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A DANGEROUS PLOT.

CHAPTER XIX.

We were silent for a space, standing there on the verge of the terrace and in the darkness. She leaned against a lime-tree trunk, torn and shaken with struggles of body and soul, and I was wondering what I could do, how her rescue was to be assured.

"I am going to take you back to the Grange," I said firmly and quietly, "and see you safely again in your own room; and I shall go and meet Mr. Crawford Carden."

"Then, Viola! What can you do? No, no; there is nothing can help me now!"

"There may be only one way, but that way I shall try, and I do think I shall succeed," I said, with a confidence I did not feel.

"You must come home with me first."

There was no weak attempt to protest, and she did not answer a word. We walked together to the Grange, and, unnoticed, up to her room. Then, by main force of my will, I bade her self-possession return to her, and I left her, well, her eyes sent me nine, and she sank back from me with a waiting smile.

"Why should you carry?" she said, "Why do you think it worth while to help me?"

There was a look of fear, of hoping, and pain enough. I was shivering with cold, for I had gone out without covering on my head or shoulders, and the night was chilly. Under the was sufficiently roused from herself to be conscious of my condition.

"I will look after her and cloak, and then rang for Lucy to come to her—not Mathilde. Mathilde, if I could help it, should not enter her room while I was with her mistress's room again."

"I will go now," I said, trying to speak in cheerful commonplace tones. "You must be very tired, and I am sure I am."

She put out one white hand to me.

"Viola, what can you do?" she asked, a finding hope into her voice. "Yes, you not deceiving yourself? I have tried in vain to bribe him. Do not you go into danger. He is false and bad to the core. But I will promise you I will not see him again, Viola; but, while he has those letters, I cannot meet my husband."

"Dear, I am not afraid of him!" I answered. "Do not fear the end." And the courage I summoned to comfort her steeled my own faltering heart.

Quickly as I could, I shrouded myself in shawl and thick veil, and went out once again from the Grange and hastened across the park to the Norbury gate to meet Crawford Carden.

He was standing just within it, by the tall hedge; and he opened the gate hurriedly for me to pass through.

"Come, my love," he whispered, "come—you are late. The carriage is only a few yards off. We shall have enough to do to catch the train. Come!"

I stood facing him by the gate.

"It is I, Mr. Carden," I said clearly. "I think you are mistaking me for some one else."

He remained a moment stock-still, gulping down an involuntary oath, and I knew there was rage in the dark face I could not see. When he answered, his voice was softer and pleasanter than ever the unsuspicious could have detected the false ring of such carefully-concealed base metal.

"Miss Leigh! I regret, indeed, my error. Will you allow me to accompany you where you may be going? It is far too late for a young lady to be out alone."

"I am going no farther than this gate," I replied. "I came to see you."

"I am hardly deserving of such a compliment; but that I apprehend it has a friendly say. Can I do anything for you?"

"I come from Lady Martin Pomeroy."

"Indeed!" He allowed himself a betray nothing beyond curiosity.

"Are you not anxious to hear further, Mr. Carden?"

"I am ready to receive her ladyship's message."

"She desires the return of letters in your possession."

"In my possession? What letters? My dear Miss Leigh—"

"Mr. Carden, I know all about them. Do not trouble to explain."

His mild expostulatory tone changed a little, but only a little; he was too wise to betray feeling; and he answered with quiet scepticism—

"Don't you think Lady Martin had better come to transact her own business, herself?"

"Lady Martin has not the least intention of coming."

"Then kindly tell her, with all deference, that I must answer her letters are too valuable to be parted with even at the bidding of Miss Leigh."

"And what good," I cried, "can they be to you? What would it avail you to make her unhappy, even if by them you could part husband and wife? Is it of no use, Mr. Carden, to appeal to your generosity? Will you not to take advantage of a woman's moments of weakness."

"It would be better if you would leave this matter to be settled by those who are interested. You are exciting yourself quite unnecessarily."

"You shall judge presently whether I am excited. I appeal to your honor as a gentleman, Mr. Carden, and to your honor as a lawyer. What authority do you hold for? Is it on whose to cannot be demanded? Is it to not speak of right and integrity and chivalry to a lady? Must be magnanimous? I thought a man would scorn to mean a revenge."

"I really must decline to have anything to do with a third person in my interviews which concern only myself and Lady Martin Pomeroy."

"And you refuse to return those letters?"

"Certainly."

Because they are hers, and it is I who ask for them? You need not make that, at least, your reason. What ground have you for supposing that I am not by Lady Martin? I grant that she was ignorant of them, that her maid gave them to me; but do you know that I am not her friend? She may have been foolish; she may not have acted always as Lady Martin's wife should have done; but do you suppose for a moment that she would in writing compromise herself with you? Keep your letters; but let them be enough who win. Even a lawyer may be deceived."

I saw him start, and felt his eyes flash on me. He could not see the darkness hid my face, and that he could not hear the quick trembling behind the cool tones whose boldness I inwardly marvelled at.

"Do you dare," he said, "to tell me that Lady Martin did not write them?"

"Dare' is a strong word to use, Mr. Carden."

"Pooh! Do you expect me to believe that trumped-up tale? For what reason, pray, am I required to return the letters?"

"It is I, not Lady Martin, who asks you. Her name is of no use to you, and I will give five hundred pounds for them. There are only four; it is not bad value."

"Lady Martin offered me a thousand."

"And I whisper, but my offer is in good faith."

"You mean that hers was not?"

"I mean, sir, that I am not a maker of my words, Mr. Carden. I offer no explanation. I have di overed—she who had learned to know you has taught me to do so—that in writing to her, pretending to be in love with her, while to me—"

He took the boy I off red him! It was a fast, bitter, and desperate attempt to save Gwendoline. I did not think he could hurt me, but plainly he could hurt them. Anything to rescue poor unhappy Gwendoline, at the worst, as she had truly said, of utterly ruin.

I broke off abruptly. I must keep my word; and with wildly-beating heart I stood looking down on the ground, shivering with fear from head to foot.

He paused to think over his next move. I hoped that he would think the owner of the Grange would give him a more valuable price than he could win from Lady Martin Pomeroy. I thought he would name some heavy sum. Even if he did not believe me, it would be more profitable thus to terrorize over me than over her, for he must see that there was no chance of winning Gwendoline. He answered in the ingratiating tones I had ever hated; but I was fool enough to think they revived me the victor, puzzled though I was.

"It shall be," he said, "exactly as you wish. I will give the letters to you, but to you only. For your sake and Lady Martin's, I can trust to no other hands. Meet me to-morrow evening at nine o'clock; you shall have them."

"I shall be here."

"This is too near the high-road. I will meet you by the shrubbery gate. Under my compliments to Lady Martin Pomeroy, and tell her that when she is frank she need not fear me. I retaliate only on those who de-

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