

STRONGER THAN DEATH OR A RANSOMED LIFE

CHAPTER XVI.

The sportsmen passed on, Ardel still chatting gaily, as if nothing had happened, and Wickham rousing himself to answer. As Harry and Lucy moved more slowly through the quiet woods, the voices in front gradually died away in the distance. She was still pale and faint from the shock of Ardel's danger, and in a frank, sisterly fashion, she took Trevor's arm for support. At the touch of her hand, the great passion that underlay all his thoughts, his life itself, welled up tumultuously, raging against all barriers of reason. Her mere presence close beside him thrilled him with unutterable rapture, he knew not why, or how. Love and hope and fear filled his soul with tumult. One moment his heart throbbed with ecstasy at the thought of winning her for his own—but the next came the dread pain of loss; the yielding of her to another chilling him to the very marrow of his bones. Yet, by the fierce strain of his strong will, he kept his passion under.

"How lightly he laughs at death," he said; for even yet the faint echoes of Ardel's laughter reached them on the still air.

"Is it not strange?" she answered, "Eva—your mother, I mean—has often told me that, to the Dr. Ardel of the old days the mere thought of death was an abiding horror. There are two Ardels, unlike in everything except mere outward form."

"Which Ardel do you love best, Lucy?" he asked abruptly. She looked up at him in surprise. "Don't talk of love, like a good boy. Oh, if you knew, even for an hour, the Dr. Ardel I once knew, you could not ask that question!"

"If he could come to you again, and loved you?" he began eagerly; but checked himself, as he met her startled eyes.

"The real Dr. Ardel is dead," she answered softly, after a pause, speaking rather to herself than to him; "only his body lives. It's too sad to talk of. Do you know, Harry, you sometimes strangely remind me of him, in thought and word? Did no one ever tell you this before?"

"No one, Lucy; and I am glad to hear it first from you. It gives me courage to say what I have got to say. I want you to let that resemblance plead for me. You cannot know how I love you; with a love that is more than half my being. My soul is weak with longing. I feel that you are the best part of my life, and lacking you, I must die."

She stopped short, dismayed, as this fervent declaration reached her, trembling and growing pale and red by turns, at the intensity of the man's passion in his words and voice. But when she looked again at the boyish face of the young lad who spoke so earnestly, a half-amused smile dimpled her cheeks, and sparkled for a moment in her blue eyes.

"My dear Harry," she said very gently, "is it as bad with you as all that? I thought you had more sense. I thought you had clean forgotten this folly. But all boys are the same, I suppose. So you want to marry your grandmother, and this is the 'great love' of your life; your long life of eighteen years. I suppose you think yourself in earnest, my poor boy, and I must not laugh at you."

Her playful words stung him to the soul. He felt how true they seemed; how powerless he was to dispute their truth; and all the time he knew how false.

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When the nervous system becomes exhausted the whole body is more or less affected and the various organs fail to perform the duties devolving upon them. Digestion is impaired; there are feelings of discomfort in

He stood for a moment, abashed and dumb, before her, looking the foolish schoolboy that she thought him.

"Oh!" he cried at last, "how I wish I could make you understand!"

"Understand what?" she asked; and there was no reply.

Then she looked at him pityingly. Foolish as she thought it, his pain was very real.

"My dearest Harry," she said, "I don't doubt you believe all you say for the moment; most boys begin like that, I am told. Presently you will meet some nice girl of your own age, and you will laugh together, and I will laugh with you, over this folly about an old maid."

He grew desperate. "Lucy," he cried, and again the earnestness of his voice thrilled her, "can you really think me a raw schoolboy, who doesn't know his own mind? Cannot you understand?"

"What is there to understand?" she repeated, more and more puzzled over the wildness of his words. "You are not like other boys, I know. Sometimes you almost cheat me into the belief that I am talking to a man, not merely wiser, but older than myself. But I cannot long forget that you are, in truth, a boy scarce half my age—a boy whom I dangled on my knee when Dr. Ardel first brought me to Lavella, fifteen years ago."

"But is there no hope for me, even if—? Is my age the only obstacle? Answer me this one question, Lucy. Do you still love Dr. Ardel?"

She blushed softly. "Is this fair, Harry?"

But he was too fiercely in earnest to care.

"Answer me! answer me!" he cried; "my whole life hangs on your answer."

The strange power his earnestness gave him, in spite of his youth, had its way with her.

"Do you still love Dr. Ardel?" he persisted. She was the schoolgirl now, and he was the master.

