



her; the other was to face it out and dare the man she hated to do his worst. If the man at her side had been different, if his sense of honor and morbid fear of the suspicion of dishonor had been less acute, she would have told him all and trusted to her love to win him to cling to her through the publicity and scandal which would inevitably follow when Pierre was set at defiance.

But she dared not. She knew that Sir Jaffray, with all the influences that were round him, the strong love of truth that dominated him, the capacity to suffer rather than be touched with a taint of dishonor would put her away from him at once and probably he would never see her again.

The alternative was to face the other man and dare him to do what he pleased. What would he do? There was that scene on the Devil's rock, but there was no proof of what she had done. Besides, if there were, what did it matter? If she was to be dragged from the place to which she had clung, what did it matter how far she fell? A little deeper would make no difference.

Need she fall at all? That was the question. She knew Pierre well, had seen through and through his sordid little soul, and could count up easily enough the price that would buy him. Comfort, ease, luxury, money for his vices—these were his ambitions, and she could satisfy him. Sir Jaffray had settled on her an ample dowry, and she could easily get more money if she wanted it.

She would go through with it, face it as she had faced her troubles and fought them down, and so great was her fighting instinct that, though she knew the whole happiness of her life would be at stake, the excitement of the prospect was not altogether unpleasing. In the early hours of the morning she fell asleep, and Sir Jaffray, waking in the gray light, found her sleeping quietly and peacefully, with a slight flush tinting her cheeks such as he had seen when she was excited and pleased.

When she went down to breakfast, she was quite herself—alert, vigilant, resourceful, high spirited and so suggestive of strength of will and purpose that Sir Jaffray noticed it and was pleased.

He put it down to her being at home at the manor. "Seems to have done you good to get home, Lola," he said. "You're not the same woman you were on the boat. Where are your omens?" She smiled. "Where, indeed?" she replied, laughing back. "I'm afraid I must have been upset by the voyage. Perhaps I thought I was going to be shipwrecked. But I'll be safe here, eh? There was more in her words than he understood.

"You ought to be if anywhere," he answered. "Even if I manage to offend the very great personages who come here?" "You won't do that. People aren't easy to take offense with Walcote." "Where's the mother—Lady Walcote?" "I suppose I may call her mother?" "She's not coming down to breakfast. She's not used to our wild west early rising. Besides, she was up late. She'll be down to lunch."

"Did you sit up late? I was horribly tired. I couldn't stay? What was that



"Seems to have done you good to get home," she was saying about some ridiculous musician or other and a five stringed violin?"

"Bit of a crank, I fancy," said Sir Jaffray, laughing; "said he wanted some rot or other about a violin and that you'd been his pupil or something years ago. Turrian his name is. Do you remember him?"

Lola laughed musically and showed her white, level teeth. "What, Pierre Turrian? Oh, do tell us our friends across the water say. I wish I'd stopped up to hear. Remember him? Of course. He's only a young man, fair, and would be handsome if he hadn't a curious expression on his face which I couldn't like. He's a wonderful fiddler—wonderful—a genius with more than a touch of madness, but a wonderful player."

She spoke as unconcernedly as if she were discussing a servant. "Where did you know him?" "Switzerland, soon after I left the convent. He taught me singing when there was some talk about my using

my voice, you know." She had told him that at one time her father had thought of putting her on the stage, but that she had refused to go—a version of the fact that was not accurate—and a mere reference to this subject was generally enough to turn him from any awkward discussion.

"Were you under him long? Did he know that you were thinking of that?" "No, of course not," she answered when he paused, taking her cue from his hesitation. "The thing never went far enough for that. He knew no more than that I had a voice that was to be trained, and he trained it. He is a good singer as well as player. You'll hear him in all probability. By the way, I shall have to get to work and practice. Our wanderings haven't given me much time for singing." And with that she turned the subject.

She had produced the impression she wished upon Sir Jaffray's mind and had further prepared the way for Pierre Turrian's coming to the house should he insist upon doing that, as she thought very likely.

