

(CONTINUED FROM TENTH PAGE.)

appeared and announced that a gentleman wished to see him.

Jordan nodded as he bent over his letters.

"Ah, yes, the—or—messenger from London," he said. "Let him come up, please."

The valet ushered in an elderly, white-haired man dressed neatly in dark-colored clothes of the fashion favored by clerks and lawyers, wearing a gray beard and a pair of spectacles, who bowed respectfully to Sir Jordan as he motioned him to take a chair.

Both waited until the valet had had time to get out of hearing; then Lavarick rose and quietly opened the door and listened for a moment.

"Look it," said Jordan in a constrained voice; but Lavarick shook his head. "No, no; the flunky will be up on some business or other, perhaps, and would wonder why the door was locked; this is better"—and he set a chair against it—"he can't come in now without giving us warning. That's a trick worth two of locking it. Well, Sir Jordan," and he nodded curly at him, "what's the verdict, eh? Is it to be peace, or war to the knife? I don't care much which it is. I can make terms with the other side, you know better terms than I'll get out of you, perhaps."

"Do not let us waste time in that kind of argument," interrupted Jordan, "the quicker the—the interview is over the better. You ignore danger, but you cannot be insensitive to the risk you run in being seen here."

"Not a bit of it!" retorted Lavarick, airily. "I defy even Trale to see through this get up. Good, ain't it?" and he chuckled and stroked his beard.

Jordan eyed him repulently. "It is good until it is penetrated," he said, curly.

"That's so," assented Lavarick, cheerfully. "I thought it wise to come to the front door this time; some one might have heard us talking in the room there"—he jerked his finger over his shoulder—"and thinking it was burglars, raise a row. And now, what is it to be, Sir Jordan? You've had time to think it over, and like a sensible man you've made up your mind to come to terms, eh?"

Jordan leaned back in his chair, his eyes downcast.

"I have decided on my course of action in the matter," he said, slowly. "I will give you the money you ask."

Lavarick snapped his fingers triumphantly and laughed.

"Thought you would," he said, nodding. "You're a sensible man, Sir Jordan. Another man might have played bluff a little longer."

"On one condition," said Jordan, haughtily, "and that is that you place the will in my hands, and a declaration that you saw my—Sir Greville burn it on the night of his death."

Lavarick stared and frowned.

"What's the meaning of that, now?" he asked.

"What's your drift, eh?"

Jordan looked up at him with an evil smile.

"For a cunning scoundrel, Banks, you are singularly obtuse," he said with a sneer. "You forget, too, a little incident in your past career. I refer to your conviction for forgery."

Lavarick, still eyeing him suspiciously, swore impatiently.

"What's that to do with it?"

"Merely this," retorted Jordan, almost sweetly, "that I think it highly probable that in exchange for my money you would give me a forged copy of the will and retain the genuine one for another occasion."

A gleam of real admiration lighted up Lavarick's face.

"Pon my soul, you're cute!" he exclaimed under his breath. "That's what you'd have done, isn't it?"

Jordan smiled and cast down his eyes.

"And I never thought of it," muttered Lavarick, with honest shame and remorse—"I never thought of it, to help me! Sir Jordan, you're a clever man, and I admire you! And to prove it, I say—done with you," and he held out his claw-like hand.

Jordan looked at it as if he would rather have touched a snake.

"Good!" he said. "That is my one condition. Give me that and I am content. You may leave the country, or—"

"Wait here till you've hit upon a plan for getting me safely bagged and sent back to penal!" finished Lavarick, with a grin. "No, thank you. Once I touch the coin I'm off; I did mean to stay on in the old country a little longer," he stopped, and his face darkened with an evil scowl.

Jordan watched him.

"Whether you go or stay is your business," he said, coldly. "I have only to arrange for the—exchange."

Lavarick nodded.

