

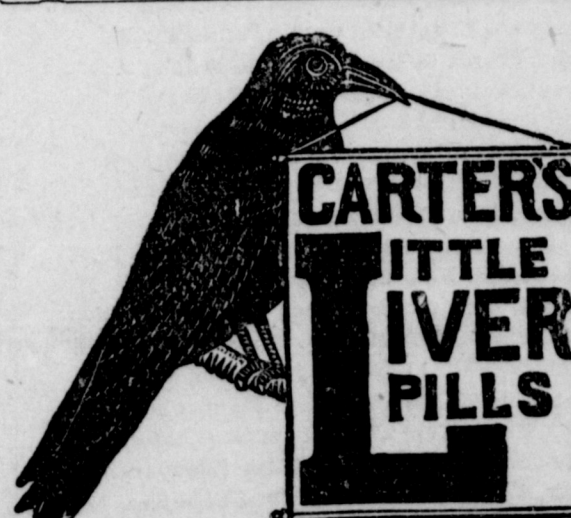
Continued from Tenth Page.

He was not going to put up with any nonsense. She would have to understand that he was not to be got rid of in that way, or any other way. He stood looking through a window, with a heavy scowl upon his face. He felt in a bad humour with everyone, most of all with Lucy Brend. Had it not been for her ridiculous behaviour, he should not have come down at all, and so would have escaped meeting Cora. Heaven alone knew what mischief and worry might not spring from that meeting. He meant to get rid of her; but, even for a man of his resource, it was a risky thing to do. He gnawed his under lip savagely, and cursed below his breath. Then the door opened, and Lucy Brend came across the great room towards him. He advanced also, holding out his hand, with a— 'Well, Lucy, so you have come at last.' She looked at the outstretched hand, without attempting to touch it. Then her eyes slowly travelled to his face. Her indignation burning in her own. 'For what reason have you come here today, Captain Dorrien?' 'My dear Lucy, drop that tragedy-queen sort of voice. I have come to see you, to tell you not to be a little idiot. I intend to marry you—you know that—we have gone through it all before, and it isn't an atom of use you trying to thwart me. You understand?' She gave a little disdainful laugh. 'Your day is over, Captain Dorrien. I shall never marry you, for the simple reason that I am going to marry someone else. A gentleman this time, not a cowardly cad.' He lifted his clenched hand as if to strike her, but control'd the impulse. 'Curse you!' he cried, through his set teeth. 'I'll teach you to speak to me like that!' Lucy crossed the room to the bell, and laid her hand upon it. 'Go!' she said, 'or I ring and have you turned out. Perhaps, when you hear I am going to marry Mr. Ridley, you will understand how useless it will be for you to remain here another instant.' 'Ridley!' he repeated, staggered. 'Ridley! That is a lie, and you know it.' She rang the bell. Her lips were white with passion. 'I will send for Mr. Ridley,' she said, 'since you doubt me. I will then take the opportunity of telling him of the low, abominable way in which you have endeavored to get possession of my money. I spared you before, because, when I found myself free to cast you off, I wished to have nothing more to do with you, and never to hear your odious name again, and also because I thought you too mean and contemptible a creature for Mr. Ridley to punish in the manner I felt certain he would choose. I would rather he tried his strength on something more deserving of it. James,' as a servant appeared in the doorway, 'ask Mr. Ridley to come here at once.' Dorrien was almost choking with mortification and fury. 'If Ridley dares to molest me, I'll give him rather more than he bargains for. And, as for you—' he went nearer to her, his big teeth grinding together, his face flushing a dull red—'well, my lady, don't be too sure that you have seen the last of me. I'll make you pay dearly for this. He went to the door, then turned and shook his fist at her. When Ridley made his appearance in the drawing-room, in answer to her summons, he found her alone. 'I don't want to play tennis,' she said, hurriedly, 'my head aches.' 'It was not aching a quarter of an hour ago,' he said. 'What is the matter?' 'Nothing—nothing!' she cried, hysterically. 'Mayn't I have a headache if I want one?' 'Certainly, my darling,' he said, taking her into his arms. 'You shall have one just as long as you like.' She kept quite still for a little while, with her head resting against his shoulder, then she said— 'Captain Dorrien has been here.' 'I know he has.' 'He was very angry.' 'That was natural, darling, under the circumstances.' 'He was rather—rude.' 'The brute—he'll have to answer to me for that.' 'He isn't worth thinking about, she said.' 'But I want you never to speak to him again, or to let him come near me. Will you promise?' 'He shall never come near you, dearest. I'll thrash him within an inch of his life if he does.' She looked at her lover proudly. There was no need to fear Dorrien while those strong arms were ready to defend her. 'My head is better now,' she said, with a happy laugh. 'I'll run and fetch Shirley, and we will have some tennis.' And, before Captain Dorrien had got half-way to the station, Lucy was as merry and light-hearted as she had been before his visit, while he cursed the sunshine, and the dusty road, and every living thing that crossed his path.

