# STRONGER THAN DEATH

## OR

## A RANSOMED LIFE

CHAPTER XIV.

For five weeks longer the drama of life played itself out placidly at Lavella. To all outward seeing, Harry Trevor and Lucy reverted to their old, familiar relations with never a hint on either side of his passionate outburst of love. But she was shy of being alone with him, and more tolerant than before of the open, persistent courtship of Colonel Wickham.

Jeannette and Ardel enjoyed themselves in the frank, free fashion of boy and girl with just that piquant flavor of love-making which makes merry-making so fascinating.

Now and again Jeannette would cast admiring glances on the playmate of her youth, and coax Herry to join in the excursions by land or water. But she always found, however much she tried to hide the feeling from herself, that their excursions were the livelier from his absence. Harry, for his part, seemed well content to be alone in the woods, or on the river, soothing his love with Nature's loveliness, or pondering moodily on the perplexing problem of his life.

Then suddenly, and without warning, the event occurred which broke up this peaceful life, absorbing all other thoughts and feelings in one overmastering horror.

It chanced one sunny afternoon Judge Trevor was hard at work in his study, while Eva, who loved to be with him even in silent companionshop, sat still as a mouse in the cosy cushions of a great chair; not so absorbed in her book but she stole a look now and again at her husband as he worked with persistent vigor.

The morning had been dull, but the clouds passed with midday, and sunshine flooded the air.

There was a sudden chill and darkening of the room. Trevor raised his eyes, and right opposite him, on the oblong patch of sunlight on the wall paper, he saw the black shadow of a man, with hand raised to the fastening of the French window that opened from the room into the garden.

Turning sharply, he faced the intruder, who instantly raised his cap with a deprecating gesture. Trevor was not unused to such visits. It was a hobby of his to help the prisoners whom he had been compelled to sentence when they had shown any desire to go straight after their release. Many of them had got from him the chance at last of an honest livelihood, and took it. As he opened the glass door to let this man pass, the judge's quick eye recognized him at once by the slouching walk and close-cropped hair as a newly liberated jail bird. He was not so quick to recognize face or figure, though instantly conscious of having seen the man before.

Middle-sized and middle-aged, he looked still strong and active, in spite of slouch and limp. His clothes were a shabby-genteel smooth black cloth, and his hands, as he drew off the cotton gloves and folded them into a ball, though coarse and large, were scrupulously clean. On his egg-shaped head the coarse black hair, just grizzled with white, was cut close to the skin. His face was a puzzle—a wide, rugged, cruel mouth, rough with broken teeth, like a gap cut in his head by the gash of a hatchet, belied the soft, persuasive almost obsequious—look in his great black eyes. His soft voice was not less persuasive than his soft eyes.

"I came to thank you Judge Trevor. You don't know me, my lord?"

Trevor shook his head. "I seem to remember your face—I seldom forget a face. I have seen you before; I cannot well tell when or where."

"Try again, Judge. You ought to remember. You gave me fourteen years' penal servitude once on a time. I was a young man then, but surely there is something left of me still to swear by. Don't you remember Jake Curzon, my lord?"

The memory of the man came back to Trevor like a flash at the mention of the name.

"Yes, yes," he replied, a little vain at the quickness and accuracy of his recollection. "You were tried at the Old Bailey for killing your wife."

"In a drunk, Judge. I didn't go for to kill her. She wor kicked and beaten worse than that many a time before, and she worried over it all right. Last time but one the beak said, 'This is a horrid, bad case,' and fined me ten bob. You gave me fourteen years, judge; for my own good, you said. The fourteen years is just up, and I'm come to thank you for what you done for me."

He almost grovelled before the judge in the excess of his gratitude.

Again Trevor had a sudden recollection of the time when he had last seen this gentle, pentitent-looking man. Then it was a fierce, wild beast, black eyes blazing, strong hands clinging to the bars of the dock, coarse voice yelling curses and vengeance as they tore him away.

The judge smiled to himself at the thought of the beneficent change the prison discipline had wrought.

"I did only my duty," he said. "It was a sharp sentence. I'm glad you have come to take it in that spirit. If I can help you to begin life again, I will be glad. Only be quick about it, for I'm very busy. What can I do for you?"

