It was rather awkward, getting up without the steps, but I learned to climb when I was a boy, and the ivy is pretty thick, and here I am. And what were you doing, Sir Jordan? Cleaning the furniture, eh?"

Jordan had been thinking rapidly while the man had been speaking, and he moved toward the bell, as he replied:

"I give you two minutes to go back by the way you came. If you still remain at the end of that time, I will call the servants, and hand you over to the police."

Lavarick laughed.

"Bravo, Sir Jordan! not a bad bit of bluff, that. But don't you waste your time waiting the two minutes; ring up the servants at once; they'd be interested in the little chat you and I are going to have."

Jordan's hand dropped from the bell, which was weak on his part. It is always unwise to threaten unless you can perform.

"Say what you have to say quickly, and go," he said, biting his lips. "Of course, you have come to extort money?"

"Right the first time!" retorted Lavarick; "and, of course, you don't mean giving it. Quite right! don't you be bullied!" and he laughed with impudent mockery.

Jordan's face was an ugly sight at that moment. He actually moved a step or two toward Lavarick; but Lavarick did not appear alarmed. He took a revolver from his pocket, and, in a casual fashion, tapped the edge of the table with it.

"No good trying that on with me, Sir Jordan," he said, quietly. "You're younger and stronger man than me, and so I brought this little plaything to make us a little more equal. Not that I shall want to use it, because you are a sensible man, I know, Sir Jordan, and will listen to argument."

Jordan stood looking down for a moment; then he raised his eyes watchfully and scanned the man's face.

"You think you possess some knowledge concerning me which will enable you to levy blackmail on me, and do so with insolent impunity. You are mistaken, my man. Only fools commit such a blunder. You know nothing that can give you any power over me, while, on the other hand, I know you to be an escaped convict, and have only to secure you and hand you over to the police to get rid of you."

"Then why don't you do it?" retorted Lavarick, coolly, and apparently not at all offended. "Bluff, Sir Jordan, bluff! But I don't blame you. It's rather hard for a gentleman to find himself driven into a corner, and he naturally doesn't like it. But you treat me well, Sir Jordan, and I'll act fair with you. I don't mean you any harm, and won't do any if you'll act straight."

"You can do me no harm," said Jordan, haughtily. "If I consent to tolerate your presence and listen to you, it is because I am curious to hear what you have to say, and your reason for running the risk you have done."

"Just so!" said Lavarick, dryly. "You said just now that I'd come to levy blackmail on you."

Jordan sneered.

"That is your only excuse, my man, for risking capture."

"Well, perhaps I have; I'm hard up, Sir Jordan, and I want money. But that's not my only reason, I've come to do you a service."

Jordan's sneer was intensified.

"Of course you don't believe it. It don't seem possible that such a man as I can be of any service to the great Sir Jordan, Lynne; but it's true all the same."

"Go on," said Jordan coldly. "Don't exhaust my patience."

"Oh you'll be ready presently to listen long enough," said Lavarick, confidently. "Now, then, Sir Jordan, you remember the last time I was here in this room?"

Jordan kept his countenance, but Lavarick saw him wince.

"I remember," he said. "You attempted to break into the house to commit a burglary, I have no doubt?"

"Nothing of the kind," interrupted Lavarick, coolly. "I was running away from the police. They'd pressed me rather hard, and it occurred to me that if I could get into the house and hide, the chuckle-headed idiots would never think of looking for me here, and I could get away when the night was darker."

I knew that I could get into this room by the steps, and I ran up them, intending to come in by the window."

"All this doesn't interest me," said Jordan, impatiently, but keeping a watchful eye on the face of the speaker.

"Oh, but it will presently," said Lavarick, as dryly as before. "I'm not wasting time, Sir Jordan. Well, I crept up to the window, and heard voices. They were yours and your father's, Sir Gre-

ville. The shutters weren't closed, and I managed to look in through a chink in the curtains. The old gentleman was lying dying, and you were standing beside him. He was talking, and you were listening, and I could see by your face that what he was saying wasn't particularly pleasant for you to hear. You looked ugly, Sir Jordan," and he smiled.

Jordan bit his lip, but remained silent and watchful.

"I managed to get the window open a little ways, and putting my ear to it, found I could hear every word. What was it I heard, Sir Jordan?"

Jordan's lips twitched.

"You could have heard very little," he said. "My father's voice was weak."

"So it was," assented Lavarick, "but my ears are sharp. Law bless you! a man's hearing gets cute when he spends months listening to the step of the warden outside the cell. I can hear a mouse scampering across the floor; I can hear the tick of a watch in a man's pocket under a couple of thick coats; I can almost hear your heart beating now, Sir Jordan," and he grinned.

