

STRONGER THAN DEATH

OR

A RANSOMED LIFE

CHAPTER VIII.

It was as fair a picture as was ever framed in autumnal bravery that met Vivian Ardel's eyes as he passed first through the rustic opening to the smooth green quadrangle, shut out from the river by a high screen of trees, with the restless sheen of silver glittering through the leaves.

A game of lawn tennis was in full swing, and for the moment the players were too absorbed to notice the newcomers. Further off, away in the shadows of the trees, gay specks of color on the dark green, the three children were at croquet, with big bright balls and mallets almost as tall as themselves.

Close to the edge of the tennis court, under the shade of a wide-spreading beech, Eva Trevor's tea-table was set, resplendent in silver and old Worcester china, blue and gold. A strip of rich silk embroidery tumbled from her lap on to the sward as she leaped up impulsively to welcome her visitors.

She smiled with demure delight as she saw Ardel's eyes turn to the tennis court, where the young girl in the nearer court was about to serve. A moment, lightly poised, with foot advanced and arm uplifted, the girl stood, in act to strike—as fair a vision as ever warmed an artist's soul. But in that moment her eyes met Ardel's, and she knew him at a glance. The ball flew aimlessly into the net, and the racket dangling loose in her hand, she moved slowly and shyly across the ground to join the group now gathered round Eva Trevor's tea-table.

Seen unexpectedly Ardel would hardly have known her, though it was only a few months since they had met. The haggard and hunted look was gone from her face. Her cheeks wore the tint of the blush rose, and her soft blue eyes were full of restful happiness.

"You need no introduction here, Ardel," said Trevor, smiling; "you introduced yourself once upon a time."

As Ardel took the little hand she offered him so shyly, the rose-tint deepened on her cheek, and Eva again stole a quick, pleased look at the group.

"Let me introduce Mr. Wickham," Trevor broke in. Then a look of pity stole into Lucy's eyes, for she knew of the ordeal through which this man had passed, and she turned to greet him with a smile.

But Wickham—the ready-witted Wickham—stood for a long moment silent and motionless, dazed by her beauty, and in that moment Ardel's keen eyes read in his face the birth of a passion devouring as fire, hungry as the grave.

The look passed from his face instantly, and he bowed and smiled, murmuring inaudible commonplace. But Eva spoke out as she welcomed him.

"We pitied you from our very hearts, Mr. Wickham," she said, "we two women. We knew you were innocent, of course, and prayed for you night and day. Thank God you escaped. God is just always."

"Thanks to your husband, Mrs. Trevor," began Wickham, with an uneasy smile.

But she held up a warning forefinger.

"Oh, we know," she said smiling; "John has no secrets from me. Thanks to Dr. Ardel, who has added yet another to the long list of the lives he has saved and made happy."

Again her eyes glanced aside, and

Wickham, following her gaze, was surprised at the gratitude that shone in Lucy's face, and looked inquiringly at Eva.

Meanwhile Trevor had for the moment drawn Ardel aside, and they were speaking earnestly about a strange lunacy case in which the distinguished lawyer had been just engaged, and in which a great estate was involved. The owner of the property had fallen in the hunting field, his temple striking a projecting stone. In that instant of time he had been transformed from a cultured gentleman, the kindest of husbands and of fathers, to a mere brute beast, full of savage instincts and appetites. So he had continued for months. His bodily health was perfect; only his mind and moral character had vanished.

"Some pressure or hurt to the brain tissue," Ardel said. "I shall be glad to see him, of course, and do what I can. It does not seem a desperate case by any means. A trifle, is it not, Trevor? to rob a man of 'God-like reason.' If I get the brain tissue right, and I think I can, the mind will come back. It's humiliating, is it not, that a skull-full of grey pulp does all the thinking for the best of us?"

Trevor shook his head reproachfully evading a reply.

"I knew you would help me, Ardel," Wickham said; "and you turned again to the group at the tea-table."

"We were just talking of you, Vivian," said Eva. "I was telling Mr. Wickham about Lucy, and how—"

"Then don't," he interposed briskly; "it's not on the programme. Tea and tennis are what we are here for. Yes, I'll take another cup; thanks."

"We have got the material for a capital set," said Trevor. "There's young Lewin, that was playing just now with Lucy—you know him, Ardel, I think; you know his father. He's next thing to a tennis champion. Lewin and Wickham ought to match Lucy and yourself. You play, I suppose, Wickham?"

"A little," Wickham replied, with the modesty of excellence.

"Then I'll stand out for this set," said Trevor.