He dropped back in his chair, motioning the other to be seated. But the man still stood in front of him humbly, with drooping shoulders and shuffling feet.

"I'll be as quick as I can," the man said humbly. "You can help me, Judge. The very sight of you is a help to me. Many and many a time I thought of you with a blessing during the long fourteen years, when my hands were aching from the oakum, or my knees from the treadmill; and it cheered me to feel I would one day stand before you, as I do now, and thank you for it all. Do you remember the wicked words I spoke when last we met, fourteen years ago?"

"I only remember that you were in a fierce rage."

"I can remember every word of it. I swore by God that day if ever I left prison alive I would pay you out."

"Don't trouble about that now, my man. I bear no malice. I'll help you to employment, if I can. Meanwhile, a little money will be useful."

He swung round on his office chair and fitted a key to the desk drawer where his loose cash was kept.

"I don't want your money," the man said, coming a step closer, and slipping his hand into the bosom of his coat, while his voice sank to a low, purring whisper. "I'm not coming here any more. The thought of you and what you did for me has been in my heart those fourteen years of hell upon earth. I've come to pay you back and give you what you've earned. Damn you!"

The purring whisper broke off in an angry snarl. Before Trevor could turn his head, a long knife gleamed bare in the sunshine.

But, quick as the man was, there was one before him. With a wild cry, Eva sprang between her husband and the murderer, pushing him back with feeble hands. The raging wild beast was awake in the man. He struck fiercely at the woman. The keen point, entering between her breasts, went home to the hilt, and she fell into the arms of her husband. Mad with rage, the murderer raised the dripping red knife to strike again, when Ardel and Harry Csevor, drawn by Eva's wild cry from the lawn, broke into the room.

Ardel was first, and tne wild beast at bay turned on him with bloody knife as he came. But Ardel gripped his arms in a grasp of iron, raised and hurled him with tremendous force to the furthest corner of the room—a groaning mass of broken bones and bruises, with blood welling from a deep wound in his thigh that his own knife made as he fell.

Without wasting word or thought on that crushed carcass, Harry Trevor turned to where Eva lay drooping in the arms of her husband, who stood and stared with vacant eyes, dazed by sudden horror. Eva made one pitiful effort to smile and speak comfort to him, but the red blood bubbled at her lips, choking her voice. Her face went deadly white, her eyes closed softly, the lids quivering, and her body lay limp in her husband's arms.

"Is she dead?" he whispered hoarsely, only half realizing it even yet.

The younger man, alert, resolute, calm, though every nerve tingled, stood silent for a moment with finger upon her pulse and eyes on her face.

"No; not yet." The words seemed forced from him. "Let us lift her to that couch; softly, softly—a jar is death."

The wound had hardly bled at all: only one round, dark stain showed on the bosom of her pale grey dress. But too well those keen eyes and that skilled touch divined the internal bleeding that was draining her life away.

"Is there no hope?" the husband again whispered humbly, as to the master of life and death.

The gloomy eyes raised to his were his answer. It did not need the despairing word, "None."

After his fierce effort of vengeance, Vivian Ardel stood panting and glaring with blazing eyes upon his prey, as though he longed to tear the savage to pieces with naked hands.

But when his eyes turned to where Eva lay, and he heard young Trevor's despairing whisper, suddenly his mood changed. He flung himself on his knees beside the couch, his whole body shaken with grief.

Slowly down the husband's face the merciful tears coursed. But for Harry Trevor's deep sorrow, for his stinging remorse, there was no relief in tears. The instinct of the physician to save or soothe triumphed for the moment over human weakness, and instinctively the other two leant on his strength for comfort and counsel.

"Fling open the window," he said to Ardel; "the sunshine and air are good for her. Lift out that carrion; it poisons the room."

"How long?" the husband whispered to him again with white lips, so feebly the faint words hardly stirred the air.

"Twenty-four hours is the utmost limit that human science can stretch her life."

"Not in pain, Harry; not in pain. I would not have her linger, even for an hour, in pain."

"There will be no pain. That, at least, in any event I can ensure."

"Must she pass away from us unconscious, without a word of smile at parting?"

"It is not best so? She dies without the knowledge of death, or the fear. But I can give her back consciousness in a moment. You know her best and longest; it is for you to say."