"I hardly know," she answered musingly. "Sometimes the mere sight of him seems to revive the feelings of long ago, and tender thoughts and memories storm my heart. But, at a word or a laugh, the feeling passes as swiftly as it came. Often and often I mourn for my dead love. But it is in truth dead. There is no one living whom I like better than yourself, Harry, if you would only not spoil our friendship. There is Jeannette—"

"But Jeannette loves Ardel?" She noticed the strange eagerness in his voice.

"Sometimes I half fear she does; but his age frightens her. It is all a terrible tangle now. But if you chose Jeannette, may—"

"No, Lucy, never; that can never be. Yet still there may be a way found out of this maze, and happiness at the end for all."

"And you will forget this folly, Harry?"—very earnestly.

"My love is part of my life," he answered slowly; "it can only cease with my life. I can wait and hope; I cannot change. dare not despair. When I next speak to you, perhaps—"

"Never, never, never, you poor mad boy. Cannot you see that every day that goes by this folly becomes more foolish? I cannot, I will not have your young life wrecked by such madness."

"You have no choice in this, Lucy, and I have no choice. So long as you are free I must strive to win

you. Strange as it may seem to you what you have said just now has given me new hope. I must see Ardel at once. Don't look frightened. I shall tell him no secrets of yours. Oh! if the past could be recalled!" The last words were muttered under his breath, as if forced from him by a sudden pang of torturing remorse, and did not reach her ears.

A brief space they walked on in silence. Then Trevor lightly touched on some outside topic, and she answered, shyly at first, for her heart was still in a tumult. But presently their talk glided smoothly into familiar channels. Was it altogether chance that, ever and again, some stray turn of thought—a phrase—brought her memory back to that summer evening long ago, when she and Ardel walked for the first and last time together under the trees at Lavella?

They parted at the great stone steps, and Lucy in her room, alone, repented of that pleasant walk, and cast about for means to end his folly, half fearing for her own heart, till, with a sudden trembling, it came upon her—that she had found the desperate remedy she sought, and she wept bitterly at finding it.

Meanwhile, Harry Trevor, passing round to the court-yard, found Ardel in pleased contemplation of a great pile of slaughtered game that had been emptied from the carts.

"Seventy-five brace to my own gun—not a bad bit of shooting," he said complacently as he ran his arm through Trevor's and turned with him towards the house.

"Can I have a word or two with you?" said Trevor to Ardel, as they crossed the great hall together.

"Of course you can, old man. Come to my room now, while I am getting my shooting togs off, and having a tub. You don't mind talking while I'm tubbing, do you? No—Come along then."

Ardel's dressing-room was on the ground floor, and a full half of the space was covered by a great plunge bath, lined with white porcelain tiles, where the tepid water dimpling in the bright sunshine that filled the room threw a waving reflection up to the high ceiling.

When Ardel, throwing off his shooting clothes, made ready for a plunge Harry Trevor noted with a curious kind of envy (himself conscious of the humor of it) the dark, handsome face flushed by healthful exercise, the strong frame, deep-chested, and clean limbed.

For a moment Ardel paused on the bath's brim, drew a deep breath, and went in head foremost, and lay for a long minute prone on the cool white floor, with a gentle upward motion of hands and feet, till a string of tiny bead-like bubbles streamed up through the clear water.

Presently he was out again, dripping and glowing, draped in a huge rough towel through which his limbs and chest showed marble white.

He caught up two fifty-six pound dumb-bells, and swung them alternately round his head like feather weights, the muscles smoothly rising and sinking on legs and arms with every easy motion, like the ridges and dimples of swift flowing water.

So far not a word had been spoken. It was Ardel began. He turned, half-dressed, to Trevor, who had been watching him with whimsical admiration, hardly knowing how to say what he had come to say.

"Well, Harry, old man," he cried, "what's on your mind? Out with it. Can I help you in any way. You look a bit seedy and worried. Have you been moralizing over the slaughtered pheasants, as the melancholy—what's his name?—Jacques, moralized over the wounded deer? He had his share of the venison at dinner for all that, I'll be bound."

"It's a serious matter, Ardel; to me, at least; terribly serious, perhaps not less to you. You must bear with me patiently if you can. I want to have a few words with you about—Jeannette."

He had meant to end the sentence with Lucy. He could not tell in the least how the other name came instead.

But Ardel started and flushed at the name, and Trevor, suddenly seeing his advantage went on before the other could reply.

"You know she and I have been always like brother and sister, and her happiness is very dear to me."

