

STRONGER THAN DEATH OR A RANSOMED LIFE

CHAPTER VIII.—(Con.)

"Oh, Lucy is better than any angel," said Eva, with impulsive affection, ignoring theology; "she is a sweet, true-hearted girl. One would fancy she had never known an hour's sorrow, her soul is so steeped in sunshine."

"The sunshine seems brightest when we come to it through shadow and darkness," Ardel answered. "Oh! Vivian," Eva broke out earnestly, "are you not glad and proud to have saved her? To have saved a life like hers is a thing to be proud and glad of while your own life lasts."

"While my own life lasts," he echoed musingly; "but a brief space now, Eva, for joy or pride."

For answer she touched her closed lips with her finger-tips.

Wickham had enticed Lucy to a second song, to which his mandoline tinkled a gay accompaniment.

It was a lively love song this time. Young love and merriment rippled and laughed through the notes, as the skylark's joy overflows in a fountain of delight through the pure fresh air of the morning.

A moment afterwards Lucy slipped quietly from the room.

"The little ones," Eva said. "I heard a whispered promise to Willy of a fairy tale in the nursery. They love her stories better than the books. You have seen and heard the last of Lucy for to-night, Vivian. Are you sorry?"

She spoke lightly, but there was a curious underlying earnestness in her voice, and she glanced quickly at his face to read his thoughts.

It may be that her woman's eyes found there more than she sought, for she changed the subject quickly.

"That is a wonderful diamond." She touched the morsel of many-colored light that flickered on his finger. "You usen't to wear jewels."

Trevor's voice broke in before he could answer: "Come, have a game of billiards, Wickham; there is no parting Eva and Ardel when they get together. There's no playing billiards with him, either," he added, as he and Wickham left the room; "he seems to mesmerize the billiard balls. They have to do exactly what he wants them."

"I'd rather he'd mesmerize the billiard balls than me," Wickham replied laughingly; "I'm half afraid of him."

Meanwhile Ardel had drawn the diamond ring from his little finger, and dropped it into Eva's small white palm, where it glistened like a fire-fly.

"Are you quite sure this is a jewel, Eva?"

"It looks exquisite. I have never seen anything so beautiful. Isn't it a real diamond?"

"Oh, it's real enough. Mr. Ophir, of New Bond Street, tested it by every test known to the diamond expert, and pronounced it a genuine Brazilian brilliant of the purest water. He laughed in my face when I told him I made it myself. But it was true, all the same. I don't care now it was made, or who made it," said he; "I will buy it as a pure diamond, and as many more of the same kind as you wish to bring me. Only don't make too many of them, Dr. Ardel, and flood the markets. Well, I don't mean to make any more."

"It's wonderful!" cried Eva, with a woman's innate delight in precious stones. "Can you make as many and as big as you choose?"

"I think I could manage a Koh-

Noor if I tried hard," he said, still smiling; "but I don't intend to try. There is nothing very wonderful about it, Eva. Other people have bought small diamonds cheaply; I have made a big one cheaply. That is the first, and will be the last, of my making. Will you please me by wearing it for my sake?"

"But why for me, Vivian?" she said, with her eyes on the diamond, which sparkled restlessly in her soft white palm. Then, after a moment, in a lower tone, "Is there no other woman whom—"

"There is none, Eva," he said, answering her half-spoken question; "there never has been. Of what is called love, that love which has bound you and John together, and made your lives together a long happiness, I know nothing, except in vaguest fancy. I have often longed for love as I walked my lonely way through this wonderful world. But it has not come with longing for it. Sometimes a bright eye, or a sweet smile, or a soft voice has fluttered my careless heart with an idle fancy, that lightly passed away, and was not love. Sometimes I seem to have found my ideal in a picture or a book. I have dreamed myself in love with Shakespeare's Rosalind and with Tennyson's Enid in turn. But of real, live love, of which poets write, and which men and women feel,—love which absorbs all other feelings and fills a life with its radiance,—I have been ignorant as the blind of color, or the deaf of music. Love has passed me by, Eva, on the other side, and it is too late to hope or fear a visit now."

