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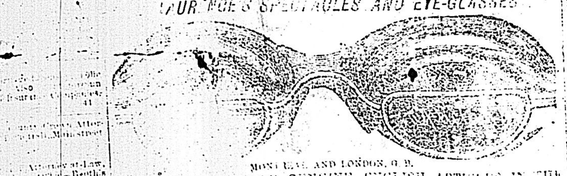

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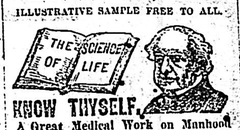

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HER MARTYRDOM.

...more the old mansion woke to a ...toxication of gaiety; and it was ... that first and most brilliant ball ...Lady Laura Wynyard found there ...many things in life of which she had hitherto known nothing. She had never been absolutely jealous. Her first husband had treated her with such loving tenderness that the feeling had never been awakened in her heart. She had felt the first symptoms of jealousy when Angela told her that the captain loved Gladys Rane; since then it had lain dormant; there had been nothing to arouse it. But on this night of the ball the captain looked so gallant and so handsome; the nurses thought every woman in the room must find him irresistible, as she herself did. She was attired in an exquisite dress of pale blue velvet, and her magnificent pearls suited her to perfection. The captain owned to himself that there was no handsomer woman in the room, while Lady Laura looked with anxious eye at the many fair young faces.

"Vance," she said, "there are a great many pretty faces here to-night."

"Yes; they are pleasant to gaze upon," he observed.

Then she looked up at him with laughing eyes, the wistfulness of which he did not see.

"Vance, you must not admire them; you must not flirt with anybody, for I am jealous of your every smile."

"My dear Laura," said the captain gallantly, "you are the most beautiful woman in the room. If I flirt with any one, it will be with you." Then he added to himself, "My reward for that speech ought to be a waltz with every pretty girl in the room."

Husband and wife were standing together when Angela entered the ballroom. She had never looked more beautiful than now. Her tall slender figure showed to the greatest advantage in a dress of rich white silk elaborately trimmed with fine lace; her lovely face and dark eyes commanded admiration.

"How beautiful that girl looks to-night!" remarked the captain to his wife. "After all, there is nothing like the beauty of youth."

He spoke without thinking, and the words seemed to disturb her ladyship so much that her face grew pale.

"The beauty of what, Vance? I thought you said no woman could be perfectly beautiful under thirty."

"My dearest Laura, I repeat that you are the fairest woman in the room. Now we must go and do our duty-dances; then we can enjoy ourselves."

But during the evening her ladyship's eyes followed her husband incessantly. She longed to withdraw him from the company of the young and pretty girls he courted so persistently and monopolise him herself.

"Do dance with me!" she besought him once during the evening. "It makes me jealous to see you so attentive to those pretty girls."

"Never cultivate jealousy, Laura," said the captain laughingly.

"True," returned his wife. "But dance once with me, Vance."

"My dear, every one would laugh at us," he answered. "I would do anything to please you, but not that."

"Many men dance with their wives," she said coaxingly.

"I never shall," he returned good-humouredly. "It is bad form, Laura, and I dislike anything of that kind. Pray say no more about it."

And the captain, who had been out of society during his short married life, enjoyed himself thoroughly with the youth and beauty around him. He danced with the prettiest girls in the room, several times with one or two of them, and Lady Laura's loving, longing eyes followed him wistfully.

"Angel," she said the next day to her daughter, "did you think the captain seemed unduly attentive to any one last night? Some of our young guests were very pretty."

"No, mamma, I did not," she replied; and the anxious face lightened.

"He is so handsome," said the weak loving woman.

"And you are so beautiful, mamma," was Angela's half-indignant rejoinder.

She was determined not to admit that the captain had any physical advantage over her mother.

"I do not know how it was, Angel," she continued; "but all at once last night I seemed suddenly to grow old and feel old."

"You never looked better in your life, mamma," Angela assured her mother hastily.

"I should not like to lose my beauty," sighed Lady Laura. "And you see I am very happy—much happier than you thought I should be, Angela."