"I've thought of that," he said. "Bring the money. I'll take it in notes. Oh, I'm not afraid you'll stop them; you couldn't without causing an inquiry, you know. Bring the notes to Stoneleigh Burrows, on Friday night, at ten o'clock. I'll meet you by the clump of trees."

"Why not bring it here?" asked Jordan, thoughtfully.

Lavarick smiled and shook his head.

"No, thank you, Sir Jordan. I wouldn't trust myself with that precious document in my possession under your roof. You're so clever, you see. Think of your idea of my forging a duplicate. No, no; we're safe—both of us, on the Burrows."

Jordan pondered a moment or two.

"Why Friday?" he said. "The will is not in your possession, then?"

"Do you mean to carry it about me? No, I certainly do not; I'm not such a fool. You don't carry the Lynne diamonds in your coat-pocket, do you? Well, the will's worth almost as much as they are to me. I've got it hid away snug and safe, and I'll produce it on Friday, as I say I'm not afraid you'll go back on me. You can bring Trale if you like. But you know better. What we both of us want is to settle this little affair between ourselves quietly and comfortably."

"Very well," said Jordan. "I have no more to say," he added, after a pause, and he glanced significantly at the door and laid his hand on the bell. Lavarick took up the highly respectable hat which formed part of his disguise, then, as if by a sudden impulse, stretched out his hand and motioned to Sir Jordan not to ring the bell.

"Halt a moment," he said, hesitatingly, and looking down at the thick Turkey carpet with a strange and curious expression on his face. "We've arranged our little business, Sir Jordan, but—but there's another matter I wanted to speak to you about."

"What is it?" said Jordan, impatiently, and rising as he spoke, as if the man's company grew more intolerable each moment.

Lavarick gnawed at his lip, and evidently made an effort to speak indifferently. "It's just this," he said, and his voice was thicker and huskier even than usual: "You might remember, Sir Jordan, that I"—he paused—"that I've got a daughter—"

Jordan was standing in front of his chair, and as Lavarick spoke he seemed to grow suddenly stiff and rigid; then he turned to the letters on the small table beside him so that his back was to Lavarick as he replied: "Yes, I remember."

"Well"—Lavarick seemed as if he found it difficult to proceed—"she—she was my only child; she was like her mother"—he glanced at Sir Jordan as if he expected him to sneer, and meant to resent the sneer if it came; but Jordan looked steadily at the carpet with the same impassive face. "Her mother was a good woman—a better wife than I deserved; and it was a good job she died before—I was very fond of my little girl, Sir Jordan. You laugh, I dare say, and you think that such as I haven't any right to feelings."

"I was not laughing," said Jordan, and without raising his eyes. "Go on."

"Well," resumed Lavarick, huskily, "my girl was all the world to me, and—and if anything could have kept me straight she would; but I'm one of those that can't go straight. I suppose there's something in the blood that drives a man to the devil whether he will or won't. I'm a bad lot, I know; but I was fond and proud of my girl; and the worst part of the business when I was sent off was the thought that I was leaving her all alone and without any one to look after her."

He paused and cleared his throat.

"It was the dreadful longing to see her that drove me to breaking out of quod. I thought if I could only get away and take her to a strange place the other side of the herring-pond, she and me could make a fresh start. Well, I got out," he continued, with a touch of pride in his tone, "and I risked everything to come down here and see her. I knew I was running into danger—just putting my head into the lion's mouth, as you'd say—but I risked it. And when I got down here I found"—he stopped and turned his head away—"I found that my girl—Rachel—had gone!"

Jordan still gazed at his boots, outwardly calm and indifferent; but his heart was beating nineteen to the dozen, and his brain was hard at work.

"She was gone. That was bad enough, but there was worse behind. My girl had fallen into bad hands. Some villain had—had played her false, and she'd gone off with him!"

His harsh voice trembled, and Jordan, glancing up, saw that he was shaking as if with ague.