CHAPTER XXI.

Vivian West was not spending his days in idleness. He could not afford to do that just yet; but he was painting in a different style to anything he had done before. Hitherto his subjects had all been strangely mournful—dreary mists and wild, desolate scenes; now he stood whistling happily, before his canvas, on which his skillful hand was painting blue sky and sunshine, and a laughing summer sea, and, wandering by the margin of the curling, rippling waves, two lovers—a fisher-lad and his sweetheart. Shirley loved that picture—it seemed to

represent their own great happiness—and she would sit beside him for hours, watching the magic touch of those slender fingers. Not that these two were left much to themselves on these occasions, for that part of the beach lay within easy distance of Royal Heath and Coddington, and, as West was universally liked by both men and women, it became the favourite walk of most of his friends and acquaintances. Sir Metherell constantly came that way, walking slowly, with eyes moodily bent upon the ground, wrapt in his own sad terrible thoughts, till he would find himself with the young artist. It was only when talking to him that the burden, which was crushing him to death, seemed to grow lighter. The shadow would lift from his face, and he would raise his eyes and see something of the beauty of the world. Vivian West had from the first felt a strange sympathy with this grave, lonely man. He liked to talk to him, and, while naturally reserved about himself to other people, he spoke openly of all his hopes, and plans, and thoughts to Sir Martin Metherell. And the elder man would listen, with all his heart going out to the son he dared not acknowledge. It chanced one day that Lady Gildare was seized with a desire to come down to the beach, and take a look at Vivian West and his work. So, accordingly, leaning upon the arm of Nurse Patience, she made her way across the sands, taking a childish delight in the novelty of the proceeding. 'This is really quite charming,' she declared. 'It reminds me of the days when I used to tuck up my skirts and paddle. I hope this sun won't burn me very much. Ah, there they are! What a delightful spot to have chosen. How surprised they will be to see me, of all people.' Shirley, on catching sight of them, had uttered a prolonged 'Oh!' 'What is the matter?' Vivian asked, without glancing from his work. 'The enemy is advancing, that's all,' Shirley replied. Lady Gildare is bearing down upon us. What shall we do?' 'Get rid of her as quickly as possible,' he said, with happy indifference; then, more seriously: 'Why won't people leave us alone? I never get you to myself for five minutes at a time. I shall have to carry you right away to some desert island, where never a soul can come near you. How would you like that?' 'I should love it,' she said, softly. 'I don't want anyone but you.' He touched in a fleecy white cloud. 'You would grow tired of it,' he said, with something like a suppressed sigh. 'It would require a very great love to stand that.' She made no answer, and he had no knowledge that his idle words had hurt her. He did not hear the passionate inward cry— 'When will you believe in me? When will you know that my love is strong and true?' It seemed to her that, for all their lives, he must look upon it as a poor trifling affection—one that would fail him in emergency, and fall from him in adversity. She got up, and went to meet Lady Gildare. 'Am I not growing energetic?' her ladyship cried, gaily. 'Oh, we have come such a long distance. We left the pony-carriage on the road. I really think I shall come here every morning.' Shirley said how pleasant it would be, while her inner eyes saw all the happiest hours of her day spoilt. 'Now, my dear Mr. West, don't let me disturb you,' Lady Gildare said, as the artist lifted his cap. 'I have just come to see how you dab it on, so that, when it is adorning the walls of the Royal Academy, I shall be able to proudly say, "I saw it being painted." What an adorable young man! and the girl is Shirley, of course! As if you could paint anyone else just now! But the sea—don't you think you have got it just a little—only just a little—too blue?' 'Perhaps so,' Vivian admitted, with that quiet good humour which won him so many friends.