"It is not too late, Vivian; I do hope it is not too late," said Eva softly. "Love would transform your soul. In its pure light the dark shadow fears that trouble you at times would disappear."

"No, Eva; if what you say of love be true—and I believe it true—it would but give a double terror to death. We die again and again in the deaths of those we love. The brighter our lives are the more horrible is the thought of the inevitable, unending darkness into which they vanish."

"But life itself is poor and empty," the woman said, "and is not worth the living until it has known love. If you die unloving and unloved, you die lacking the best gift of God. Oh! Vivian, I had so hoped—"

"Your hope is my fear, Eva," he interposed. "I am not so dull but I can read the thoughts that shine through those clear eyes of yours. But it cannot be; it must not be; even if I might hope to win her love. I dare not wed my failing years to the joy and freshness of her youth."

"Let her choose for herself; she will choose best for her own happiness."

"No; in this, at least, I must choose for her. I will not let any vague, girlish fancy born of gratitude ruin her life."

With a demure twinkle in her soft brown eyes Eva looked straight in his. "And yet you say you never knew what love meant, Vivian?"

He met her gaze frankly, smiling a little sadly as he answered: "No; and I mean never to know. Eva. For this reason I leave you to-night. Tomorrow I will start again on one of my rambles round the world."

"And leave her to the first chance comer to woo and win?"

"I leave her in your care, Eva."

"In my care! What can I do, what can any man or woman do, to

shut out love? You remember in the old fairy tale how the king closed his daughter up in the top storey of a tower of brass to save her from the unwelcome suitor. But it was all of no use. The suitor came, and saw, and conquered. Precaution is hopeless. Love will enter where he chooses, bringing with him great joy or great sorrow, as it may chance. Even now—"

"There was a long pause. "Well, 'even now?'" Ardel asked, a little impatiently.

"Surely you have eyes, Vivian; you have seen how young Wickham is captivated."

"Yes, I have seen. I hoped—I mean I thought, I might be mistaken. Then, after a pause, "Well, and if it were so?"

"Would you wish it? Be frank with me. Do you like him well enough to wish it?"

"There is no use trying to hide my thoughts from your eyes, Eva. I'm jealous of him; jealous of his youth, jealous of his right to woo and his hope to win her. Yet, in spite of my jealousy, I feel there is something in his frank, joyous nature wonderfully attractive. And you?"

"I will be frank too. I have pitied him from my heart for the terrible ordeal he has endured. I see him bright, handsome, innocent and light-hearted. Yet there have been times this evening I came near hating him. If I were Lucy's mother, Vivian, I would ten thousand times sooner give her to you."

He smiled and shook his head. "I know what that means, and I'm duly grateful. I cannot help being glad you are unfair where I am concerned, Eva. But, believe me, it is best for all of us that I should go away."

"Best for you, perhaps; though I greatly doubt it."

"Best for her too, believe me. Youth must match with youth. Age and death are stronger than love."

"It's profanity to say so; love lives for ever. I know and feel it; it is part of my soul."

He sighed without answering, as one spares the bright, happy, foolish fancies of a child.

At that moment Trevor broke into the room—an embodiment of kindly common-sense and good-humor. He was in his shirt sleeves, and had a billiard cue in one hand and a lump of chalk in the other.

"If you and Eva are done talking philosophy, Ardel," he said, "come along and give this young fellow inside a beating. He is too strong for me."

"Not to-night, Trevor; and not for many a night. I'm just off."

"Off where?"

"To London first, and after that everywhere."

"You don't mean to say you are going to ride home on your wheel at midnight?"

"That's just what I do mean. It is only a run of an hour and a half, at the most. The moon is almost as bright as day, and my electric lamp, if I needed it, brighter than the moon."

Trevor dropped into a chair, bewildered at his sudden parting. "But where are you going to, and when are you coming back?"