"That's all I could hear. I nearly drove me mad. I couldn't make inquiries; I daren't stop, and try and find her; I had to bolt, as you know. But I swore I'd come back and find out who it was that ruined her, and—well, I've come back! But I'm as far off as ever; no one of those I ventured to speak to—and it's precious few, of course, knew anything more than that she went off with some man, and that she's not been seen in Stoneleigh since!"

He dashed his hand across his eyes with an oath at the emotion which he could not conceal, and looked out of the window.

"It occurred to me," he went on, after a pause, during which Jordan remained silent and watchful, "that you might have heard something; that you might know who it was that led her astray. You see, you're a magistrate and local swell, and—and things generally come to the ears of a man in your place. I want to find her," he stammered, hoarsely. "I don't care what she's done, she's my girl, my Rachel still, and I want her. But I want the man who ruined her, worse! I've sworn—look here, Sir Jordan, most good men, like yourself, for instance," and he laughed grimly, "say your prayers at night. I'm not good any way, and instead I've sworn an oath every night before I've laid down that I'll have revenge on the man that robbed me of my girl, and if he's alive and I can find him, I'll keep that oath!"

He raised his clenched hand as he spoke and swore fearfully.

"That's all I wanted to ask you," he said. "Just answer it, and I'm off. Just tell me anything you have heard, anything that might give me a clue. Why look here"—and he struck the small table so that the letters danced again—"I'd rather lose the money I'm to get from you than give up my hope of revenge upon the villain that ruined my little girl!"

It was at that moment that an inspiration visited Jordan. It came in a flash, as most inspirations do, and its suddenness sent the blood to his pale face.

"You will get into trouble, my good Banks," he said gravely. "You had better forget your daughter, and put yourself beyond the reach of the police."

Lavarick laughed a gressome kind of a laugh.

"You think so? Well, look here; if the man I want was standing with a policeman on each side of him, I'd fly at his throat, and as I choked him I'd say: 'I'm Jem Banks, the father of the girl you ruined! and I'd kill him and be hung afterward!'"

Jordan turned pale, and his eyes hid themselves under the thick lids.

"I—I scarcely know whether I should be justified in telling you," he began, hesitatingly.

Lavarick turned upon him eagerly. "You know something!" he exclaimed. "What is it? Tell me!" Jordan bit his lip softly, as if still considering; then he said, slowly:

"I can not refuse a father's appeal."

Lavarick swore impatiently.

"Curse that!" he said, hoarsely. "Out with what you know!"

Jordan rose and looked pensively down at the carpet.

"You say that your daughter's name was Rachel?" he said.

"Rachel!" assented Lavarick, huskily. "What is it—what do you know?"

Jordan sighed.

"Heaven knows whether I am acting wisely in—telling you what I know," he said; "and if I do so it is in the hope that I may help you to recover your daughter, not that you may wreak your vengeance upon her betrayer. I think I saw her but once or twice as I passed through the town. I should not remember her if I were to meet her again."

"Go on!" broke in Lavarick, impatiently.

"You must let me tell you in my own way," said Jordan, gravely. "Did you know my half-brother, Neville?" he asked, as if with painful reluctance.

Lavarick started. "No," he said; "he was at college, I suppose, when I was at home—I never saw him. What—why?"

"Well," said Jordan, almost gently; "wait a moment."

He went out and returned after a minute or so with a letter in his hand.

Lavarick, who had been pacing up and down with the gait, and indeed, the expression of a hunger thirsting for blood, stopped and glanced at him.

"What's that?" he asked.

Jordan held the letter firmly.

"I do not know, as I said, whether I am acting wisely in showing you this. I am not convinced that it—er—brings home the guilt of your daughter's betrayal to the person who received this letter; but I cannot withhold my sympathy from or refuse to help a father in his search for a lost child."

Lavarick eyed him with savage incredulity.

"Stow all that!" he said hoarsely. "What is it?"

