

# The Power of Persuasion

Or Lady Caraven's Labor of Love.

## CHAPTER I.

A week had passed since Lady Caraven reached Paris—a strange week. She had seen but little of her husband. He never took breakfast with her; they met at dinner, and twice he had taken her to the opera. He never interfered in the least with any of her affairs.

Lady Caraven was a bride of a week. Left without a mother while still in the nursery, her father had educated her in almost convent-like seclusion. One afternoon, a few months before our story opens, Arley Ransome, lawyer and money-lender, had introduced to Hildred, his only child, the handsome young Lord Caraven. On the day following he had announced to her that the noble lord had done her the honor to sue for her hand, and had intimated that it was his wish that she should accept him. Flattered, and entirely ignorant of the ways of the world, she had fallen in with her father's wishes without demur.

A scene in Arley Ransome's office a short time previous to this would throw a light on this sudden and brief courting. Besides Ransome himself, the only person present was Lord Caraven, whose prodigality had wasted his inheritance and covered his ancestral home of Ravensmere with mortgages.

"I have worked hard all my life," said Arley Ransome—"worked as few men have ever done before—from sunrise to sunset, and often through the long, silent night. I have worked because I love money—because I am ambitious; because I have had an end in view. You know my lord, that beside practicing as a lawyer I have been, and am now, a money-lender; it is no news to you that I advanced the mortgage-money on Ravensmere, and that, unless you pay it, the estate becomes mine.

"I have a daughter, and she must take the place I would fain have given to my boy. My lord, I make you this offer. You are a ruined man; you tell me there remains for you no hope—nothing but death. Now I will give you my life, liberty, wealth. I will make you greater than any of the Earls of Caraven have been yet. I will give my daughter a dowry of two hundred thousand pounds if you will marry her."

Lord Caraven lost his self-possession for one half minute; he literally looked as he felt—bewildered. Then an indignant repudiation of the proposal sprang to his lips. He would not listen to it. But finally when he had become accustomed to the idea and realized that his only choice was between the girl and a revolver he gave way. He promised to marry her and give her his rank, at the same he cursed himself for a villain for wrecking an innocent girl's life. She, thinking that he loved her, and altogether ignorant of any other reason for the marriage, accepted him as we know.

He sent every morning to ask if she had any particular wish for that day—if there was any place she desired to see. At first she said "Yes," and went to the different places of note. He accompanied her, but she could not avoid thinking that he was slightly bored by these excursions. The next time he sent she declined, and he did not remonstrate; he made no remark, and she felt almost sure that he was relieved by her refusal. When they went to the opera, they were never alone—he always secured some companion. It seemed to Hildred that he was quite as much a stranger as on the first day he entered the Hollies.

She had, indeed, no part in his existence—he lived as though she were not. He had fulfilled his part of the contract by giving her his name, his rank, his position. That a living, beating human heart might long for more did not occur to him. He never thought of her as his wife; the chances were that, if any one had asked him suddenly if he

was married, he would have said "No." He had paid the forfeit of his folly by being in some measure compelled to burden himself with this young girl.

At first he was considerably surprised in his wife. He thought to himself that the daughter of a man like lawyer Ransome, sharp, shrewd, cunning, must inherit some of his propensities—that she would occupy herself with small intrigues and maneuvers of all kinds. She did nothing of the sort; she was quiet, grave, calm, self-possessed. He did not even dream of the unstirred passion and tenderness in her girlish heart.

It was decidedly tiresome having a wife. True he saw little of her—few days together they sometimes did not exchange a word; but people began to look upon him as a married man, and he did not like it—when they met him they asked how Lady Caraven was.

"Lady Caraven!" He smiled scornfully to himself, remembering all the fair and stately dames who had borne that name; remembering the dark-eyed girl who now bore it, he smiled in bitter scorn.

He had never been one of those men who look forward to marriage as the one great end and aim of life. It had never had any charm for him even, even in the days when he was free to dream as he would; but his visions had been of a golden-haired love, radiant and fair, never of a girl-wife, the daughter of a man who had, as it were, outwitted him—the child of a man who had dealt faithlessly with him. He shuddered at the very thought of it.

He was not given to thought—the rules of right and wrong had not troubled him very much. He never realized that it was wrong to have married a girl he did not like—wrong to leave a young wife so entirely alone. He never thought of those things; he only remembered that marriage was a burden to him, that his wife's presence was some kind of mute reproach, that he was a thousand times happier away from her than with her.

Certainly he felt the burden less at Paris than he would have felt it elsewhere, because there was always something to occupy him and distract his thoughts, there were always some kind friends to relieve him of the ennui and tediousness of existence.

One evening he was rather startled by Hildred. There was a favorite singer at the opera, and they went to hear her. She was very fair, and the gentlemen were busily engaged in discussing her. With Lord and Lady Caraven was a Frenchman, the Comte de Quesne, a great admirer of fair women. The conversation kept up chiefly between the two gentlemen, was about the charming actress.