But she had still to deal with Lady Walcote, and during the time she was going round the house and stables and the grounds and the conservatories with Sir Jaffray she was thinking out how best to meet his mother.

She commenced with an attack from her own side, skillfully planned and executed.

She found the old lady sitting alone in the morning room, and she went up and kissed her with a show of much warmth. Then, drawing a low chair, she sat down by her.

"Good morning, mother. I may call you mother?" she asked, looking into the elder woman's rather stern eyes. "Jaffray's wife can be nothing but my daughter, Lola," she answered.

The lady paused and then said slowly and thoughtfully: "I could wish that there were less diplomacy in that answer and more warmth in the tone." And she sighed. "I have never had a mother, remember."

"I know very little indeed of your childhood, Lola. You have never told me anything, you know," was Lady Walcote's answer. "It is hard to give confidence where there is no sympathy," said Lola.

"As hard as to give sympathy where no confidence is offered, child." The girl sighed and raised her hand and let it fall on her lap as if with a gesture of disappointment.

"I want to find love in the manor house," she said, after a pause, looking up into Lady Walcote's face. "And you offer me—this," dropping her voice, but keeping her eyes fixed steadily on her companion's face.

The old lady returned the look with one quite as steady. "What do you mean, Lola?" "That I want to love you and you to love me, and in place of that you meet me with diplomatic answers and neatly turned retorts. Is that all the welcome you have for me? Is that what our relations are always to be? Can Jaffray bring us no nearer than that?"

It was a subtle plea and for a moment went unanswered. Then, taking the girl's hand with a more kindly action than she had yet shown, Lady Walcote said: "I, too, wish to love Jaffray's wife, Lola, but love is not a thing to be driven and constrained, and if you do not find me so warm as you wish you shall at least find me quite frank. I have been glad to have your letters and to see in them the little overtures which I thought I could detect. I thank you for your thoughtfulness, child, in urging me not to leave the manor, and I have staid, as you see, for the time, to see how we get on. It is an experiment, no more."

"Why need we doubt the result?" "There are many reasons, but I will give you one—one that is from my side. You know that I had cherished other plans for Jaffray's marriage, that for years past it had been the strong desire of our family that Jaffray should marry his cousin, that Beryl has always been like a daughter of my own and that the project was infinitely dear to me. We old people do not easily pluck out from the heart a desire of this kind, which has struck such deep roots there as this in mine, and I have yet to see how the old manor will seem to me with another in Beryl's place."

"That is very hard for me to hear," said Lola after a long pause. "It is not meant for hardness, only to tell you frankly what I feel, so that you may know the full truth as to my feelings."

Lola sighed, and, rising from her low chair, walked to the window and looked out, and there was a long silence in the room.

She was disappointed at Lady Walcote's attitude and began to regret that under the circumstances she had ever yielded to a gentler impulse to try to appease her by getting her to stay at the manor and so win her affection.

It would be an infinite complication if she was to have this sharp, clever, suspicious old woman in the house while the trouble with Pierre was being settled, but at present her only course was to try to win her round. If that failed and she grew to be in the way, a quarrel must be fastened on her which would drive her away.

She was not long making her decision, and she went back and sat down again, close to the old lady, though not in the same chair she had sat in before. If she was to win, it would be by her

wits and not by her witchery. "If you reject my love, then," she said, "how are we to stand toward one another? You have scarcely thought what the effect of your words must be on me. You make me feel that I am something like an interloper in my husband's home and to Jaffray's mother. Is that what you mean? Do you wish me to be uncomfortable at the thought that I am not Beryl Leicester and that I did not steal my heart against your son as his mother had stolen hers against me?"

"I have not stolen my heart against you, Lola. God forbid that I should do anything so wicked, I have tried to open it to you."