"I will tell you," said Jordan gravely. "You taunted me last night with being the cause of the quarrel between my father and my half-brother Neville. It was an ignorant and unjust accusation. The cause of the quarrel between Sir Greville and Neville, who was his favorite son, was—your daughter."

Lavarick started back, gasping.

"What!" he said, almost inaudibly, his eyes fixed on Jordan's face.

Jordan shook his head gravely.

"What I tell you is true," he said. "It came to my father's ears that Neville was—well, being seen too frequently with your daughter, Rachel; and my father taxed Neville with his heartless perfidy, and bid him give up his designs upon a young and innocent girl; but I am ashamed to say that my half brother was as willful and obstinate as he was vicious. He persisted in his evil courses, a stormy scene ensued between my father and him, and Neville disappeared. I fear—I greatly fear, that he persuaded your daughter to accompany him!"

Lavarick stood white and trembling.

"Is this one of your lies?" he got out at last. "Is this a dodge of yours to come over me?"

Jordan shook his head.

"You do right to distrust me, Banks," he said; "but I'm telling you the truth. Why should I concoct this story? My brother Neville is doubtless dead and beyond the reach of your vengeance; indeed, if I did not think so I should not have told you, for I bear him no ill-will."

Lavarick's trembling lips twisted into a sneer.

"You hate him!" he said, hoarsely. "But that's nothing to do with me. Give me the proof. What's that in your hand?"

"The proof you ask for," said Jordan; and then, as if reluctantly, he handed Lavarick the paper.

It was an old letter which had apparently been partly burned—the date and the commencement were destroyed, but the body and the signature remained.

Lavarick seized it and examined it, then he glanced up at Jordan.

"It's—it's her handwriting!" he said, hoarsely. "It's her name—Rachel's!" and he dashed his hand on the signature.

"You recognize it?" said Jordan, gravely, almost pityingly. "It is a heart-rending letter—the appeal of a helpless girl to the man who has ruined and deserted her."

"Where—where did you get it from?" demanded Lavarick, wiping his eyes, as if the sight of the familiar handwriting had blinded them.

"I found it in my brother's room when I was clearing it out after my father's death," said Jordan, quietly. "It was lying among some burned papers. Will you give it me back, please?"

Lavarick folded it, and thrust it in his pocket, his eyes fixed on Jordan's face with an awful look.

"Give it you back—give it you back! No; I'll give it back to him! I'll give it back to him when I'm killing him. Oh, my God! and he seized his head with both hands, and held it as if he were going to have a fit—"my girl—my poor girl! Dead—you say he's dead? He's not, he's alive, and I'll find him. I'll—"

He stopped as if he were choking, and tore at his respectable collar and neck-tie. "Give me some water!"

He seized a carafe from a side-table and gulped down a glassful, then stood breathing hard and staring vacantly at Jordan.

Jordan stood, rather paler than usual, but with his eyes fixed on the carpet.

"For your own sake," he said, "I trust you will not commit any rash deed—for your own sake."

Lavarick stopped him with a gesture at once defiant and savage.

"Leave that to me," he said, brokenly; then he laughed a horrible laugh. "If you'd only told me this, given me that letter last night, I'd have let you off the money."

Poor Jordan stared, and a gleam of regret crossed his face. Lavarick laughed again.

"But I'll have the money and my revenge too, curse you both, curse everybody by the name of Lynne! It's you and the likes of you that drive us to the devil! My girl—my pretty, innocent girl—" he broke down again, but recovered himself as if he had had a suspicion that Jordan, for all his grave face, was enjoying the sight of his misery.

"I'm going," he said, breathing hard. "Friday, remember. I'll have the money; it will help me to find him! Your brother won't trouble you after I've done with him, Sir Jordan."

He went to the door, but his hand shook so that he could not turn the handle. "Open it," he said, roughly.

Jordan obeyed and accompanied him down stairs to the hall door.

"You will take care of the papers, Mr. Smith," he said, blandly, for the benefit of the footman in the hall.