"You know I never make any plans. I will see that man of yours who has lost his soul to-morrow—Ardel never forgot a promise—and do what I can for him. After that I will wander about at large for one, two, or three months. Three, I would think, is about the limit. You know of old my fancy for seeing every nook and corner of this wonderful, beautiful world of ours while I am in it."

"But what has Eva to say to all this?" Trevor asked, still dazed by the suddenness of the thing.

"Oh! Eva has said her say," she answered, with a reluctant little sigh, "quite in vain. You ought to reason with the tide about ebbing and flowing, or the sun about rising or setting. If he will, he will; and that's the end of it."

"A wilful man will have his way. Good-bye, Trevor; good-bye, Eva. Say good-bye for me to the little ones, and to Miss Ray. This will be my first resting-place when I get back to England again."

"What address while you are away?" the lawyer asked, business like.

"You might as well ask an address of the wind, that blows where it listeth. My notion of travel is to be irresponsible as the bird on the wing—to go where I like and stop when I like. Your letters can get no closer to me than my London address, Parkgate Street, until my return; and it's hardly worth while sending at all, for I will be here as soon as I am there."

The next morning Lucy, coming down early, with a vague and timid joy new-born in her heart, was told by Eva of his going. And Eva, watching closely, saw the joy fade from her face, and whispered well pleased to her own heart: "I was right. I knew I was right. He should never have left her. But it is not too late. Three months won't be long passing, and then—"

CHAPTER IX

For Vivian Ardel the next three months went swiftly by. He looked in at the Academies of Paris, Berlin, and Vienna, where he had many friends and disciples. Then he loitered about Rome, till the memories of lost life hault the very air of this city of a dead and buried past

chilled him, and he fled away to the remotest wilds of Western America, in whose solitudes—vast and still—all limits of time and space seem lost.

In the midst of this wild, free life, simple, active, healthful, where quick motion or calm sleep left no time for thought, there came upon him, sudden and not to be resisted, a longing for home. Then, sudden and swift as a bird's flight across continent and ocean, he took the straightest road to London.

In ten days he was standing on his own doorstep with his latch-key turning in the lock. But he was chilled with a strange fear, like one whose dream has come true, when he saw a letter waiting him on the hall-table, in the full light of the electric lamp. The writing was Trevor's, but so shaky as to be scarce intelligible, and across the corner of the envelope the word "Immediate" was scrawled large.

"Come at once," the letter began abruptly; "for God's sake come when you get this. Willie and Harry have diphtheria. Willie very bad. Eva insists on nursing them. I fear for her."

The last few words struck Ardel hardest of all. Diphtheria was his special subject. He knew the remedy, but he knew also the danger of the disease. He glanced at the date of the letter. It was three days' old—three precious days irrevocably gone. His bicycle was in the stand in the hall, spick and span, and ready for the road as it had come from the maker. A moment more, as it seemed, and he was clear of the traffic, out on the smooth, hard road to Lavella.

Hardly an hour had passed since he read Trevor's note in Park Lane till he grasped Trevor's hand at his own door at Lavella, a good thirty miles away.

"Well?" said Ardel abruptly, for the haggard and frightened look of the other's face frightened him.

"Thank God you have come," faltered Trevor. "Poor Willie is dead—died one hour ago. Harry is at death's door; and Eva herself, I greatly fear—"

"Where?" Ardel interrupted, with quick decision in his voice.

Trevor led the way without a word to the roomy nursery. Over the other child's cot the mother leant.

"Save him, Vivian! save him!" she cried, with all the faith and fervor of a child's prayer.

"You first, Eva," he said simply, as he opened the medicine case.

"No! no! save my boy first."

"All in good time; you first," he said again, "you first."

"But look at him at once, Vivian. It may be too late."

"It is not too late, though there is no time to be lost."