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'And the sand,' Lady Gildare continued, well pleased with herself, 'is it quite yellow enough, do you think? One always reads of the golden sands. Of course, I don't pretend to know anything about art; but a fresh eye, you know, often detects faults—' Shirley would not stay to hear any more. She went down to the water's edge, and flung a pebble as far out to sea as she could. After a little while Lady Gildare grew tired of criticising. 'I don't think I will stay any longer,' she said, in a tone of one who had been pressed to remain. 'We must not keep that pony waiting all the morning. Perhaps Shirley will drive back with me. Say here, nurse, while I speak to Miss Lorraine.' She went, picking her way over the loose stones, to where Shirley was gathering seaweed and shells. Vivian West, turning his head, found Nurse Patience standing a few yards from him. 'Won't you sit down?' he said, pleasantly, indicating the chair, which had been brought there for Shirley. 'Thank you,' she said, and, coming nearer to him, seated herself, and locking with admiring gaze at the half-finished painting. 'You are a great artist, Mr. West,' she said, in her usual soft voice. He laughed. 'Not yet—but, some day—well, some day, I hope to be.' 'It must be grand, indeed, to have such talent. Do you inherit it from your father or mother?' A slight shadow fell across the brightness of his face. 'I cannot tell,' he said. 'For, strangely enough, I knew absolutely nothing about them.' 'They died? That is very sad.' The sweet, sympathetic tones pleased him; they appeared very soothing after Lady Gildare's thin tittle. 'It was sad,' he admitted. 'I felt the loss of them all my life; but now—with a glad smile—that is all over, and I would not change places with any fellow in the world.' Round a bend in the rock a tall, bent figure was coming. 'And who is this?' Nurse Patience said, breaking a short silence. Vivian West followed the direction of her eyes. 'It is Sir Martin Metherell,' he said, 'the kindest gentleman living.' Nurse Patience slowly rose from her chair. Her hands, beneath her long black cloak, were clenched together. Her lips moved, but no sound came from them. Vivian West went forward to speak to the baronet, and while the two men shook hands, Nurse Patience turned and hastened away, stopping only when she had placed some distance between herself and the easel. No one had noticed her eccentric behaviour, and none but the sea birds heard the hard, sobbing way in which she drew she breath. 'I was mad to come!—mad to come!' she kept repeating, as if scarcely conscious of what she said. 'After all these years—oh, my God! after all these years! It is like coming back from the grave—forgotten—forgotten by all! She pressed her trembling fingers to her temples. 'Oh, merciful Heaven!' she moaned, 'who is this Vivian West? When he looks at me—when he speaks—my heart—he clasped her hands over it, he voice broken and tremulous—'my heart goes out to him. Is he my son, my boy? Can it be possible he did not die?—that it was a lie? That, having robbed me of all things, they took the only one I had left to love—my baby—my little child? Shall I end this uncertainty—shall I go now, and ask him?' For an instant she stood irresolute, looking towards where Sir Martin and Vivian West stood together. 'No,' she said at last, with a weary gesture, 'of what use? He would never tell me now—and, if he did? Ah! who wants such a mother as I? He is happy—contented—ignorant of the stain upon his name—ignorant of his mother's ruined life. If he knew, he might but shrink from me in horror and aversion. I have suffered torture,' she whispered, gazing across the wide blue sea; 'but that would be worse than all.' She went on a few paces, struggling to control her terrible agitation. 'It is he, indeed, my son,' she said at length, 'I should be thankful, beyond all words, for having seen him as he is—beloved by all—with a great career before him. Surely this knowledge will take the sting from my life, and bring me some sense of peace. But, is he my son? Can I be mistaken, and is it only the irony of Fate which has brought him across my path? I must know—I must put an end to all doubt, and then I will be content.' Lady Gildare was not quite so agreeable as she walked back across the sand. She was tired. Her high heeled white shoes pinched her toe, and the sun was very hot. Then, too, she had failed to persuade Shirley to drive home with her, and she was a woman who liked to have her own way in every trivial matter. 'Between ourselves,' she said, in a fretful voice, 'I think that picture hideous. The people about here look upon young West as a marvel, and rave over every bit of colour he chooses to dab on a canvas. Oh, dear, what is distance this! Can you see the pony yet?' 'We shall directly we get round this bend.' 'I ought not to have come so far. I am overtaxing my strength terribly. That gentleman who came up was Sir Martin Metherell. The son is staying at Royal Heath. You would hardly take him for a gentleman. I call him a most detestable person—and he comes into everything when the father dies. I should say he would make ducks and drakes of it.' 'This heat is awful! Sir Martin must have been a handsome man at one time; and his wife, they say, was one of the