But Lavarick, as if he had forgotten his assumed character and part, strode down the steps and along the drive with bent head and white, distorted face, his hand clutching the pocket in which he had thrust the letter.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

A wise maxim-maker has asserted that there can be no love between two women when both are young and pretty. As is usual with maxim-makers, he was wrong, and Sylvia and Audrey proved him so.

They were drawn toward each other by a mutual sympathy which acted with equal force.

Sylvia had gone through the furnace of sorrow through which Audrey seemed now to be passing. But though Sylvia saw that something was troubling her newly made friend, she did not ask for Audrey's confidence, and Audrey did not give it.

But, notwithstanding this, the two girls had fallen in love with each other with that quiet fervency which evinces something warmer, deeper, and more lasting than a transient fancy.

The day after their meeting in Sylvia's room, Audrey drove round to Bury Street and carried Sylvia off to Grosvenor Square.

Lady Marlow at first received her with a mixture of kindness and reserve, but before an hour had passed, Sylvia had made her way, unconsciously and without any effort on her part, into her little ladyship's heart, and the viscountess happened to come in to lunch, was as promptly conquered and enslaved.

Sylvia was so utterly unlike the ordinary conception of an actress and an operasinger that the dissimilarity itself began to slowly work the charm.

She was not overwhelmed by the splendor of the mansion and its appointments—as, perhaps, Lady Marlow expected she would be—and she seemed as entirely without self-consciousness or vanity as a child—if any child, by the way, can be without vanity. We have never yet met such a phenomenon.

The viscountess was made captive at once, and Lady Marlow looked on and listened to him with amused amazement as he talked and laughed with the beautiful young girl just as if he had known her from infancy, as she declared afterward.

They insisted upon her remaining to lunch, and the meal had never been got through more pleasantly, the viscountess, when it was over, "hanging about," and still talking with the signora instead of dashing off to his club. Then, when Sylvia said that she must go, Audrey begged her to go for a drive with her, and the two girls went off—not exactly arm in arm, for that would have been an attitude suitable to neither of their characters, but so evidently enamored of each other that Lady Marlow, looking after them, could not repress an exclamation of astonishment. The viscountess said:

"Most charming girl I ever met since"—he bowed to his wife with grotesque gallantry—"since I met with you, my dear. I don't wonder that Audrey has taken to her so warmly. What a child, too! Every now and then I found myself staring at her and wondering whether she could be the famous, etc., etc. That girl has a history, my dear."

Lady Marlow groaned softly.

"Don't, Marlow—that's just what I'm afraid of! An opera-singer—"

The viscountess shook his head emphatically.

"You're wrong, my dear. I'll stake my life there's nothing in the history which should cause her pretty face to blush."

"Oh, you're a man!" retorted Lady Marlow. "But there, as I said, it's no business of mine now. Audrey is answerable to Jordan, and if he approves—"

The viscountess smiled significantly. "I'm thinking the amiable Jordan will approve everything Audrey does—especially while they are unmarried. Where is that charming individual?" he added.

Jordan was not a very great favorite of the viscountess.

"At Lynne. He has gone down on business," said Lady Marlow. "I can guess what it is. I expect he'll transform the old place into a palace before the wedding."

"Well," said the viscountess, curly, "he ought to do so, seeing that he's going to marry a princess, and the best and sweetest girl in the world into the bargain."

"Not even excepting Signora Stella?" put in Lady Marlow, with perhaps pardonable irony.

The two girls went for their drive, and the crowded park saw them together and

noted the fact, and the result was demonstrated next day by the arrival of sundry cards and invitations which made Sylvia stare and Audrey laugh.

"You see, my dear," she said, as she turned over the cards and daintily crested embossed notes, "the 'great world,' as you called it, is open to you if you like to enter it."

"But I don't," said Sylvia, almost pathetically. "The only thing that would tempt me to go to one of these parties is the desire to see you there."

"Very well then," said Audrey, "we'll go to the Countess of Landon's together to night."