Defly as a lady's-maid he rolled the loose sleeve of her dressing-gown right up to the shoulder. In his hand he held a little gold syringe, with a point fine as a needle. He pressed the keen point through the white satin of her skin and sent three drops of the mysterious fluid into the quick current of her blood. Only three drops, but it meant death baffled and life saved.

Her eyes were on him all the time in pitiful entreaty.

"Yes," he answered, "you are safe; now for the boy."

"Will he pull through, Ardel?" whispered Trevor.

"He will live," Ardel answered confidently; "but it was a very close thing. One half-hour more and—"

The mother's frightened face stopped him.

"Oh! he is quite safe now, Eva. All he wants is some little watching. It's just possible I may have to repeat the operation. By the way, where are Lucy and Jeanette?"

"They are away. Lucy does not know of this. They went away before this trouble came. They are safe, thank God."

"He is safe too, with care."

"I will stay with him," Eva and her husband spoke together.

"No," Ardel answered decisively. "You both need rest. No one but myself can be of use."

"You will let me stay too, Vivian? I cannot leave him."

"No, Eva," he repeated firmly, and his eyes met hers with a steady stare.

"Go now and sleep till morning," he said, and she went, obedient as a child.

"Go with her, Trevor. She will wake from a long sleep with life renewed. You, too, need rest, and you have had much to suffer. Poor little Willie!—there is no doubt he is dead?"

The tears were in the father's eyes as he answered:—

"None; he died quietly and without pain an hour before you came."

With his hand laid lovingly on the arm of his wife, who walked beside him passively and with eyes closed, he passed from the room.

Dr. Ardel was left alone with the living child and the dead. Some faint, lingering hope, in spite of Trevor's last words, made him walk to the little bed in the corner of the room, and draw the curtain aside, and gaze searchingly at the small, pale face.

The first look told Ardel there was indeed no hope; but still he held the curtain back, and gazed steadfastly on the small, still white face, and the horror and loathing of death flooded his soul—death inevitable and irreparable.

He drew the curtain close, shutting out the sight of the dead, and

passed to the other bedside, where the living child lay sleeping placidly. The potent infusion in his blood had done its work. Ardel's eyes on the child's smiling face, Ardel's fingers on the child's steady pulse, told him the same story. Baffled death had retreated before him. For a moment the physician's heart warmed and swelled with a consciousness of power like a god's. It was he that had beaten death—had given back life. The next moment he was raging against his own hopeless impotence. To that child he had given long years of life; he could not add one second to his own. It was slipping from him swiftly and smoothly, and all his skill and power could not stay its course. He fell to envying the sleeping child. In that tiny atom of humanity there was that reserved vitality which he had exhausted. In his own strong frame, with all its pride and power of manhood, there was the element of decay. They two were in the morning and the evening of their days; before the boy lay that bright youth which the man had lost for ever.

The child's eyes opening softly and suddenly startled him, seeming to read his thoughts. He made two or three quick passes, and again the eyelids closed softly in deep, hypnotic slumber.

Then all at once, as Ardel gazed on the sleeping child, temptation seized him and shook him like an ague fit. Here was his opportunity come at last. There was profound silence in the room, but from the cot where the sleeping child lay a voice reached his soul, insistent as fate.

It was so easy, so certain. He had often tested it to the very verge of accomplishment. It meant so much: a renewal of life, a new youth, a new manhood. His thoughts grew bolder and took wider range. The miracle once wrought might be renewed again and again. It meant—his heart leaped at the thought—a perpetual putting aside of age and death.

"But the boy?" his conscience whispered; "the helpless boy?"

"Well, what of him?" temptation answered boldly. "You have given him life only an hour ago. But for you he would be at this moment like his brother yonder—a mere lump of senseless clay. You only resume a small part of what you have bestowed. In return you give him vigorous manhood, limitless wealth, and assured position in the world. Who could say what the child's own choice would be, if he had power to choose?"

Once more he found himself forced, as by a power outside himself, to the bedside of the dead. Again he drew the curtains and gazed on the small, still white face. Again his very heart grew cold at the thought of blank oblivion. The longing to escape mastered every faculty of his soul. The way was open; he would take it.

