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(Continue.)

Lady Darrell was right, Valerie loved Roy now with all the power of her heart; not as she had worshipped Eustace Rivers, but with a great passion of genuine affection and tenderness; she had been living in a dream these two days past.

She felt secure in Roy's love, and thought of Alice only as a cloud on the horizon of her happiness; but now she was faded living in dreamland.

Roy's eyes all this night had rested on his wife; a dawn of something new and such as had never come for her, appeared on his face, and Valerie saw that once again her happiness would be wrecked.

She had had no plan; she knew not what or how she meant to do it; but she swore to herself that before many days the earl should be effectually separated from his wife, my Lady Alice, and turn to her.

The men coming in from the smoking-room disturbed her thoughts.

Lord Radine hurried up to Alice.

"Countess," he exclaimed, "how beautiful you look to-night! I could not approach you before dinner, you were so surrounded. The pale cheeks produced by the ghost have quite disappeared."

"Ghost!" repeated Count Jura, who had strolled up to Alice also; "have you been frightened to-day, countess?"

"Yes," Lord Radine went on; "we rode over to the abbey ruins, you know, this morning, and as we were about to mount the remains of the tower, Lady Darrell turned deathly white, uttered a slight exclamation, and fled back to the air. When I taxed her with seeing a ghost, she declared such to be the case."

Alice had grown pale during this speech. She had looked up and met the gaze of Valerie's eyes burning with their passion of hate, and there was such a resemblance at that instant to the sinister face of Paul Ross, that she felt again the dread that had attacked her in the ruins.

Count Jura watched her cheeks blanch; his brows were knit.

"Why, Lady Darrell," he exclaimed, "you surely don't mean to tell me you are afraid of spirits?"

"Not of spirits," Alice answered with an imperceptible shiver, as Lord Radine turned to speak to a lady close by; "but of men, Count Jura, I am afraid."

"She has seen Paul," was Count Jura's swift thought.

"Then you think this was a man?" he continued easily.

"I am sure of it."

The count elevated his brows.

"Shall we go for a stroll into the hall and conservatory?" he said in his most graceful fashion.

Alice hesitated.

She would much prefer to have remained alone.

Somehow she disliked and feared this man, but she could not refuse.

Roy was speaking to his mother as they passed.

Lady Darrell saw the glance he gave his wife, and the way his brows contracted as if with pain and vexation.

"Roy's," she said aloud, softly, "she does well to-night, and how beautiful she is!"

Roy turned and grasped his mother's hand.

"Thank you, dearest," he said hurriedly; "she is indeed most beautiful."

Mother, I begin to think we have judged her harshly; recollect, she married me thinking to save my life."

"I do remember it," answered his mother gently, "and for the future she shall be welcome to me as my daughter; my pride has been against her all this time, but to-night she stands revealed a lady in every sense of the word, and you have no need to blush for your wife."

"I shall seek or send to the Browns to make every inquiry about her birth. I am certain she has proud blood in her veins, mother, and does not belong to them."

Valerie was just behind him as he exclaimed this.

"Discussing my Lady Alice," she observed, with an effort to keep her steaming temper down. "She has really astonished me. What a born actress the girl is!"

"Actress!" repeated the earl, vexed beyond measure at the words; "it is not acting, Valerie; it is nature."

Valerie bit her lip, her worst fears were confirmed. She altered her mood.

"I congratulate you," she said softly, just glancing at him with her lustrous eyes; "it has been a severe test, and no one among your friends is more pleased at the success than I am, Roy."

Roy's face softened.

"Thank you, Valerie; it is like you to be so kind. I am anxious that you should be friends with my—my—the countess. You are so clever, you can help her."

"My Lady Alice does not need my aid, Roy; but since you wish it I will be her friend, first for your sake and then for hers."

None knew what an agony of pain was living beneath that smiling exterior.

Lady Darrell overheard her son's request and her face was puzzled.

"Roy is like all men—clumsy," she said to herself, "Valerie will never be a friend to his wife."

Alice meanwhile walked away with Count Jura. She scarcely heard what he was saying. All the evening her memory had gone back with a thrill to her husband and his request. To-morrow they were to meet and walk together.

It was like a beautiful dream to her, and unconsciously brought her happiness.

Count Jura led the way to a marble anteroom.

Statues gleamed white amid the foliage of rare tropical plants, dim lamps were hung about, and a fountain played in the centre.

"Let us sit here awhile," he said as he led her towards a velvet couch, placed close to the fountain; "we have had no time for a chat, Lady Darrell."

"Nor shall I have any now," said Alice hurriedly, forcing herself to smile.

"You forget, count I have my guests to attend to."

"And am I not one?" he asked quietly.

Alice opened her fan and moved it to and from, but did not answer.

"So you were frightened in the ruins to-day?" went on the count, drinking in the fair loveliness of her face with passionate avidity.

"Yes; but it was very stupid of me. Please do not think me a coward, count."

"And if you are afraid in broad daylight, how can you have the courage to sleep in a room with all these glorious jewels?"

He touched a glittering bracelet as he spoke.

"I am not frightened in my own apartment," Alice said, wondering just a little at the way in which he always discussed the diamonds.

The count noticed her surprise; he adroitly changed the conversation.

"Ah, you should see the wonderful caves and weird nooks I have beheld in my travels. Ghosts and spirits dwell in them, indeed!"

"I should be glad to travel and see other lands."

Alice spoke dreamily.

"You would?" broke in the count.

"Ah, how would you like to leave this cold, desolate place, and see nothing but blue sky, sunshine, and flowers? Fancy a garden with orange groves scenting the air, with terraces leading down to a bay as blue as blue as your starlike eyes! One can be happy in a home like that!"

"Do you know of such a place?" the girl asked, eager to continue this conversation.

"Yes, I know of such a paradise. It is mine—all mine. Now it stands empty and deserted; it only waits for a mistress—a mistress fair, lovely as the sun, with gentle grace and maddening eyes—such as yours. Yes, you are—"

"Count!"

Alice rose quickly, but his arm stole round her slender waist.

"Yes—you are the only woman in this wide world that could bring happiness in such a home. Have not my eyes spoken clearly? Did you not understand? Alice—my Lady Alice—listen! I will take you away from all this gilded misery; you are wretched here. I can give you more—more. Yes, give you more—"

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not comprehend what a passion is devouring my heart. For you I live alone, for I love you!"

"Let me go!" breathed Alice, wrenching herself from his grasp. "How dare you insult me like this!"

"Insult!" The man laughed. "What! you pretend you have not seen my love?"

"Your love?" repeated the girl with deepest scorn. "I have seen nothing; if I had, should I have come here to hear your insults? Go—go—at once! You are a coward! I scorn you! I hate you!"

"Hate me! Beware, Lady Darrell! I am your friend, your lover now, but make me your enemy, and I will fight you to the end."

The girl drew up her figure to the full height, and pointed her right hand to the doorway.

"Go!" she said quietly. "I am not frightened; a man to use threats to a woman must be a coward. Go!"

The count turned, then swiftly moving back, he seized her arm and pressed his lips to it with a passionate force that hurt her.

(To be Continued.)

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