

Linked by Fate

BY CHARLES GARVICE

Author of "The Verdict of the Heart," "A Heritage of Hate," "Nell of Shorne Mills," "Paid For," "A Modern Juliet," Etc.

(Continued.)

"Oh, it is beautiful, beautiful!" murmured the young Miss Limmington. "What a lovely, lovely voice Mr. Shore has; and how exquisitely he sings!"

Vane, who happened to be near her, nodded perfect agreement.

"Yes; my cousin has a wonderful voice, hasn't he?" she said, warmly. "Ask him to sing 'Kathleen Mavourneen.' I shouldn't be surprised if he makes you cry."

Julian sang "Kathleen Mavourneen," and succeeded in bringing tears to the eyes of more than Miss Limmington.

"First rate, splendid!" said Sir Charles, with a half-defiant glance at his wife. "Sing us something else, Shore?"

But Julian courteously declined. With the Spanish shrug of the shoulders he left the piano and sauntered to the French windows, which had been left open, for the night was warm, and passed out on to the terrace. He thought that he was done, and he lit a cigarette and leaned against the stone railing, his eyelids drooping, his long lashes sweeping his hollow cheeks. Music excites the performer as well as the listener, and his heart was beating quickly. While he had been singing his eyes had rested upon Judith Orme's profile. From her beauty he had drawn the inspiration which had enabled him to move his hearers as they had been moved. And now his heart was aching for her, as it always ached the moment he was out of her sight. At first he had fought against the passion which had taken possession of him, had tried to argue himself out of it; but he had long ceased to struggle, and now surrendered himself to the spirit that enthralled it. And jealousy was adding another torture to that of unrequited love, for he had seen, almost on the first day, the day he had called on her with Vane, that she was in love with his cousin. Love makes the duller man quick-witted and sharp-eyed where the woman he loves is concerned, and Julian had discovered that Judith was not heartless, as the world considered her, but that her heart had been given to Vane. Fate had willed that his cousin should not only step in between him and the Lesborough peerage, but that he should stand between him and the woman whom he loved with an absorbing passion which was nearly akin to madness.

With a gesture of despair he flung the end of his cigarette away and went towards the end of the terrace. As he was descending the steps he saw Sir Chandos Orme coming out of the smoking-room where he had been for the brandy-and-soda, which pulled him together after his dinner. At the same moment there was the frou-frou of a woman's dress, and one of the ladies stepped on to the terrace from the drawing-room, and Julian heard Sir Chandos say, cautiously:

"Is that you, Judith?"

Julian went softly down the steps and stood under the terrace listening.

"Yes, father; do you want me?" replied Judith, coming towards him. They stopped, almost immediately above Julian, so that he could hear every word, though both father and daughter spoke in a low voice.

"Yes," said Sir Chandos with a slight hiccup. "Look here, Judith, I want to talk to you. I'm getting anxious, uneasy. You don't seem to be making much of this game—ow, don't be offended and turn away like that. I won't have it! I've been a good father to you—"

She laughed with a kind of weary scorn.

"I am listening," she said, coldly.

"Well, then, I'll go further and say you seem to me to be making a mess of it. We've been down here—how long is it?—and you are no 'for-rader' than you were in London. I've got eyes in my head, of course, and I can see, anyone could see, that Lesborough isn't in the least smitten. The man seems to be like a block of ice, confound him! Pears to me you've completely lost your old power over him—"

She leant against the stone coping, her hands clasped tightly, her eyes fixed on the darkness.

"Now don't go over the old ground and tell me it's my fault, that's all past and gone."

"I was not going to do so," she said in a low voice. "It would be useless."

"Quite so," he asserted. "Nothing is more painful than that kind of—of bickering between father and daughter, especially when they understand each other as you and I do. What I wanted to say was that, in my opinion, Lesborough isn't a marrying man; that he doesn't intend to marry; and that he intends this Julian Shore to succeed him here. You can't help observing this—the fuss Vane makes over the fellow."

"Well?" she said, after a pause.

Sir Chandos got out a cigar, but after a glance along the terrace, refrained from lighting it.