"And you have failed. That is even harder to bear still. I will tell you why. I have never had a woman friend in all my life except my Aunt Villiers—and the woman who is not loved by woman grows hard. Still, let it be as you will. I am no pleader for the impossible. You tell me in signs that are plainer than words that you cannot love me, and remember that it is you who have laid the foundations of what may be a wall of division between us. Remember, too, that I gave you my word I would never marry your son unless you yourself said yes. Never forget that, whatever may come. You say it is hard for the old to pluck from the heart a cherished desire. But it is harder for one like me to step out from the heaven which the love of such a man as Jaffray opened to me. Yet this I would have done had you bidden me, as I pledged you."

Then, with a swift change of manner, as though carried away by one of her uncontrollable impulses, Lola threw herself on her knees at Lady Walcote's feet, seized her hand and pressed it between her own and looked with tear touched eyes into her face as she said: "Cannot our love for him and his love for us make us one, mother? Think how it would sweeten his life!"

It was the shrewdest of all pleas, and, as once before it had prevailed, so now it wrought powerfully on the mother's heart.

She bent and kissed Lola on the lips, her own quivering slightly. "You are right, child," she murmured. "We should be held together in his love. Forgive me if I have pained you."

While they were in the act of the embrace the door was opened quickly by Sir Jaffray. He stood on the threshold right well pleased with what he saw, for his great desire was that his mother and Lola should be on the closest terms.

Not wishing to disturb them, he was going away without a word when Lola called him. She was quick to see the desirability of getting confirmed in his presence what Lady Walcote had said.

"Come to the mother, Jaffray," she said, "and hear what we have been doing. We have just been concluding a great treaty of love and peace. Give me your hand."

She laughed very softly and sweetly, while her eyes shone brightly with the light of happiness, and holding one of the mother's hands in hers and taking one of Sir Jaffray's she placed all three in one clasp.

"Now we are all unconventional people, thinking of nothing but our three selves, and we two, the mother and I, have made a great compact that the love we both bear you and the love you bear to both of us are to bind us together always in a love for each other. Kiss us both, Jaffray, in witness of it all, and then let us all three promise to do whatever lies in our power to make that compact the chief cornerstone of our lives. Is not that right, mother?"

Sir Jaffray stooped and kissed them both. "It's the best news you could give me, mother," he said when he kissed Lady Walcote. "You know that." And the earnestness of his tone proved to her what he felt.

"It is true, Jaffray," she said. "It shall be so with me." Then Lola, knowing that if the scene lasted a moment too long its sentiment would be spoiled, jumped up quickly and said lightly:

"Now, we can be again the great people of Walcote manor, who ought not to be troubled with hearts and feelings and passions. Sir Jaffray," she cried, assuming a very grand air, "will you give me your arm? I will take the air in the park. We will leave the lady mother to her thoughts."

"Come on, Lola," cried the baronet, and they went out of the room together, laughing.

And the chief thoughts of the "lady mother" were that her son's wife was an exceedingly clever young woman, whose wits were as sharp as her face was beautiful.

During the next few days she had ample evidence of this, as Lola's treatment of Lady Walcote was tactful and clever to a degree, and the old lady, despite her sharpness and shrewdness and tendency to suspicion when she was alone, could not resist the girl's charm when they were together. Thus the intimacy between them ripened quickly enough to surprise and please Lola herself, who wished that it should be as close as possible by the time that the blow fell which she was daily expecting.

It came all too quickly. She had been home less than a week and had ridden over one morning with Sir Jaffray to a county meeting at a town a few miles away when on her return she was told that a gentleman was waiting to see her.

She knew without glancing at the card who it was. She had nerved herself to be always ready for the meeting, however, and without staying to change her habit she went at once to the library, where her visitor was waiting.

"You wish to see me, I understand. What is it?" Pierre Turrian waited in silence until the servant had closed the door, and they stood thus looking steadily into each other's eyes.

CHAPTER IX.

PIERRE TURRIAN'S SCHEME. The two stood looking straight at one another for some time after the servant had closed the door and left them alone, and Pierre Turrian was the first to break the silence.