ugliest of women—yet he must have been devoted to her, for he has never got over her death.' 'Is—Lady Metherell dead?' 'Oh, dear yes—had a fit, or something, and died in a few hours! Thank goodness, I can see the pony! I shall rest the remainder of the day.' As they drove back to Royal Heath they met Lady Ayerst and a party of friends riding. Madge stopped for a moment to speak to Lady Gildare. 'Is it not a perfect day?' she said, pleasantly. 'I hope the drive has done you good.' 'My dear child, I am almost fainting from fatigue,' her ladyship cried. 'I have been toiling over the beach. Was it not foolish?' 'The beach! What made you go there?' 'Why, the lion of the hour, of course—Vivian West—and, naturally I was disappointed.' 'Naturally! Madge assented, in her pretty calm way. 'Life is full of disappointments.' She rode on then. One of the party had waited behind for her. It was Lord Carsborough. 'To hear such sentiments from your lips' he said, 'surprises me. What disappointments can your ladyship have experienced?' 'Does one ever live through a day without having some?' she asked lightly. 'You can never have been more serious than a gown that has failed to please, or a bonnet which has not quite suited the loveliest face in creation.' 'And how can your lordship know she asked severely. 'I can but draw my own conclusion,' he replied. Possibly I am mistaken; but, if you have known any serious disappointment you show no sign.' She laughed, and touching her horse with the whip, cantered forward. She had met Lord Carsborough in Scotland, during her honeymoon, and, at Sir Henry's request, had been particularly gracious to him, though, after the first few meetings, she had felt a great dislike to him—a dislike in which there was a strange mingling of fear—why, she knew not. They had met again in town, during the season, had met frequently, and it was then that her feelings toward him changed. She still distrusted him; but he attracted her, and, even against her will, she found that attraction growing stronger. When Sir Henry had mentioned the fact that he intended inviting him to Royal Heath, she had begged him not to do so, much to her husband's astonishment. 'My dear Madge,' he exclaimed, 'what on earth do you mean? I intend Carsborough not only to come here, but to be a particularly honoured guest. He admires you, and I wish you to be civil to him.' 'He is an odious man—I cannot endure him.' 'You endured him fairly well in town, my love,' was the sneering reply. 'Because you have tired of your conquest is no reason why I should lose a friend.' She plaited the fringe of a cushion without replying. She was half-sitting, half-lying on a couch in her room. There came to her an impulse to say— 'I am afraid of this man—I feel he has an evil power over me. For my sake do not ask him here!' But the knowledge of how utterly useless such an appeal would be kept her silent. 'You are getting uncommonly proud,' Sir Henry continued, finding she did not intend to speak, 'that you can turn your nose up at a man like Lord Carsborough. I can afford a good many of your whims and vagaries, but I'm dashed if I can run to this.' She lifted her proud, cold gaze to his face. 'And why not?' 'Because, my dear, if at the present moment he chose to cut up rough about anything, he could ruin me. That is why.' 'Ruin you!' she repeated, faintly. Never for an instant, had she thought of the word in connection with Sir Henry. 'You don't really mean that?' He stood tugging at his heavy dark moustache; then, catching sight of her scoured face, he laughed. 'Don't look so horribly frightened—he is not likely to do it; but it is as well to remember that it lies in his power.' 'But how! What has he got to do with you?' Madge was sitting bolt upright. The mere possibility of losing all she had sold herself for was awful indeed. 'Oh, we have had a few business transac-