"Well," he said, shifting his small, tightly-shod feet uneasily. "Well, you can't be blind—no one could be—to the fact that Julian Shore is—very much in love with you, my dear Judith."

"Well?" she said again and in exactly the same tone.

"Well! Bless my soul, you don't want me to point out that you ought to shift your objective. If you can't get the present king of the castle, why not—not make for the next?"

She laughed wearily.

"You talk as if Vane were an old man, on the brink of the grave."

"No, he's not an old man, but—well, accidents are always occurring," retorted Sir Chandos. "Look at the way Providence shot him into the title, and—and—well, I've a fancy Vane won't make old bones. He looks to me like a man who has ceased to take an interest in life, and by gad, when that's the case, life soon ceases to take an interest in the man! Then—then he is a reckless devil; you saw him riding that horse of his yesterday? It was a marvel he wasn't thrown. Mark my words, he'll break his neck some day!"

Her face went white in the darkness and her hands clenched each other.

"Until he does—" she began, then stopped.

"So what I say is," resumed Sir Chandos with the redundancy and emphasis of a half tipsy man, "keep the two strings to your bow, my dear girl. For instance, there's no need to treat Shore so cavalierly. He's a decent chap, he's fond of you, and it's my opinion that he'll come into this sooner or later—" He swept

his hand across the view comprehensively. "At any rate, I, a dead certain that you're making no headway with Vane. Of course with your beauty—by gad, I'm as proud of it as you are!—you might marry anybody; but, well, you've got into the pace here and—Now, take my advice and think the matter over."

She laughed again.

"If I do not marry Vane, if I have lost him," she said, almost to herself, "it does not matter—"

"That's what I say," her precious father caught her up, with an eager hiccup. "It's been my motto all my life—and a very prosperous life it's been—that, if you can't get the moon, good cream cheese is an admirable substitute. Now do be a sensible girl, my dear Judith!"

He stretched out a wavering hand to lay it upon her shoulder, but she shrank slightly but perceptibly, and Sir Chandos, carrying his hand to his moustache and murmuring, "I'll just go and get a drink. Too much salt in that last savoury," shuffled jauntily back to the smoking-room.

Julian, with a pale face and a throbbing heart, was stealing away when he heard another step on the terrace, and he waited. It was Vane's. Judith also heard it, and with a smothered sigh turned towards him.

"Who is it?" said Vane. "Ah, it's you!" as she moved into the light from the window. "Have you seen Julian? They want him for bridge."

"No," she said in the soft, low and deliciously musical note which always came into her voice when she spoke to him. He left the drawing-room some time ago.

"Gone into that den of his, I suppose. If so, it's useless to attempt to draw him. What a good fellow he is, isn't he?"

"Yes?" she said, half interrogatively, as if she knew he had a purpose in his praise.

"Such a—a likeable chap," said Vane with the awkwardness with which a man approaches a delicate subject. "And he's clever, too. The sort of man who would make his mark in the world if—if he had an object."

He lit a cigarette, tossing the match almost on to Julian, and smoked furiously for a moment or two.

"You—take a great interest in him," she said in so low a voice that Julian had to strain his ears.

"Rather!" asserted Vane, "and naturally, seeing that he will follow me here."

"Will—follow you?" she repeated, mechanically.

Vane nodded. "Yes, I shall never marry." She moved out of the light and leant against the railing in her old attitude. "I'm one of those fellows who are better single."

"Ah, I understand!" she breathed with a long-drawn sigh.

Vane frowned and set his teeth.

"See here, Judith," he said in the tone of a man who has resolved to speak his mind and to spare neither himself nor his hearer. "I don't think you do. Of course I know you are thinking of the past—and our old engagement. You don't mind my speaking of it? Why should you?"

"Why should I?" she said in a still voice.

"Quite so. That's all past, and I don't want you to think you have anything to reproach yourself with. We—well, we made a mistake, that's all; and it was precious lucky, for you that you discovered it before it was too late!"

"Was it I only who discovered it?" she asked.

Vane hesitated for a moment. It is never easy to tell a woman that you have ceased to love her.

"Let us say that you were the first to make the discovery," he said, gently. "We won't discuss it."