He turned from her, and, looking all round the room and then glancing back at her, a smile parted his lips and he raised his eyebrows and shrugged his shoulders as he said in a tone of mock praise:

"You've done well for yourself, Lola, a very lovely cage for a very pretty bird—very lovely indeed." And he emphasized his words by another comprehensive glance round the room. "You're a devilish clever woman."

Lola assumed an expression of indignant surprise. "I don't know what you mean, sir," she said, drawing herself up. "I was told by my servants that a M. Turrian



"You're a devilish clever woman." I wish to see me, and I have understood from my friends that that person is a foreign musician who wishes to interest me in some musical scheme. When I heard you were here, I concluded that that was now your object, and I came at once to see if I could help you. But it seems I have been mistaken, and you have found your way into my house to offer me some kind of insult. I wish you to understand, sir, that I am here in my own home, surrounded by my own servants, who will know how to treat the man who insults their mistress."

She looked at him with resolute defiance. He started as she spoke and looked first angry and then amused. "Devilish good, no doubt, but not good enough," he said, with an oath and a laugh. "One might think that you and I had never met before—on the Devil's rock, for instance."

"You are apparently under some strange delusion. I have never seen you before in my life," she said firmly, "and so long as you hold to any delusion to the contrary I decline absolutely to speak to you."

"You are a magnificent liar," he exclaimed, "and I know what you mean. I don't consent. I want my wife, and I'll claim her."

"I know nothing about your wife, no more than about you. If that is all you have to rave about, you will please not to come here again, or my servants will refuse you admission by my express orders. If, on the contrary, there is any business I can help you with, I shall be ready to do what lies in my power."

"Do you mean that you dare to deny you are my wife?" "Absolutely. You are mad to think of it. I am Lady Walcote, the wife of Sir Jaffray Walcote, and though I have heard of you as a fiddler—she spoke the word contemptuously—and may have had a lesson or two from you in singing or music, in any real sense I have never seen you before in my life."

The splendid audacity of her manner almost took away his breath. He was prepared for any other reception than this. "You are a devil!" he exclaimed in French. Then he added in English, "Do you mean that you were not married to me in Montreux four years ago and that you haven't traveled half over the continent with me as my wife?"

"That is precisely what I mean," returned Lola coldly, firmly and deliberately. "Precisely. It is quite ten years since I was in Montreux, and I traveled with my poor dear father alone up to the time of his death in Neuchâtel, two years ago. Obviously you have made some surprising mistake."

"You are mad!" he cried. "You can't set me at defiance. I have proofs—ample, undeniable, complete—that you are my wife."

"Proofs? Of what?" she answered more quickly. "Proofs that you married some one else in my name, maybe. Bring the priest who ever made me your wife and then talk of proofs."

"You devil, you know he's dead, but I can bring a thousand people to swear to you. Beauty like yours, my girl, can't hide itself or be forgotten. But what better proof is wanting than this—that you stand here bandying words with me over a matter of this kind?"

"You recall me to myself. I have been too indulgent to one who, I was led to believe, is mentally afflicted. I will listen no longer. If you repeat the slanderous tale that you have told, I will have you pitched neck and crop out of the house and kicked down the drive. Do you understand me? Now, what do you say?"

house. "You are my wife," he answered between his clinched teeth. Lola crossed the room in silence and pulled the bell vigorously.

Then she turned toward her companion, with resolution in every line of her beautiful face. She said not another word, but watched him closely.

The color waned gradually from his face, and he moved restlessly once or twice. Then he bit his lip and then his nails and eyed the girl angrily.

"What terms do you offer?" he said. "I make no terms with slanderers," she answered steadily in the same deliberate, half contemptuous tone in which she had spoken before, though a feeling of intense relief and joy shot into her heart as she saw that she was beating him in her desperate move. "Do you retract the infamous slander you have uttered?"

"You are the devil!" he cried again in French. At that moment the servant opened the door. "Well!" said Lola, turning to her visitor while the man waited for orders. "I retract," he said, rolling out the words in French.