Then Ardel's face lightened at once, and he broke in with desperate haste. "I know it is, Harry. I know it ought to be. I have often longed to speak to you about her, but somehow I never could get the words out when I had the chance. I need not say there is one whose opinion I think more of. But I shirked this subject. To tell you the truth, old man—with an uneasy little laugh—"I wasn't quite sure of the brother-and-sister business. I fancied you might like to go one better, and I've seen her look at you now and again in a way that gave me a nasty twinge."

Trevor laughed outright at him. "Jealous," he said. "Well, you need not be; she's ten times as much with you, and ten times as happy in your company."

"Oh! yes, I know. We get on pretty well together, sometimes," the other answered with lover's modesty. "She often seems to forget how old I am, and I generally manage to forget it myself, till all of a sudden I catch her looking at me in a half-frightened kind of way, and I know right well what she is thinking of. I might have a chance, perhaps, if I

were not an old man, but—why, Harry, I'm at least three times as old as she is."

"Not quite," the other answered curtly. He did not seem to like the topic of Ardel's age.

"Well, you know what I mean. It's a lie to say 'a man is as young as he feels.' In that case I'd be under twenty; I feel like a boy. I love to be with young people, and do what they do, and get laughed at for my pains. Do you know, Harry, I sometimes feel quite miserable about it? I do so want to be young. I feel as if I never had any real youth."

Trevor started as if to speak, but thought better of it.

"Well, I suppose I was young once like everybody else, but I have not the least remembrance of it."

"Not the least?"

"Sometimes I have the queerest notion. I seem to remember in a vague, misty kind of way, as if it was about somebody else, that I was a little kid called Harry, and that is nonsense, of course. But it stops there. I have tried till my head ached to get a glimpse into the past, but it was no use. The first thing I really remember is you, a little boy, teaching me, a big man, to read words of one syllable. They tell me I was a wonderful jossler once upon a time, that I was a great doctor, who made all sorts of discoveries and saved people's lives. Lucy especially is always trying to recall those days, but they have gone clean out of my head. I'm nothing now but a blundering duffer, with the brains of a schoolboy, and to crown all I must needs fall head over heels in love with a schoolgirl, whom I can never marry, of course."

"Why?" Trevor asked.

"Why! every why. It's not like you, old chap, to make fun of a fellow. She's sixteen and I'm forty-seven. There are thirty strong reasons why; she's a young girl and I'm an old man."

Harry Trevor winced again at the word "old."

"Well," he said slowly, "what cannot be cannot be, I suppose. But there are other women of a more suitable age. There's Miss Ray, for example."

"Don't chaff. There is only one woman in the world for me. It is her or nobody, and that spells nobody. Don't laugh at me, Harry, like a decent fellow, but I feel as if Lucy Ray was years older than I am, instead of years younger. I seem to have a kind of dream of another life, when I was a wee chap, and she was a grown woman, and read fairy tales to me. I'm sometimes more than half afraid of her, I cannot help it. I fear I must be a little mad," he wound up ruefully.

"That's mere folly," said Trevor; "look at things from the bright side, not the black"—he had brightened up wonderfully himself. "Have you never said a word of all this to Jeannette?"

"Never, and never will. It would be too absurd."

"Why not, at least, give her the chance to choose?"

"Look here, Harry; whatever I am I hope I'm not a cad, and that would be the act of a cad. I don't believe she cares two straws about me in that way, but if I thought she did, all the more reason for saying nothing—for going clean away out of this. It would be mean to take advantage of her youth. Why, I'll be an old man without hair or teeth when she is still a young girl."

"You put it unpleasantly, Vivian," Harry answered with a grim smile, "but you put it straight. I agree husband and wife should grow to old age together—yet—"

There is no 'yet' about it. I feel now I ought to cut and run out of temptation, but I feel, too, as if I haven't pluck enough in me to try."

"Vivian," said Trevor after a long pause, and the intense earnestness of his voice fixed the other's attention at once, "believe me there is hope for you even yet. I am glad you spoke out so freely. It helps me in what I may have to say to you, when I can find strength and courage. I have a secret to tell, and a choice to offer—a grim secret; a strange choice that may utterly change both our lives, but it will be for you to choose."

Ardel looked at him, utterly mystified, with wide-open eyes and lips apart.

"I don't know in the least what you mean, Harry, but nothing you can say, nothing you can do, can give me the love of Jeannette or the right to take it."