"No; it isn't necessary," she said in a strange voice, as if she were holding herself under control. "You have told me enough. I—judged you, Vane; but—you found consolation. There is another woman!"

Vane did not start, but he set his teeth and his brows as if she had struck him. For a moment he was silent, then, looking straight before him, he said grimly:

"You are right, there is—there was another woman."

Her hand stole to her bosom and clutched the lace there. She had hoped against hope for a swift denial; the confirmation of her dread was almost more than she could bear.

scarcely breathing she stole a little closer to him.

"Tell—tell me about her," she whispered.

He shrank again; but after a pause, during which she thought he must hear the wild beating of her heart, he said:

"I don't think I can. There are some things—No, no, just let it rest at that."

"Is she—is she anyone I know?" "No," he replied almost curtly.

"She is, of course, very beautiful? I—I can't imagine you caring for a plain woman."

He drew his hand across his brow. "She—Let it rest," he said, hoarsely. "I did not want to speak of myself, but—Julian."

She stood motionless, as if she had not heard him, then as if she had suddenly become conscious of his words, she said, in a voice absolutely emotionless:

"Mr. Julian Shore?"

"Yes, Judith, he—has fallen in love with you."

"And you—you have come to plead his cause?" she said swiftly through her closed teeth.

"I have come to plead his cause," he assented, resolutely. "It's like my impudence, you think? But, consider, Judith! He is of my kith and kin; I like him, I am fond of him; and I don't like to see him suffer. The poor fellow has got thin and worn—oh, but you know, you must know! I know what you are going to say: that he might speak for himself. But Julian is the last man to do that in such a case. He is poor, I stand between him and the title, the estate."

He thinks, and rightly, that you are far above him. And he is just that sensitive, high-minded kind of fellow who would suffer in silence—and you treat him, well, not too gently."

Her breath was coming fast, and she moved a little away from him that he might not see the passionate leaving of her bosom.

"So let me plead his cause," Vane went on, warming to his advocacy, and deaf and blind to the passion which was rending her. "I'm convinced that he would make you—"

"A good husband," she finished, quite calmly.

"Well, it sounds pretty banal; but that's what I was going to say," he admitted. "And that he loves you with all his heart and soul, I've seen—and you must have seen—for some time past. I know the signs," in a low voice, but without bitterness.

"And, mind, I am not altogether disinterested."

"No?" she said, keeping the surging mockery from her voice.

"No. I want to see the man who will come after me make a better thing of his life than I have done. I want him to be—happy. And, by George, Julian will never be happy until he has won you!"

"Or you have won me for him?" she said.

He looked at her quickly.

"You are offended, indignant?" he said. "I'm sorry. I beg your pardon, Judith, beg it most humbly! And I'm afraid I've done Julian more harm with you than good. But I—well, I presumed on our old—friendship—"

She moved suddenly, as if she were losing the control over herself which she had maintained by an almost super-human effort. If Vane Manning had sought for a mode of avenging himself for her treatment of him, he could not have found a more deadly, a more cruel one. For a moment or two her lips trembled with the rage—and, yes, hate—which possessed her; but she pressed her hand to her lips and forced the hot words back.

"You—mean well," she said at last. "Your cousin should be very grateful to you."

"Then—then you are not offended? You'll think it over, and—and be a little kinder to Julian?" he said, gravely, earnestly.

"I will think it over, and Mr. Shore shall have no cause to complain of my unkindness," she said. Then suddenly she laughed, not loudly, but so strangely that Vane started and looked at her with questioning surprise; for as he had ceased to love her, as his heart was buried there on the Fairy Isle, he had no suspicion that she still cared for him; had she not left him of her own free will?

"What—what is the matter?" he asked with all the denseness of the straightforward man.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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5.50 p.m.—For St. Stephen, Houlton, Woodstock, Boston, etc. Montreal and West. Palace Sleeper Fredericton Jct. to Montreal. Pullman Sleeper Fredericton Jct. to Boston.

9.00 p.m.—For St. John and East.

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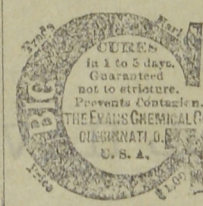
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