"I heard every word the old man said, and this is pretty near the sense of it. He was telling you about this will."

"Jordon started slightly and shifted his position, so that the light should not fall upon him; but Lavarick, with a turn of the lantern, brought Jordan into focus again, and watched his face as closely as Jordan watched his.

"The old gentleman was terribly cut up about things he had done during his life, and he was going over them and fretting about them, and the only thing that consoled him was the fact that he had tried to put some of the things straight in that will of his."

Jordan opened his lips, but stopped himself before a word had been said.

"For one thing, there was the trouble about Mr. Neville, your half-brother. He used to be the favorite son, but the old gentleman had quarreled with him and cut him adrift, and now he was lying a-dying it made him feel queer. I heard him say that you'd been mainly the cause of the row. Hold on, Sir Jordan, I am not going to utter a word that ain't true; what 'ud be the use? You and I are alone, and there wouldn't be any sense in our giving each other the lie. I tell you I heard every word."

"Go on," said Sir Jordan huskily.

"The old gentleman reminded you of the way in which you'd kept the quarrel a-boiling, and begged you to find Neville and tell him how sorry his father was that they'd ever quarreled—"

"I have tried every means of finding my brother," said Jordan.

"All right," assented Lavarick; "I didn't say you haven't. Let me go on; there was another thing that laid heavier on Sir Greville's mind than his treatment of Mr. Neville; and that was the way he'd hounded a certain party to death."

Jordan started.

"I'm using the old man's own words," said Lavarick. "Hounded 'em to ruin and death, was what he said, and this party was the lady who'd promised to marry him, and then run away with another man. It was like a novel to hear the old gentleman, wasn't it, Sir Jordan? A regular case of remorse and penitence, eh? He behaved something awful in the way of cruelty to the unfortunate couple—ruined 'em, and drove 'em out of the country with their little girl."

Jordan sunk into a chair, Lavarick deftly following him with the light from the lantern.

"But some people are satisfied with being sorry for what they've done and stop there, but Sir Greville didn't; he tried to make—what do you call it?—atonement, and was telling you about it. I knelt outside the window there and listened."

Jordan leaned his head in his hand, so that it partially concealed his face; it was working with an agitation he could not suppress.

"The old man was telling you about his will and what he'd done. There were two will; one in which he'd left all to you—"

"The only will," said Jordan, as if the exclamation had escaped him.

Lavarick smiled.

"Oh, no! there were two. The first one was at the lawyer's as the old gentleman said; the other he'd made himself, and being the latest, it was the will."

Jordan shuffled his feet restlessly.

"And what was in that last and real will?" Lavarick continued, leaning forward and dropping his voice to a whisper. Jordan smiled an evil smile.

"No such will ever existed, excepting as a concoction of an escaped convict," he said.

Lavarick nodded coolly.

"Didn't it? We'll see presently. I'll tell you what was in it, as I heard the old man tell you. First, he'd left you a third of the property—"

Jordan rose, but sank back with a smile of contempt.

"Then was another third for Mr. Neville and lastly, there was the last third for the daughter of the couple Sir Greville had hounded to ruin and death; and not only that, but all the pictures and the jewels—another fortune, as I happen to know, Sir Jordan."

Jordan rose and leaned against the mantel shelf, Lavarick causing the light to fall on him as before, and smiled down at Lavarick.

"And on this feeble story—this tissue of lies you hope to levy blackmail on me, do you?" he said, contemptuously.

Lavarick regarded him with cool gravity.

"Hold on awhile longer, Sir Jordan," he said, quietly. "You may ride the high horse when I've done—if you can," he added, significantly. "I saw your face as the old man was telling you about the last will, and it was enough to give a nervous man the shivers. You looked—well, worse than you look now, Sir Jordan—as if you could have killed the old man as he lay there. It wasn't pleasant to find yourself put off with a third of what you'd expected to get all to yourself. And you'd plotted and schemed to cut your brother out of it, and now, here he was to come in for as much as yourself, and a girl—a girl you didn't know anything about—to have her share—and the largest too. It was a cutting up of the property that made you feel mad—and you looked it, I can tell you. I give you my word that I was getting ready to jump in, for I thought that you meant mischief as you looked down at the old man."

Jordan's eye shot swiftly round the room and he shuddered. The man's words had called up a grim picture of the events of that night. He could almost see his father lying on the bed, and panting out the eager broken words.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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