"Oh, of course," said Lola, as if he had mentioned the name of some wine. "Bring some claret, Dalling, and biscuits."

While the man was gone for the wine neither of them spoke, and Lola remained standing by the fireplace, flushed with a sense of triumph at having won the first move in the game, and thinking steadily what to do next.

She knew her antagonist through and through. Sheer, dogged force was the only weapon that would beat him down and hold him in subjection. The slightest sign of weakness on her part, the faintest signal of fear, would make him strong at once. It was only by making him believe she did not fear the consequences of his saying all he knew and claiming her that she could hope to win.

But she knew also that she must allow him a certain amount of license. Within the limits she laid down he must do what he liked, go where he liked and say what he liked, and above all he must be well paid.

Thus she saw that the attitude which she had adopted almost on the spur of the moment and in obedience to something like an instinct was capable of being used with easy advantage, and she resolved that if possible the terms should be arranged before he left the house, but she was prepared for an outbreak beforehand.

He was a man who was sure to try to cover his defeat in a torrent of threats as to what he could and might be driven to do.

He broke out in this vein almost as soon as the man had left the room after returning with the wine. "I suppose you rather plume yourself on having beaten me, don't you? And you think that because I pretended to retract just now you can play with me as you please. Let me tell you one thing first. I'll be quite open with you. My retraction is simply and solely for a time, because, my faith—this with a shrug of the shoulders and an attempted light laugh—"because it suits me better for the time. But, mark me, only for the time."

"It will be simpler and quite as effective with me," answered Lola contemptuously, "if you will string all your threats together into one long sentence and get it off like a child says its lesson. The project of yours concerning the scheme in connection with the violin, for which, as I understand, you want considerable money help, is a much more material and practical subject for an interview of this kind."

Pierre Turrian rose abruptly from the low easy chair where he had been sitting and began to walk up and down the room, moving his head from side to side and shrugging his shoulders and gesticulating.

Then, drawing a cigarette case from his pocket, he turned to her and held it out to her. "Does Lady Walcote," pausing on the words and laughing, "object to smoke? Perhaps she herself smokes. I have here some cigarettes of the kind my wife," with another quick, significant glance at her, "used to like. Will you try one?"

He held it open to her with an impudent leer on his fair, handsome face. "I take no interest whatever in what your wife used to like or dislike," returned Lola, with an expression of absolute indifference. "If you wish to smoke, you have permission," with a wave of the hand.

"My faith, but you are magnificent—sublime!" he exclaimed in French. Then he lighted a cigarette, and, drawing in the smoke with the relish of an inveterate smoker, he went on walking up and down the room. Presently he stopped again, and standing close to her he said:

"It is no wonder that I mistook you for my wife. This is just as I can conceive her acting in just such circumstances. She is a magnificent actress, and I have seen her fool men—aye, to the very top of their bent—but there she differs from you, madam," and he bowed low with an assumption of gallantry, "for she is the most extraordinary and unabashed liar that ever married two men in one name."

He shot another glance of swift cunning at her and laughed. "I have already told you that I take not the slightest interest in anything that concerns your wife, though I am ready to discuss your scheme if that is what you want."

up the ease and comfort which your scheme may bring you and drive you to step out into that hard, barren, working world, which I should imagine to be particularly distasteful to you. It will be a matter of surprise to you. But it will be a matter for you to decide, of course. If you like to beggar yourself for a whim, I should not think any one will care, I least of all." And Lola looked all the defiance which her words conveyed.

"That is not true. You do care," he said angrily, waving the hand which carried the cigarette between the fingers. Lola shrugged her shoulders in response and said nothing.

"You play the game as if you held all the winning cards," he exclaimed again angrily, "as if I could not win a word strip you of all this fine house, have you banded into the street for an impostor and made the mark of every lout and loon in the miserable village yonder. I can do this and more, as you know. I can brand you with the iron of shame and haul you to the dock for a bigamist, and you know it well enough, for all your bravado."