"Don't be too sure, even of that," the other answered, and passed from the room abruptly, leaving Ardel still utterly bewildered. But he pulled himself together quickly, for no trouble troubled him long. At luncheon he was again the gayest of the gay, chatting and laughing with Jeannette in the voluble exuberance of youth, as if no serious thought had ever touched him in all his life.

(To be continued.)

Most people are good nurses when it comes to nursing animosity.

RHEUMATISM CURED

A RIGHT WAY AND A WRONG WAY TO TREAT THE TROUBLE.

Liniments and Outward Applications Cannot Cure—The Disease Must be Treated Through the Blood.

Rheumatism is one of the most common ailments with which humanity is afflicted, and there are few troubles which cause more acute suffering. There is a prevalent notion, also, that if a person once contracts rheumatism it is bound to return in cold or damp weather. This is a mistake; rheumatism can be thoroughly driven out of the system, but it must be treated through the blood, as it is a blood disease. Rubbing the affected joints and limbs with liniments and lotions will never cure rheumatism, though perhaps it may give temporary relief. Dr. Williams' Pink Pills have cured more cases of rheumatism than perhaps any other disease except anaemia. These pills drive the rheumatic poison out of the system by their action on the blood, and the trouble rarely returns if the treatment is persisted in until the blood is in a thoroughly healthy condition.

As an illustration of how even the most aggravated forms of this trouble yield to Dr. Williams' Pink Pills, the case of Mr. J. J. Richards, of Port Colborne, Ont., may be cited. Mr. Richards says:—"About three years ago I suffered from a most severe attack of rheumatism. I could neither lie down nor sit up with any degree of ease, and I am quite sure only those who have been similarly afflicted can understand what agony I endured. I put myself under the care of an excellent doctor, but got no benefit. Then I tried another and still another, but with no better results. By this time I had become so reduced in flesh that friends hardly knew me; I could not move hand or foot and had to be turned in bed in sheets. The pain I endured was something awful. Then I was urged to try Dr. Williams' Pink Pills, and after taking a few boxes there was an appreciable change for the better; the pains began to leave me, and my joints began to limber. I kept on taking the pills until I had used a dozen boxes, by which time every trace of the trouble had disappeared. I firmly believe that had it not been for Dr. Williams' Pink Pills I would have been a rheumatic cripple for life."

These pills not only cure rheumatism, but all other blood and nerve diseases, such as anaemia, indigestion, kidney troubles, neuralgia, partial paralysis, St. Vitus dance, etc. The genuine pills always bear the full name, "Dr. Williams' Pink Pills for Pale People," on the wrapper around every box. Sold by all medicine dealers at 50 cents a box, or six boxes for \$2.50, or sent by mail, post paid, by writing to the Dr. Williams' Medicine Co., Brockville, Ont.

FACTS ABOUT THE DEEP SEA.

Great Britain and America do more deep-sea measuring than all the other nations put together. More than one-half of the sea floor lies at a depth of a little less than three miles. Some of the deepest places are holes in the ocean bed. One of these in the South Atlantic covers 7,000,000 square miles, or 7 per cent. of the surface of the globe. The Indian Ocean is a great place for deep waters, twenty-four out of the known forty-three "holes" lying at the bottom of that body of water. Sea near the coast usually slopes away gradually to a depth of 600ft., and then drops rapidly to a depth of 6,000 ft. Variations of temperature do not extend deeper than 600ft. Below that the temperature never varies.

A BLESSING TO CHILDREN.

"From the fulness of my own experience," writes Mrs. Samuel Hamilton, of Rawdon, Que., "I can say that Baby's Own Tablets are an indispensable medicine in every home where there are infants and young children. They speedily relieve and cure all the common ailments incident to childhood. In fact I think the Tablets are a blessing to children."

It is such sincere, honest words as these that has made Baby's Own Tablets the most popular medicine with mothers all over the land. The Tablets can be given to all children from the tiniest, weakest baby to the well grown child, and where they are used you find only healthy, happy children in the home. You can get the Tablets from any dealer in medicine, or they will be sent by mail at 25c a box by writing The Dr. Williams' Medicine Co., Brockville, Ont.

JEWELS ON AN IDOL.

The jewels of an Indian idol must be worth stealing if many of those remarkably hideous images possess such valuable head ornaments as made for the idol Parthasathy, in the Triplicane temple at Madras. The ornament is worth some 50,000 rupees, and is made of sovereign gold, studded with diamonds, emeralds, and rubies, the largest emerald being valued at 1,000 rupees and the largest ruby and diamond at 300 rupees apiece.