Sylvia laughed and blushed. "Do you know that I have no ball-dress, and no jewels, excepting my stage ones, and I suppose they wouldn't do?"

"Oh, yes, they would," said Audrey, coolly, "and they wouldn't be the only false ones there my dear. Say you will come."

"Well, I will," replied Sylvia; "that is, if Mercy is better."

Mercy had got a headache—only a headache, she declared, though she had kept to her room and was looking pale and worn. But she insisted upon Sylvia going with Audrey, and would have got up and dressed her if Sylvia had not vowed that she would remain at home if Mercy did not lie quiet.

She went with Audrey but she did not wear the brilliant gems—of paste and silver—which dazzled the eyes of the audience at the theater, and her "ball-dress" was a very simple affair of black lace, unadorned save by a white exotic which Audrey had, with her own hands, chosen from the hot-house.

The magnificent rooms were crowded, and the appearance of the famous cantatrice excited no little sensation, a sensation which was intensified by the fact that Audrey Hope and Lady Marlow were evidently on the warmest terms of friendship with her.

To Sylvia Audrey seemed the most beautiful of all the brilliant throng of handsome women, but she noticed that, notwithstanding all the attention and evident admiration which surrounded her, Audrey at times looked sad and preoccupied; and once, as they sat side by side for a moment or two between the dances, she heard Audrey sigh and saw her eyes grow moist as if her thoughts were far away and fixed on some sad subject.

Sylvia danced several times, and with partners whose names stand high in our English bible, the Peerage, but she was not elated nor overwhelmed, and when they were driving home together, and Audrey, holding her hand, whispered: "Well, Sylvia?" She made answer:

"Yes, oh, yes; it was very grand, and very gay, but—"

"But what?" said Lady Marlow, who had caught her answer.

"But I think I would rather spend the evening with Audrey, Lady Marlow; just our two selves together. You see," she said, with the frankness and naivete which Lord Marlow declared her greatest charm, "it is different for you. You are *grande dames*, and it is part and parcel of your lives. But I"—and she laughed—"I was thinking all the while how some of the great personages who were so friendly with me would have stared if I told them that not many months ago I was running about an Australian gold field, with scarcely any boots and stockings to speak of. I suppose they would have been very much shocked, Lady Marlow?"

Her little ladyship laughed.

"I don't think they would, if you had told them just as you have told us," she said, shrewdly.

"Ah, well!" said Sylvia, with a smile and something like a sigh, "after all, I think I am happier at the theatre, no one there cares what I was so that I can sing and act. Are you coming tomorrow night?" she asked Audrey, wistfully. "It is not fair to ask you—"

"Of course I shall be there," said Audrey, promptly, "and if you will have me, I will come round to Bury Street and have tea with you, and we can go together."

Sylvia found Mercy awake, still looking ill and depressed; and Sylvia would have sent for a doctor, late as it was, but Mercy begged her not to do so.

"I shall be well again to-morrow," she said. "Tell me all about your ball, Sylvia; and Sylvia sat on the edge of the bed and recounted the glories of the evening."

"But it's my first and last party, Mercy," she said, with a laugh and a little sigh to follow. "You and I will live our old life, with just Audrey for a friend. Mercy," she broke off, "why is it that I love her so?"

Mercy shook her head; she seemed weary and listless.

"Life is a puzzle," she said; "and a sad one sometimes. But I am very glad that you have met her and that you are such great friends. It has made your life brighter, dear, has it not?"

Sylvia nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes," she assented, softly,—yes; but even Audrey Hope's love will not help me to forget the past and all I have lost; and she stole out of the room with his head down.

Audrey came the next afternoon, and the two girls sat and talked over their tea, as women who are fast and loving friends delight to talk. Audrey, ready for the theater, was resplendent in her evening-dress, and Sylvia was laughingly admiring her and holding up a hand-mirror, that Audrey might survey herself, when the maid-s