He dropped the curtains and shut out death, and, with pale, resolute face, took his seat once more beside the living. He whispered a few words in the ear of the sleeping infant. A moment later he, too—self-mesmerized—had fallen into a hypnotic sleep profound as the child's.

(To be continued.)

HEALTHY HAPPY BABIES.

Every mother most earnestly desires to see her little ones hearty, rosy and full of life. The hot weather, however, is a time of danger to all little ones, and at the very first symptom of uneasiness or illness, Baby's Own Tablets should be given. It is easier to prevent illness than to cure it, and an occasional dose of Baby's Own Tablets will keep little one healthy and happy. If sickness does come, there is no other medicine will so quickly cure the minor ills of babyhood and childhood—and you have a guarantee that it contains no opiate or poisonous stuff. Mrs. John Nall, Petersburg, Ont., says:—"I have used Baby's Own Tablets and find them a superior remedy for troubles of the stomach and bowels. From my own experience, I can highly recommend the Tablets to other mothers."

Mothers should always keep these tablets in the house, ready for any emergency. Sold by medicine dealers or sent postpaid at 25 cents a box, by writing the Dr. Williams Medicine Co., Brockville, Ont.

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A Chicago inventor, George Magrady, has discovered a process of manufacturing a thirty-six candle-power light that will never go out. While experimenting with photographic chemicals four years ago Magrady's attention was attracted by a glow in a small globe. The glow was caused by a chemical which the inventor keeps secret. Magrady enlarged the globe and perfected the light by placing it in an air-tight glass. He says there is no reason why the light will not remain brilliant for ever if it is not broken. A company has been formed to manufacture the lights in numerous sizes. A patent hood fits over the globe and covers it completely when the light is not needed.

To prove to you that Dr. Chase's Ointment is a certain and absolute cure for such and every form of itching, bleeding and protruding piles, the manufacturers have guaranteed it. See testimonials in the daily press and ask your neighbors what they think of it. You can use it and get your money back if not cured. 50c a box, at all dealers or EDMANSON, BATES & Co., Toronto.

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Of the Kidneys and Bowels—Well-known Steamboat Man Endorses Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills.—Statement Vouched for by Minister.

Mr. James A. Buchner, Port Robinson, Ont., was for years a steamboat man and is favorably known in every port from Cleveland to Montreal. Until a few months ago he was for years a great sufferer from kidney disease, rheumatism and constipation. Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills have made him well, and for the benefit of others he has made the statement below:—

Mr. Buchner writes:—"For many years I was the unhappy victim of kidney trouble, rheumatism and constipation, which became so severe as to make life a burden. I was a constant sufferer, entirely unfit for work; appetite was sickle; I became emaciated; could not sleep, but arose in the morning tired and enfeebled. I lingered on in this condition, gradually growing worse, and became despondent and discouraged because I could obtain no relief from the many medicines used."

"Friends advised Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills, and I now feel thankful that this medicine came to my hands when I was in such a deplorable condition."

"I think I could manage a Koh-

the thought of again recovering health, I continued the use of these pills until I had used six or eight boxes and was again enjoying my former health and vigor. I shall always recommend Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills as an ideal medicine."

Rev. W. D. Masson, Methodist minister, Port Robinson, Ont., writes:—"Being personally acquainted with Mr. J. A. Buchner, who was cured by the use of Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills, I can say I believe he would not make a statement knowing it to be in any way misleading or untrue."

It is by curing just such chronic and complicated cases as this that Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills have become so well known as a medicine of exceptional merit. Their direct and combined action on kidneys, liver and bowels makes them successful where ordinary medicines fail. One pill a dose; 25 cents a box, at all dealers, or Edmanson, Bates & Co., Toronto. To protect you against imitations the portrait and signature of Dr. A. W. Chase, the famous receipt book author, are on every box.

gave relief, and, filled with joy at