"Thank heaven for that, darling!" said the girl fervently; but in her heart she felt that all was not well.

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CHAPTER XVII.

...nce Wynyard found the autumn long; and the winter dragged still more monotonously. However, he managed to get through them by dint of continued gaieties. There seemed to be no end to them. There were fancy balls, private theatricals, charade-parties, dinner-parties—hardly a day passed without something of the kind; and Rood Abbey soon became as famous for its hospitality as it was for its natural charms.

The captain lost none of his popularity as master of Rood Abbey, and it was generally agreed that Lady Laura had done a wise thing in marrying him; she was just then the most envied woman in the country. By forcing excitement the captain managed to tolerate his new mode of existence. Yet, even with all these consolations, he found it hard, and he vowed to himself that this state of things should not occur again. Next year he would fill the house with his own friends—men of his own stamp, and women who knew how to be amusing.

"My wife is beautiful and sweet-tempered, but she has not an idea beyond looking pretty and being admired. I should like a little less love and a little more wit," he would often say to himself.

The plain truth was that in six months he had completely tired of the wife whom he had married for money. He was tired of her fair beauty, tired of the sweetness of her manner, tired of her unvarying amiability; above all, he was unutterably bored by her passionate worship of himself, although she had not yet found it out.

It would have been perfectly useless to speak to her or warn her. Lady Wynyard would perhaps have been happy for a few months longer if she had loved her husband less, or if she had refrained from showing her passionate worship of him. As it was, she, as he phrased it to himself, bored him most horribly. She was never happy out of his presence; she liked to spend every moment of her time with him; she was jealous and miserable if he paid the least attention to any one else! No love-sick girl could have shown more unmistakable symptoms of love-fever than she did.

Autumn and winter were over now, and Captain Wynyard hailed the spring with unbounded satisfaction.

"Talk of surfeiting a bee with honey!" he said to himself. "I am surfeited with my wife's beauty and adoration." And there rose before him the fair face of the woman he adored and had forsaken, the one woman of whom he never tired.

Lady Laura had offered some feeble resistance when the proposal to spend the season in London was first discussed. It was at the beginning of April, and the primroses were all out, the grass was of the loveliest and most tender green, the buds were forming on the trees, the odour of sweet violets filled the air.

"Rood is charming just now," she said to her husband; "I wish we were going to spend the spring here."

"I should be very sorry," laughed the captain. "I have had enough of rural life to last me for some time."

His wife looked up at him with something like adoration in her eyes.

"I thought you said, Vance, that all places were alike to you when you were with me?"

"They are indeed, my dear," he replied; and she was quite content.

The next time the question was discussed the captain "laid down the law" in his own fashion. They would go to town for the season; they would go early and remain late. In the summer he intended to go abroad for a short time; and, when they returned to the abbey, he should bring a party of friends with him. And her ladyship yielded without one word of protest.

The soft April winds were blowing, the soft April showers were falling, when they left Rood. The primroses gleamed like gold at the feet of the budding trees, all nature was donning its greenest garb.

"There will be nothing in London like this," sighed Angela.

The captain laughed mockingly.

"No," he said; "but there will be something a thousand times better. I would rather have one hour in London than a month in the country."

"Better fifty years of Europe
Than a cycle of Cathay."

"I am not surprised to hear you say so," replied Angela. "I can imagine that London life is more to your taste than that of the country."

"Yes," confessed the captain, who was in the highest possible spirits at the prospect before him; "I find my paradise there. Clubs, theatres, dances, are things I delight in." The captain was unusually elated, so much so as to be quite genial with Angela.

Miss Jameson was not going with them, as the captain foresaw that there would be no need of a fourth person in London. He would not be troubled with much of his wife's society there. Naturally mother and daughter would go out together, and he would be free to pursue his own course unmolested.

He was elated too when he thought of the prospect before him. He would be master of one of the finest houses in London, he would have the command of a large income, he would be free to do just what he pleased—for his wife never seriously opposed his wishes—above all, he would once more see Gladys Rane.