"Won't you play, Mrs. Trevor?" asked Wickham, turning to Eva. He did not seem altogether pleased with the proposed arrangement for a match which pitted him against Lucy.

"Oh, no," she said, smiling. "I never play tennis. I never play any game. I cannot get up any interest in games. I cannot understand why any one should care which side of the net a ball strikes or falls, or should rush about trying to hit it. I suppose I was born old, for, even as a little girl, I felt just the same way. I never could enjoy games. I nursed my dollies then, as I mind my babies now, and let others play."

Meanwhile, Trevor picked up his book, which lay face down on the short grass, and dropped contentedly into a wickerwork lounge beside his wife. "Darby and Joan," he said carelessly. "We'll look on a little woman, while those children amuse themselves."

"I hope you play very well, Dr. Ardel," Lucy said timidly, when they got together to their court.

"I'm only a beginner; but I'm not a bit like Eva. I do hate to be beaten. It's silly, I know; but I cannot help it."

"I can do no more than my best," Ardel answered, smiling at her child-like eagerness. But she knew, at once, that "his best" meant a great deal.

It was a close match, and a brilliant one. Both the young men played well, especially Wickham; clean and swift in stroke and service, but just a trifle uncertain. Now and again, at some turning-point of the game, the ball would fly from his racket out of the court, or go spinning into the net. Lucy, too, was brilliant, but erratic. So far as Ardel was concerned, he left the play mainly to his partner, and took few strokes, but missed none. There was something almost uncanny about his skill. The balls flew precisely where he wanted them, within an inch of the net, or an inch of the line. It seemed chance at first, but it was a chance that was always chancing. Now and again the younger men got away with a rush in the earlier games. But Lucy and her partner invariably stole up in the end for an exciting finish.

In this way they had won the first set by a couple of strokes, and the second was almost over. Wickham and his partner again led to the sixth game, where they were caught and held by their opponents. Then the "vantage" swayed backwards and forwards. Twice Lucy, in her excitement, just missed the final stroke that would have closed the set, and twice her partner had pulled off a game that had appeared lost.

There was a lull for a moment, while some new balls were sent for. Lucy stood, fanning her flushed face with the brim of her broad straw hat, and the breeze of it made her soft, wavy hair rise and fall about her forehead like a luminous mist. Ardel's eyes were charmed and his heart warmed by her innocent and unconscious loveliness.

"Your service," she said eagerly, when the balls were brought, yet with an underlying amusement at her own eagerness; "and it's our vantage game. Oh, I do wish you could win this time!"

He nodded and smiled, as he swung his racket over his head. Heretofore he had served softly. Now the whole strength of his arm and shoulder went into the stroke. Swift and straight the ball flew, a line of white, just over the net, and glanced away into space from the extreme left-hand corner of the court—an impossible service. "Fifteen." Again the same catapult service. "Thirty."

And again, "Forty."

The fourth service Wickham took with a miraculous back-hand; but Ardel answered with a quick volley along the side line, and Lucy had her wish: the game and set were won.

"Wonderful!" she cried, and clapped her hands with child-like glee. "I cannot help it," she went on, answering the amused smile in his eyes. "Whatever I am doing, I have to do with my whole heart; even though it is only a game of tennis."

Wickham, who was hovering uneasily round the tennis ground, joined them. "You play wonderfully, Dr. Ardel," he said, a little constrainedly. "Are you ready for another game, Miss Ray?"

"But Eva interposed. "Lucy has played enough," she said. "She gets as excited as a child. Take her away for a quiet stroll before dinner, Vivian."

"You and Lewin will make a capital match, Wickham, and I'll umpire," said Trevor lazily; and Wickham made a pretence of being delighted.

As Ardel and Lucy strolled away together down a long, shady walk that ran by the brink of the whispering river, her mood changed. She grew suddenly shy and silent, and the woman absorbed the child in her.

"How thoughtless you must think me!" she said at last, "and how ungrateful! You, of all men, who have given me back my life and happiness. Words seem weak and worthless when I think of what you have done for me. I have often and often longed for the chance to thank you, and now I cannot. Oh! I wish you could look right into my heart and know what I feel."

"Believe me," he said bravely, "you thank me best by being happy."

Something in the low tone, vaguely remembered, as in a dream, stirred her heart. As she raised her clear blue eyes to him there were tears in them—tears of vague delight.

For a moment their eyes met and their souls looked through; then her gaze sought the ground, but she still felt his eyes upon her face.

"Happy!" she answered; "how can I help being happy? There is happiness in the very air of this place. My days go by so swiftly, I can scarce count them, and each is happier than the last. I love to be loved, and I feel that they are fond of me."