"She is of real English type," said the comte, "and the English ladies are so fair—they are adorable!"

"I think myself," remarked the earl, "that a fair-haired English girl is certainly the loveliest object in creation."

The comte laughed.

"You prefer the blondes to the brunettes, then?" he said.

"Certainly," replied Lord Caraven. "I do not see how a woman can be beautiful unless she be fair." He had entirely forgotten his young girl-wife with the dark eyes and the Spanish face. He would not have wanted to have her, but he had forgotten her presence. She heard the words. At the time she made no remark, although they burned into her heart like fire.

The comte went home with them, and they were joined by another friend; but she found an opportunity of speaking to her husband when the other gentlemen were busy with cards, and Lord Caraven had withdrawn to look over some letters that had just arrived. She sum-

moned up courage and went up to him.

"Lord Caraven," she said, "would your mind telling me one thing?"

He looked up in wonder—it was so seldom that she voluntarily addressed him. As he looked he was slightly impressed with her appearance—the tall, slender figure was draped in soft, shining silk, the girlish face was flushed with the effort of speaking to him, the dark eyes were bright and starlike, filled with unutterable thoughts. He could not help owing to himself that there was some beauty in the thick coils of dark hair, in the tall, slim, graceful figure, in the perfect grace and harmony. She was simply yet beautifully dressed; a pomegranate-blossom lay in the coils of her hair.

"I want you tell me one thing," she repeated. "If you admire fair girls with golden hair, why did you marry me, with hair and eyes so dark?"

She asked the question in such perfect good faith, in such earnest tones, with such sad, sweet eyes, that he was touched, not deeply, but as he would have been had some child come to him with trembling lips to tell a pitiful tale.

"Why," she said, "if that was the case, did you marry me?"

"You know why I married you," he replied, gravely—"why ask me the question?"

He saw a vivid color spread over her face, a bright light shine in her eyes. The simple girl thought and believed he meant that she knew he had married her because he loved her. Her heart gave a great, glad bound. He loved her! She would understand better in time; she would only know why he seemed reserved, reticent, cold, and indifferent.

"You know why I married you," the handsome earl had said; and the words filled her heart with a strange, sweet pain.

"I will try to remember," she said, gently.

Dull as was his ear, he heard new music in her voice.

"You will remember what?" he asked.

"I will remember why you have married me," she replied; and as she went away he wondered greatly. "I should not think that she is likely to forget it," he said to himself. "Certainly women are puzzles. She will try to remember why I married her—and the words seemed like melting music on her lips, a light that was like sunshine on flowers spread over her face! Why, I married her because her father sold her for a title and she was willing to be sold!"

To those dying with thirst the fall of dew is a boon. To Lady Caraven the earl's few words seemed full of meaning; she said them over and over again to herself. "You know why I married you," she said to herself with many varieties of accent, with different intonations, and each time that she repeated them they seemed to mean more and more. For some hours she felt much happier; it was like a break in the cold tide of indifference. She kept expecting kinder words to follow, but they did not. Lord Caraven did not appear to remember what he had said.

He went out that evening after the "little supper" was over. She heard a whisper of "billiards."

Nothing came of the one solitary gleam of kindness. The next day Hildred did not see the earl at all; he went over to St. Cloud with some of his friends. The slight gleam of happiness died away, and the old feeling of desolation came back to her. The Comtesse de Quesne called and pressed her to go out, but the girl was sick at heart. It was such a strange life—married without love, without even friendship, or liking—married, yet living with her husband as though she were the merest stranger—his wife, bearing his name, sharing his fate, yet knowing no more of him than

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did the lowest servant in the household; his thoughts, his mind, his plans, his desires, his interests, his

amusements, his pleasures were all strange to her. It was an unheard-of position, an unheard-of fate.

"If I did not know that he had married me because he loved me, I should say rather that he did not like me," was a thought which often occurred to her, but she drove it away as unworthy. "If I were beautiful," thought the lovely girl, "I should think that he had married me for my beauty—if I had grand connections, for them; but I have none—I have nothing—my love has stooped to me from high estate." I shall never understand what he saw in me to make him love me."

She had paid so little attention to the words that she did not even remember that she had been called "Arley Ransome's heiress." Of all the ideas that occurred to her, the one that she had been married for her money was the furthest from her thoughts.

Three weeks had passed away, and Lord Caraven began to wonder how much longer he was to remain in Paris. If he had been free to follow his own inclinations, they would have led him to the gaming-tables at Baden-Baden. But, as he said, impatiently, he had no idea of going there with a whole train of people to look after.