"Vance," faltered Lady Laura, "there is no need for that, my dear." Plainly, he said kindly. "Your lawyer, Mr. Sansome, ought to have suggested the making of your will. It may seem strange coming from me."

There was, what she did not observe, a strange hesitancy about the captain's manner. He looked paler than usual, and his hands trembled. As he proceeded, his lips seemed to stiffen and his fluency of speech seemed to desert him.

"You have told me all about your first husband's will," he continued. "Mr. Charles certainly have unlimited trust fortune at your absolute disposal."

"It is not quite that," she replied. "It all goes to Angela at my death. I cannot touch the capital; nor can I sell it, it is entirely mine, yet not mine."

"Yes I know; I understand. Of course, it all goes to Angela at your death, which we all pray may be far distant; but what will Angela do with it? do you suppose?"

"She will marry, and leave it to her children, I imagine."

"What if she has no children?" he asked.

"The will makes no provision in that respect," she answered. "Angela will do as she likes."

"Suppose—although it is very unlikely—that she never marries?" he interrupted.

"The property is hers to do absolutely what she likes with it. She can leave it to charities; she can do as she will. Poor Sir Charles thought she would be sure to marry."

"No doubt she will," said the captain, whose lips had grown pale; and there was a curious expression in his eyes, a harsh sound in his voice, as he continued. "There is another view of the matter. I do not think Mr. Sansome is a good man of business or he would have drawn Sir Charles's attention to it. What becomes of the money and property if Angela dies before you?" A spasm of pain passed over his face. "Before me?" she echoed. The thought of such a contingency, if it might happen, it is a possibility about which we all pray may be far distant, but what will Angela do with it? do you suppose?"

"What if she has no children?" he asked.

"Angela will ... incapable even of entertaining so base a thought."

"He must be more than a man who would set no store by such wealth as yours. I consider your proposal most injudicious, as it will create a feeling of insecurity and uneasiness in the family."

"Not at all," said her ladyship. "I do not see how it can affect us—affect either Angela or the captain. For the captain himself may die first. The fact of my making this will will not hasten my dear daughter's death by one minute, or I would not make it."

She did not notice the grave expression that came over the lawyer's face.

"I repeat, madam," he urged, "that it is injudicious at least. You will make your daughter's death an object to those who desired by the one who will be enriched by it."

"Nonsense, Mr. Sansome!" said her ladyship rather warmly. "I tell you that my husband is one of the most honourable men. I, should my daughter unfortunately die before me, leave the property to some one, to whom better could I leave it than to him I love and trust? You may as well ...t about it, Mr. Sansome," she added; "it has to be done. If you hesitate, I shall be under the disagreeable necessity of seeing a stranger, who will not do it one-half so well," she finished, with a smile.

"Let me clearly understand," he said. "If Miss Rodden should die before you, you wish the whole of the property to go to Captain Wynyard, should he survive you?"

"That is just what I wish," she replied.

"I will draw up the will, as your ladyship directs, but I protest against the character of it as being even more injudicious and ill-judged than the one made by Sir Charles."

Lady Laura was immovable; and, seeing that, Mr. Sansome said no more. He waited at Rood House until its mistress returned, and spent some few minutes in conversation with him; and the opinion he formed of the handsome captain was anything but a favourable one.

"It will be better, Laura darling, not to say anything about the will to Angela." Captain Wynyard suggested to his wife; and she did not just then.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Plenty of invitations!" said Captain Wynyard laughingly, as he looked over the pile of cards on the drawing-room table. "'Countess Rawson,' 'Lady Herbert,' the French Embassy, 'The Duchess of Pembroke,' 'Lady Scarborough'—an embarrassment of riches. 'Lady Kinloch, to meet a Royal Duke.' We must go there! I have not seen Lady Kinloch for an age."

"We can manage three in one evening," said Lady Laura. "I know some who can manage even more."