tions together!' Sir Henry replied. 'You really would not understand if I attempted to explain. Only, don't forget to show our friend a little polite attention.' A couple of days later, Lord Carsborough had arrived. He was a distinguished-looking man—a man one instinctively glanced at a second time, in passing. He was about fifty, tall and lean, with a skin scorched brown by an Indian sun, a close cropped head of grizzled hair, a pair of small piercing eyes, a long high-bridged nose, and a fierce grey moustache. He had the manner of one used to command, and he could talk well and cleverly on any subject. He was not what is termed a lady's man, yet many a woman had gone mad about him. While in India he had married a young and beautiful girl. A year later, and he had left him. Varied were the rumours as to the reason; but none knew the facts of the case, and the world, naturally, blamed the woman. It had happened years ago and there were many who did not know that Lord Carsborough had a wife living. Madge had heard something about his early marriage. As she cantered forward, she wondered what sort of a woman his wife had been and why they had separated. Carsborough did not attempt to ride beside her again, though there were several opportunities when he might have done so had he so wished, and, in spite of herself, she felt secretly piqued by his cool indifference. He had always been like this to her, making her feel, while in his society, that she was the one woman he admired and thought of, noticing every trivial thing she did or said, yet, a moment later, appearing to be entirely yourself engaged with someone else, and she for the time forgotten as completely as if she had never existed. He was a man with a will of iron, and a heart of stone, and with the dangerous powers of playing on the feelings of others while his own remained untouched. As the riding party was returning to Royal Heath, a man driving a high dogcart, came from the opposite direction. It was Ralph Devitt. He lifted his cap, and would have passed on, had not Carsborough, who was riding in the rear, pulled up, thus forcing the other to do so. Lady Ayerst had just caught the nobleman's pleasant greeting, and Devitt's cold, quiet reply, and her lips curled disdainfully. 'The bear!' she muttered, half aloud; then, to the man nearest to her: 'How is it all you men think so much of Mr. Devitt?' 'I can't tell you, Lady Ayerst,' the young fellow, Captain Grey, replied; 'except that he is a rattling good chap—awfully clever, I believe.' Really—but such people want something to recommend them besides mere money. 'There is plenty of that.' 'Oh, yes; the father invented a patent shovel, I hear!' Grey laughed. 'Something a little more valuable, I fancy,' he said. 'There is a lamp for miners called the Devitt. It is the only—' 'Oh please spare me the details!' Madge cried. 'If you only knew how I detest the very name of Devitt, I am quite certain you would never mention it in my presence.' 'I'm most awfully sorry, upon my word.' 'Some years ago,' Madge explained, 'when my father died, this man bought our dear old home. It ought never to have been allowed. But we were only girls, and my mother was ruled by the trustees, and, of course, they sold to the highest bidder. Now, Sir Henry would buy the place, but this wretch refuses to sell. That will show you what he is. It is simply torture to me to think of him living there.' 'A beastly bore,' Grey declared, 'especially as he is such a near neighbour.' Madge patted her horse's sleek neck with her little gloved hand. 'He has the sense not to come here,' she said. 'Sir Henry has foolishly invited him several times; but I think he knows I would not receive him, and so he always pleads other engagements, and spares me the trouble of showing him that I, for one, will not entertain a man of his stamp.' 'Society is getting awfully cheap,' Grey said, comfortably forgetting that his own grandfather had been in trade. But then, his father had married Lady Jane Denier, so that, with wealth on one side, and real blue blood on the other, it was all right for Captain Grey, who went everywhere, and knew everyone, and was altogether a swell of the first water. Madge, in her quiet way, thought him a little fool; but he adored her, because it happened to be the correct thing to do just then, and he made a point of always being quite up-to-date. The Ayersts and their friends were going that afternoon to a big garden party, which was being given in their honour. All the elite of the neighborhood had been invited, and directly Lady Ayerst appeared upon the scene she was surrounded by friends and admirers. She was looking exceptionally lovely that afternoon, dressed entirely in white, without one touch of colour anywhere, beyond the burnished gold of her hair, and the pure rose tints of her face. 'What a lot of diffidence it makes if you are rich and fashionable!' Shirley observed to Vivian West, as she sipped a cup of tea. 'When Madge was only Miss Lorraine she received a lot of attention, but she was never followed about like this. Just see how the women stare! I am quite certain that awful Mrs. Beau-Rice intends having a gown made in exactly the same style. She puts up her glasses, and has a good look at it, every time Madge passes her.' 'Imitation, you know,' West said, 'is the sincerest flattery. If Mrs. Beau-Rice could imitate your sister in any way, it would be so greatly to her advantage, that one cannot really blame her for trying.' Shirley laughed.

To be Continued.

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