How long would she expect to remain in Paris? The honeymoon—that most absurd of all institutions—was supposed to last a month. It would be better, perhaps, to remain there until it was over, and then go to Ravensmere. He would be more comfortable there. The house was spacious, and it would be possible for him to move about without being haunted by the girlish, wistful face. So in Paris, until the honeymoon was over, he decided on remaining.

(To Be Continued.)

# Confusion of Caste

## CHAPTER XXVII.

"I have been writing to Frank, and my letter will reach him tomorrow," Mrs. Harcourt told Dorcas on the day after they had had their talk together, and then she paused a moment, and—"Do you think he will be likely to come any sooner for that? You ought to know better than I. Do you think he will come?" she said.

It was on a Wednesday that she had written to her son. He would get her letter in London on Thursday morning, and it would take him five hours to come from London to the Dover House.

"If he liked to come to-morrow he would be able to do it," Dorcas began involuntarily to think, as the hours passed on. "He might be here, perhaps, by afternoon; he might be here, I know, by dinner-time, if he chose, and, oh surely he will choose!"

She thought to herself, that night—"Shall I be happier when he comes than I am now?" With a little grave foreboding, she thought—"I wonder if the happiest hours of all our lives are not the hours before we gain what we want most!"

It was raining heavily on Thursday morning; it rained for a long time, hour after hour, and Dorcas watched the low-hanging clouds till she was tired, and stood at the window, listening to the ceaseless pattering of the drops upon the garden path. If it would but clear up and let her get out! the girl thought, restlessly. It seemed to her as though she could not breathe indoors; the beating of her heart oppressed her.

Would Frank come? Now that the time at which it was possible for him to come had drawn so near, she began to tell herself that she was foolish to expect him. He might have been out of town, and not have received his mother's letter; he might have business that would detain him; he might not care for her as she cared for him. "Oh! my dear, do you want me less than you used to do?" she began to cry, walking up and down her room, when she could bear to sit still no longer.

There was a sound of wheels on the wet gravel about three o'clock, and Dorcas's heart gave one great bound, and then seemed as if it ceased to beat. Mrs. Harcourt was reading, and she too suddenly put down her book. But the door opened in a minute, and only some ordinary visitors were ushered in—a Mrs. Wilson and her daughter, who lived in the neighborhood, and who had purposely chosen this wet afternoon, they said, on which to pay their visit, because they were sure that they should find Mrs. Harcourt at home. So the mother attached herself to Mrs. Harcourt, and the daughter to Dorcas, and they talked and the call lasted a long time.

They were lively people, and they talked so loud and long that not even Dorcas's ears caught the sound of another step presently that came up the garden stairs, and entered the house by the unfastened garden-door. Both mother and daughter were talking volubly, and the room was full of their voices and their laughter—when suddenly the moment came at last that Dorcas had imagined to herself a thousand times.

It came—this ineffable moment that she had dreamed of by day and night—the supreme moment of her life, as she had thought it would surely be; and, instead of rapture and unspeakable emotion, it brought only

a quick start of surprise—a rush of blood to her cheek—and then, for a little while, almost a cessation of all feeling. She merely turned her head as the door opened, with the rather tired smile with which she had been listening to one of Miss Wilson's stories still upon her lips, and her eyes and Frank's met for something, as it seemed to her, less than an instant. And then there was a sudden buzz of welcome—a series of delighted exclamations from Mrs. and Miss Wilson, and, after a few seconds, Frank's hand clasped hers; but she had not courage then even to attempt to look into his face.

With a feeling as if she was half stunned, as if she was only half awake and half alive, she sat still minute after minute. She said "Yes" and "No" almost mechanically to Miss Wilson; she caught a few of Frank's words as she listened with yearning ears; she could not keep her eyes from sometimes turning furtively towards him.

I do not think that first meetings after long absences are always sweet. Time works its changes so fast, and the face we left seems so often not the face we find again. Was there not something different in Frank?—some change that made his look unfamiliar? There came a sense to her as of something altered, or lost, that filled her with a vague pain and chillness.

At the end of a quarter of an hour the Wilsons took their leave, and Frank left the room with them to hand them to their carriage. And then Mrs. Harcourt went up to Dorcas, and put her hand upon her arm.

"Stay here, my dear, and I will send him back to you," she said, abruptly. "You shall have him soon; I only want him first for a very little while."

The two women looked at one another for a moment. There was something in the elder one's face that Dorcas remembered afterwards; but at the time, she only said, "You are very good to me," hurriedly, and half aloud.

She sat alone for what seemed to her a long time. (Perhaps Mrs. Harcourt did not think it long.) Then in the silence she heard his step crossing the hall, and the door opened and he came to her.

Had she been afraid a minute ago? She had made herself a coward with thinking that he was changed; but did he seem changed now as he stood at last looking in her face again, with more than the light of his old gladness shining in the eyes she loved so well?

(To Be Continued.)

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