The captain laughed. He was in the best possible humour, and the prospect of seeing Gladys Rane once more added greatly to his delight. He had resolved to see as much as he could of Gladys; but he had also resolved to be very cautious of his conduct. He longed with all his heart to call on Lady Kinloch; but he knew it would be more prudent to refrain. If he wished to enjoy Gladys Rane's society, he must be careful how he proceeded. He would not put it in any one's power to say that he rushed off to Palace Place on the first day he was in town, but would wait and meet Gladys at Lady Kinloch's ball.

Vance Wynyard did not attempt to repress the love he felt for the charming niece of Lady Kinloch. He knew the meaning of self-restraint or self-control he had never been in the habit of practising either. If he wanted anything, he obtained it, no matter at what cost. He never admitted to himself the unwelcome fact that his desires and interests were identical with his wife's; that, in common honour, he was bound to love her and no other woman. He would have laughed such thoughts to scorn. He had made up his mind to see as much as possible of Gladys Rane, and he intended to carry out his purpose. He never gave one thought to the ultimate harm he would do her by indulging his passion. Knowing that she loved him, and knowing all that had passed between them, if he had been a man of honour he would studiously have avoided her; but he was not a man of honour, and therefore thought only of his own selfish desires.

Angela had noticed his quick decision with respect to Lady Kinloch's invitation, and glances at her mother to see how she accepted it; but the beautiful unsuspecting face was calm and radiant. Her martyrdom not yet begun.

The evening of Lady Kinloch's ball arrived, and no one but the captain himself knew of his agitation and excitement. He disguised his feelings by an assumed light-heartedness and an uninterrupted flow of conversation. Lady Laura thought she had never seen her husband in such high spirits before. Fortunately for her she had not given one thought to Gladys Rane.

They went all three together to Palace Place. Lady Laura sweet in her fair loveliness, Angela beautiful in her girlish grace. Both were exquisitely dressed—Lady Laura in pale blue brocade with white lilac, and Angela in white silk and primroses. There were, without doubt, the two fairest women in the room, and the captain was envied by all the men present.

It was in her husband's magnificent ballroom that Gladys Rane met Captain Wynyard once more. He had seen her name in the list of fashionable arrivals in town, and had wondered when and where they should meet. Now the moment was come. He was in the same room with her, looking handsome as ever, his face full of delight at seeing her, his eyes telling of the love that burned in his heart. From the moment he entered the room until he left it he had intent only on thought and that was for Gladys Rane. Much as he had gained by his marriage, he almost repented when he saw her face once more. He had resolved that he would not seek her as soon as she entered the room; but, when his eyes rested on her fair face, all his resolutions vanished. It was as though she had stretched out her white hands and touched his heart-strings. He forgot his wife, forgot Angela, and left them standing alone while he went slowly up to Miss Rane, walking like one spell-bound.

"Gladys!" he said; and then all further speech failed him.

"I knew you would come," she whispered.

She laid her hand on his arm, and they walked away together. For some moments there was perfect silence between them; then Gladys spoke.

"This is the first time I have seen you since your marriage, Vance. I was in the church. I witnessed the ceremony."

"I wish to heaven that it was you who had been by my side," he said, in a low voice.

"Are you happy?" she asked, and her voice trembled.

"Happy!" he cried. "I am happy enough so far as money and luxury go. I say that it is not fair to the captain make a man happy; but I am heartily tired of all the rest."

"Then your wife," she began.

But he interrupted her.

"My wife," he said, ... "is the most beautiful, most loving, most ... less and inane woman I have ever met. She has never ... since we have been married. She thinks of nothing but making me costly presents and giving me the whole of her tiresome society."

"I understand," said Gladys, softly.

"I was obliged to marry for money," he added, apologetically; "and certainly my wife is all that any man could desire, except that she is a great deal too affectionate; but——"

"Well, I must not complain; no man can have everything. Life at home bores me, Gladys. Will you take compassion on me, you will come and see you sometimes."

"Yes; but you must not come too often, Vance. My aunt was ..."

"I wish your aunt were ..."

"for that case I should ..."

with her, so that you would ..."

"much," she replied, with a ...

(To be continued.)