"And the past?" said Ardel. The words dropped from him almost unthinkingly.

"Oh! the present is all the happier for the troubles of the past, as light is brighter from the darkness."

"You are fortunate in that feeling, Miss Ray. There are many for whom the shadow of a gloomy past clouds the present and the future. Still—"

He broke off with a vague inflection of disappointment in his voice.

Her eyes, raised suddenly, met his, and she cried, "you must not think that of me. Indeed, I have not forgotten the dead. The thought of them, the remembrance of them, the certainty of our future meeting, is part of my life. I know that even now they rejoice in my happiness and share my gratitude."

HAD TO LEAVE SCHOOL,

THE PITYABLE STORY OF A YOUNG GIRL.

Every Mother of a Growing Girl Will Be Interested in the Story as Told by the Young Lady.

Miss Laura Dumontier is the daughter of a well-to-do farmer in St. Cuthbert, Quebec. The circumstances under which she was forced to discontinue her studies and leave school will be of interest to all mothers of growing girls, and Miss Dumontier consents to make them public for the benefit her experience may be to others. She says: "At the age of twelve I was sent to a convent school in this parish. At that time I was as healthy as any girl of my age. At the end of a couple of years, however, I felt my strength leaving me. My appetite grew poor, and I suffered from severe headaches. I nevertheless continued my studies until October, 1901, when I became very ill and was forced to leave school. The headaches that had bothered me became almost constant. I suffered from pains in the back and stomach and the least exertion would leave me almost breathless. A doctor was called in and he said I was suffering from anaemia, and was in a very dangerous condition. He treated me until February without the least beneficial result. Then another doctor was called in, but no better results followed his treatment. My parents were now thoroughly alarmed and two other doctors from St. Barthelemy were called in, and after consultation their verdict was that my trouble had reached an incurable stage. I was greatly disheartened and did not expect to live long when one day one of my friends asked me why I did not try Dr. Williams' Pink Pills. I had lost confidence in all medicines, but was willing to try anything that might help me, and my father got me a supply of the pills. When I had used a couple of boxes it was very plain that the pills were doing me good, and after I had taken them a couple of months I had once more enjoying the blessing of good health. I feel that Dr. Williams' Pink Pills have saved my life and I gladly give my experience in the hope that it may be of benefit to some other young girls."

No discovery of modern times has proved so a blessing to young girls and women as Dr. Williams' Pink Pills. They act directly on the blood and nerves, invigorate the body, regulate the functions and restore health and strength to the exhausted patient when every effort of the physician proves unavailing. These pills are sold by all dealers in medicine, or may be had by mail post paid at 50 cents a box, or six boxes for \$2.50, by writing to the Dr. Williams' Medicine Co., Brockville, Ont. Remember that no other medicine can take the place of these pills, and see that the full name, Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for Pale People, is on the wrapper around every box.

"But they are dead," Ardel said; and he felt, as he spoke, how feeble was the answer to her vivid faith.

"Not dead, but gone before," she answered, "and waiting to welcome us. The father and the mother I loved are still alive for me. I should die of grief if I doubted it. I speak to them often when I am alone, and I know they hear, and see, and love me as in the old times, and are glad of my joy, as they grieved for my sorrow."

There was a light in her eyes that the fervor of conviction in her that filled him with vague envy and longing. He thought to himself, if he could only share her comforting faith, how different would life seem to him—and death.

They walked on a few paces in silence, and again she stole a look at his face, and saw it troubled.

"Shall we return?" he asked timidly.

"Please don't. It is a pleasure to me to hear you tell me you are happy."

"It is a pleasure, then, that you have earned, Dr. Ardel; but for you—oh! do believe I am most deeply grateful. Night and morning I pray for your happiness. It is the only return I can make."

Listening to her earnest voice, he did not dare to tell her he had no belief in prayer, no hope of a life beyond the grave. Her fervor was infectious, and for one fleeting moment half-unconsciously he shared her faith.

The cloud cleared from his face. He lightly turned the talk back to her daily life at Lavella. In low, pleasant voice and kindly eyes there was that which invited confidence. She, in artless innocence, laid bare the innermost thoughts of her pure soul. She was as yet half woman, half child; a woman in her feelings deep and tender, a child in joyous zest of life. She told him of her favorite books. In Lavella books were everywhere, and reading was to her a keen delight. She lightly glanced at the varied charms they held for her with that keen instinct for the true and beautiful that is a surer guide than reason's cold analysis. The pleasure trips with Eva by road and river, through scenes of placid beauty; the quaintly humorous sayings and doings of the little ones; on every topic of her pleasant life her talk ran

freely, enticed by Ardel's insidious questioning. Her joy in life, a joy that gave a fresh charm to her loveliness, touched the heart of her hearer with a sympathy keen as pain.