"May God direct me rightly. I choose as she would choose herself—conscious life and love to the last."

"But the fear of death which we may spare her?"

"She has no fear of death, Harry; or fears it only as a brief parting from those she loves."

"The choice is yours, remember, not mine. Put your hands to this cushion. Softly, softly. Hold her head just as it is now. The slightest motion may be dangerous. I will return in an instant."

From the small glass which he carried back with him he let ten drops of a clear, amber-colored fluid trickle slowly through the pale, halp-parted lips, on which the blood-stain showed, and waited. One, two, three long minutes John Trevor watched the white face and saw no change. Then slowly a faint color warmed her cheek, and at once softly, as to a flower's petal in the sunshine, the eyes unclosed.

Her feeble glance wandering a little found her husband's face, and rested there with unutterable love.

"Come closer," she murmured; "I want to be quite sure you are safe." She fondled the hand he gave her with both her own. "I am leaving you at last, John. I feel it in my heart; I see it in your face. I am leaving you. We have had a happy time in this world, dear; no man and woman happier. I have many things to say to you before I go."

"Will it hurt her to speak?" he whispered aside to Harry, who shook his head; and, touching Ardel's shoulder, they drew back to the far end of the room, leaving those two alone for the last time on earth.

Slowly the long day passed.

Jeannette, mastering her tears for a moment, kissed the loved face tenderly; then instantly fled from the room and fell weeping, broken-hearted, heedless of Ardel's stammering attempt at comfort.

Dr. Bartley came, and shook his head, and departed, a little aggrieved at Harry Trevor's quiet assumption of control.

The police came, too, and with them a magistrate, who spoke about the ends of justice and a dying deposition. But again young Trevor quietly put his restless importuniries aside.

"Abundant evidence will be forthcoming when it is needed," he said. "You would not surely rob ber of the few hours of life the murderer's knife has spared? But you will need no evidence,"—pointed to the maimed wretch the police had lifted upon a hurdle—"there is death in his face; he will never live to be hanged."

So through all the day he guarded the peace of the room where the dying woman lay, and each hour, with a few drops of the strong potion, he rekindled the flickering life in her, while she thanked him with a smile and a pressure of the hand, growing hourly more feeble.

For the rest he kept in the background, leaving the place by the couch to the others.

The hours crept on—Eva Trevor's last hours on earth. Slowly the light faded out of the west, and the evening closed upon them, and the curtains were drawn, and the wax tapers kindled in the room.

She had been silent a little, with eyelids drooped,—so silent and so still that they might have thought she slept; but her lips still moved, as if in prayer.

"John," she whispered, at last, "I should like to speak to Harry for a moment or two before I die."

He rose as she spoke, moving softly to where Harry Trevor stood with bowed head at the furthest corner of the room. He touched him on the shoulder.

"Harry, your mother would speak with you for a moment alone."

"With me?" He seemed surprised, startled—one might almost say frightened—by the summons. But he did not hesitate for a moment.

She caught his hand and held it as he sat beside her. "Harry," she said, "I have been much troubled about you of late."

"I am sorry," he answered simply.

"You are to be pities, not blamed," she said. "Love's eyes and ears are keen, Harry, and I know more than you ever mean me to know. Young as you are, you have lost the hope that brightens life and makes even death cheerful—the hope, the certainty of an immortal life, to which death is but the entrance."

"It is true," he said softly; "but why speak of me at such a time. Let me bear my own burthen as I may. I am not worthy of your pity or your prayers."

"I would fain help you to lift the burthen from your shoulders. Faith is warmed to life by prayer. There was a time when Vivian Ardel was as you are. But now——"

"Don't! don't!" he groaned out, like one in sudden pain. "Don't speak of that. If you only knew—if I dare tell you all. I often thought of telling you, but shame held me silent."

She pressed his hand again, with pity in her eyes—pity and love.

"Not now," she said softly, "not now, Harry. I have dreamed there was some mystery in that sudden change. I shall know all soon, when I pass to the longer and brighter life."

He felt the contagion of her confidence.

"You have no fear—no doubt?"

"None. So sure as I die I will awaken to a new life. That to me is more certain that I now touch your hand. The conviction is part of myself. You, too, believe, at least, in a God, Harry—a Creator?"