She was glad he had broken out thus. It gave her an opportunity to drive home a point which she wanted to make.

"I thought you had retracted that scandal," she answered coldly and sternly. "I am quite prepared if you are to put that to the uttermost test. Even if all you said were true, and she looked him straight in the eyes, "I would not falter for the space of a second. Even if it were true all that you could do would never bring back to your side such a woman as you describe your wife to be. You might drive her from any position she now chances to hold; you might even, as you say, put her in the dock, but how would that either benefit you or bring her nearer to you? If she is such a woman as you say, she is much more likely to face the world without you or, getting freed from you, to marry again. No, no, M. Turrian." And she laughed easily and lightly. "Take my advice as a disinterested party and stick to the musical scheme which promises you ease and comfort without risk."

She paused, and when he made no immediate answer she added: "It is weary work to fight a dangerous and determined woman, you know, and from what you say that is what your wife seems to be."

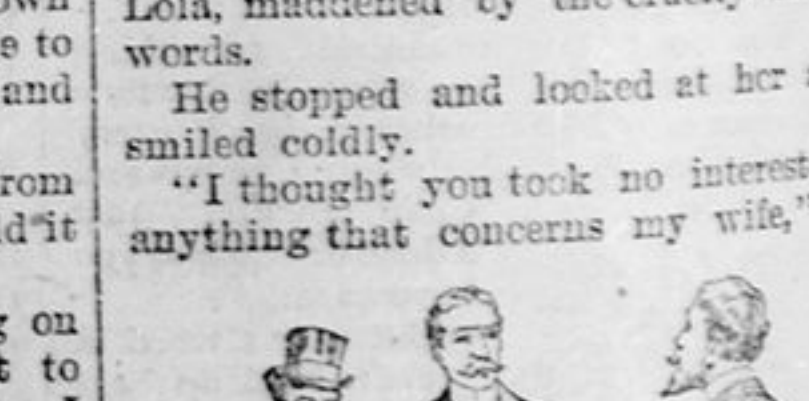
He took no notice of this, but walked up and down slowly, smoking vigorously and inhaling and puffing out the light blue smoke of the cigarette with much vehemence.

"I am inclined to agree with you," he said at length, "though I get to the same point by a very different route. I can conceive that I might in the way you mention work out a very pretty revenge. If my wife, for instance, who is in a position to help me with this scheme, to help me with money, you understand," and he flashed a glance at her as he turned his head a moment in passing, "with money, I could make my life what you call it, one of ease and comfort, and I could do more."

Here his voice sank and his utterance became slow and deliberate, and he rolled some of the words as if the mere utterance of them gave him acute pleasure. "I could watch her, holding over her the knowledge that I could crush her at any moment with a single word. I could let her live her chosen life, bear children, maybe, and then I could stab the whole of her dupes in the very marrow of their honor and self-esteem. I could play that part."

"But she could kill you first!" cried Lola, maddened by the cruelty of his words. He stopped and looked at her and smiled coldly.

"I thought you took no interest in anything that concerns my wife," he



"Well, what is it?" asked the baronet, said, raising his eyebrows, shrugging his shoulders and flourishing his hands. "Personally I do not, but were I that woman I would take your life."

"She tried once, but I am not easy to kill." The expression on his face was repulsive in its leering, malicious triumph.

"Well, you can take your choice. I am indifferent as to what you do. Only remember what I have said."

At that instant the door was opened and Sir Jaffray came in boisterously and noisily, as was his wont. "Hello, Lola!" he cried. "I got away much sooner than I expected. You might have waited for me. Ah, is this M. Turrian? I heard he was here."

Lola introduced the two men, and each scanned the other very closely, though the Frenchman made his scrutiny furtively.

"I have been explaining to Lady Walcote, whom I had the honor to know slightly some years ago as a pupil—the most distinguished and apt pupil—the object of my being now in England." (To be continued.)