She was telling him of that happy summer's day when she first discovered Tennyson and read the Idylls of the King through the long, lazy sultry hours in a pleasure boat moored in still water under the dark green shade, while the river went by whispering and sparkling in the sunlight, when the deep boom of the dinner gong pealed out through the calm evening, and she broke off abruptly with a sudden relapse into shyness.

"How I must have wearied you!" she faltered. "I have been thinking my thoughts out loud all this time."

"You have not wearied me," he said simply. "I wanted to hear about yourself, and tempted you to tell me."

"And I yielded to temptation. Now at least I must run away. Eva will want me. She makes me believe that I am of use to her."

She gave one bright parting glance and smile and was gone, light as a sunbeam, across the lawn.

That artless smile flashed through his blood and brain, kindling a new life in him. Unreasoning exultation ran riot in his veins as he followed her slowly to the house.

At dinner Ardel sat by Eva, and Wickham and Lucy were together. The ordeal he had passed through, and her pity for him, were Wickham's sure passport to the young girl's favor. A handsome face and joyous manner completed the charm that pity began. Soon they were laughing and chatting together like familiar friends, with all the frank freemasonry of youth.

Ardel, in close converse with Eva, found his attention wandering, and ever and again his eyes would rest for a moment on the gay young couple with a vague sadness too gentle to be called envy.

In the drawing-room he found a quiet corner for himself in the shade, where he sat alone and silent for a little, as if some sad purpose were shaping itself in his mind.

But Eva found him in his exile. "I've a treat for you, Vivian," she said; "you have not yet heard Lucy sing."

Wickham had just given them a gay French chanson, accompanying himself on the mandoline, from which the notes flew under his rapid fingertips like showers of colored sparks.

"Now your turn, Lucy," Eva whispered; "a sad song, for a change. He likes sad songs best."

Without preface or accompaniment, Lucy sang "Auld Robin Gray." Hers was a wonderful voice; the high notes clear as the pure thrill of the thrush, the low notes soft as the coo of the dove in the heart of the woods heard through the hush of the summer noon.

The girl's soul was in the song. Its sorrow wept through the plaintive notes, touching all hearts to tenderest sympathy, half pleasure and half pain.

"Sweets to the sweet," Ardel whispered to Eva, when the song ended in a silence that was more flattering than applause, "and youth to the young. I have always thought that song the saddest in language, but it never seemed so sad before. 'Auld Robin Gray' was most of all to be pitied."

"Hasn't she a lovely voice, Vivian? You seem to feel its echoes in your heart."

"She sings as if I could fancy one of the angels in your happy heaven might sing, Eva," he answered, smiling.

(To be continued.)


OF INTEREST TO MOTHERS.

A Safeguard for Children Cutting Teeth in Hot Weather.

The time when children are cutting teeth is always an anxious one for mothers and when this occurs during the hot weather solicitude often deepens into alarm. So many little ones often result fatally are liable to ensure that every mother will be interested in a medical discovery that robs this period of many dangers. Mrs. R. Ferguson, of 105 Mansfield street, Montreal, Que., gives her experience for the benefit of other mothers. She says: "My baby has always been small and delicate, and suffered so much last summer with his teeth that I did not think he would live. The medicine the doctor ordered for him did not do him much good. Then he was attacked with dysentery and a very hot skin and cough. I sent for Baby's Own Tablets, and they did him a wonderful amount of good, and he is now getting on splendidly."

Baby's Own Tablets are sold by all dealers in medicine or will be sent post paid, at twenty-five cents a box, by the Dr. Williams' Medicine Company, Brockville, Ont.

She (romantic)—"When you first saw the wonderful Niagara Falls didn't you feel as though you would like to jump in?" He—"No; I hadn't gotten my hotel bill then."



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Seldom, if ever, has any medicine secured such hearty endorsement of physicians and people alike. The cures which it has brought about have often been most extraordinary, and anyone who regularly and persistently uses this great food cure is sure to find it of inestimable value as a nerve restorative and blood builder.

By noting your increase in weight while using Dr. Chase's Nerve Food you can prove that new, firm flesh and muscular tissue are being added to the body. 50 cents a box, six boxes for \$2.50, at all dealers, or Edmondson, Bates & Company, Toronto. To protect you against imitations the portrait and signature of Dr. A. W. Chase, on every box,

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