"Who can doubt it that has sense or reason, that can see and think? The proofs are everywhere."

"Can you believe the great God—the good God who made the universe, who made the beautiful world for us to be happy in—would cheat men in this hope of Immortality, which He Himself inspires, would cheat and lie to a poor human soul that loves Him?"

Her face, even more than her words, inspired in him something of the faith that filled her, and shone brave and strong in her clear, true eyes. She seemed from the grave's edge, with spiritual eyes, to see the future life of which she spoke.

His doubts shrank abashed before such glorious certainty. Faith kindled warm and bright in his heart, putting chill, dim reason to shame.

"Eva," he whispered, "praise God and thank Him for me; I believe."

"Thank God! thank God!" she murmured, under her breath; "my last care has passed; now indeed I can die in peace."

"John," she whispered, presently. He had retaken his place at her side and she knew it, though her eyes were closed. "I'm growing weary; I want to sleep. The end cannot be far off. Good-bye till I waken; and if I never waken, my darling, good-bye till we meet again. It may be better so. My life has been so happy, it is hard to leave it even for a happier."

The last words trailed away into perfect stillness in the room and she slept.

They watched through the long hours of the night, speaking seldom, their eyes and thoughts with the still figure on the couch that was slipping so softly from the warm clasp of their affections into the unknown.

The chill of the early dawn was in the air and the windows showed faintly luminous when Lucy stole softly from her seat and blew the candles out and put the curtains back. For a little while the light grew slowly. Then of a sudden the rosy flush of the sunrise filled the room, and the birds broke out into song.

The still figure on the couch moved. The loving eyes sought his face lovingly, the small hand fluttered in his with a feeble pressure.

"Good-bye, John;" she whispered, "only for a while;" and she slept again, the sleep that knows no waking.

(To be continued.)


# Are You Bilious? Blame the Liver.

### Scores of the Common Ills of Life Due to Disorders of the Liver are Curable by

### DR. CHASE'S KIDNEY-LIVER PILLS.

If you are bilious, blame the liver. If your digestion is impaired and you suffer from headache and dizzy spells, blame the liver. If your bowels are irregular, constipation and looseness alternating, blame the liver. If you have pain under the shoulder blades, feelings of fullness after meals, aching limbs, a yellow, muddy complexion, blame the liver.

Torpid, sluggish action of the liver is responsible for all these symptoms and while you have a right to blame the liver, it may be well for you to set about to help the liver out of difficulty.

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The position which Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills hold to-day as the leading family medicine is undoubtedly due to their wonderfully prompt action on the liver and their combined effort on the kidneys and bowels. There is no medicine obtainable which is more useful in cases of emergency when the digestive, urinary or excretory systems are deranged than this great prescription of Dr. A. W. Chase. 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.

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All the freshness of youth, the rosy cheeks and bright eyes of girlhood, the charms of budding womanhood, are due to pure, rich blood and healthy nerves. When the face is pale and the eyes lack lustre, when there are headaches and backaches, shortness of breath and palpation of the heart the blood is seriously out of condition, and decline and consumption may well be feared. In emergencies of this kind there is no medicine so certain in its beneficial results as Dr. Williams' Pink Pills. Every pill makes new, rich blood, strengthenes the nerves and puts the sufferer on the road to health. Proof of this is found in the case of Miss Bertha Milloy, Port Dalhousie, Ont. The story of this young lady's restoration to health is told by her mother as follows: "A few years ago my daughter Bertha began to decline in health. Among the early symptoms were loss of appetite, loss of strength and an aversion to exertion. These were followed by severe headaches, and sometimes fainting fits; her color left her and she was greatly reduced in flesh. In fact her condition was such that I feared she would go into consumption. We tried a number of medicines but they did not help her; then a doctor was called in, but there was no improvement, and things looked very hopeless. At this stage acting on the advice of a lady friend (who, by the way, was studying medicine and is now practising in Chicago) I started giving her Dr. Williams' Pink Pills. In the course of a few weeks there was a decided improvement in her condition, and by the time she had taken nine boxes she was again enjoying perfect health. During her illness her weight was reduced to ninety-five pounds and while taking the pills it increased to one hundred and ten pounds. My advice to other mothers who have weak or ailing girls is to lose no time in giving them Dr. Williams' Pink Pills."

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