CHAPTER XI—Continued.

"You'll have no trouble I honestly believe," she declared. "The place is badly lighted and they will drive the people on the tender like sheep. Go right on, take the first flight of stairs to the right and you will be swallowed up in the gang in a minute."

This opinion was well grounded. Mrs. Goddard crossed the deck, descended the steps in question and found herself in a throng of passengers with eyes only for the little boat ahead of them. Our adventuress was soon on the tender, and took the most remote seat she could find in the stern of the boat. It soon began to move.

The lights of Liverpool lay along the shore half a mile distant. The black hull of the Cleopatra loomed overhead like a threatening cloud. Mrs. Goddard held her satchel tightly in her lap. It seemed such a short distance and yet the little boat seemed only to creep. She drew the foggy air deep into her lungs. It seemed so sweet after her close confinement. She would feel that she had earned the right to her freedom when she got it. After awhile, through the gray light of coming dawn, she began to discern the buildings of the city.

A little later the tender was scraping against the piles of the wharf. As she went ashore, Mrs. Goddard saw that two or three sleepy custom officers were hurriedly passing the handluggage without examination. It was evident that only the trunks would have to bear close scrutiny. One of the officers caught her arm and turned her round, but when he saw how small her bag was, he gruffly begged her pardon and she passed on out of the throng into the cold, deserted streets of the sleeping city.

"The dead is alive," she muttered, "and very much alive!"

Without much trouble she found the Hamilton house, and "Mrs. Charles Gray" was soon in a big comfortable room.

"Now, if Lucy only passes the custom officers safely there will not be one

"WHAT COULD HAVE DELAYED THE WOMAN?"

single thing to bother me," she said. "And what is to hinder her?"

But as the morning passed and her companion did not appear, her elation changed to anxiety. What could have delayed the woman? Surely something had arisen, even at this late hour, to rouse suspicion. Mrs. Goddard walked the floor like a caged beast. Noon came and passed, and the afternoon dragged itself along at a snail's pace. She was afraid to go out in the street. For aught she knew the police, having arrested her accomplice, was now turning Liverpool upside down to find trace of her. The first shadows of nightfall were like palpable substances which rasped a brain now inflamed with fears and direful imaginings.

"Exposure!" seemed to be written in letters of fire on the unlighted walls of her chamber. "Suicide!" was the next word she saw, but she brushed it aside. She would not even think of such a step. Even after this game was played, and had entertained the victims of the nine-day sensation habit, there would yet be other fields for the exercise of her fruitful brain. The world had always seemed so large to her—so full of resources.

At ten o'clock she heard some one coming up the stairs. She weighed the tread, wondering if it was a policeman's. No, it was too light for that. It was a woman's. Opening the door, she saw Mrs. Nolan standing before her in the ill-lighted corridor. She drew her in, her fears completely dominating her speech.

"I know you are angry, but I could not help it?" began Mrs. Nolan in a harsh undertone.

"What was it?" demanded Mrs. Goddard; "don't keep me waiting."

"It was a lot of things. I did my best, but the custom officers would not let me have your trunks."

"Is that all?"

"No, they held me there for several hours asking all manner of questions about you and making me swear to statements. I swore enough lies to draw a pension from the kingdom of Hell for the rest of my life. It was all about the ownership of the contents of the trunks and which were your things and which mine."

"Then they did not suspect us of—?"

"No, it was only about the things. Then after I had managed to get possession of my trunks, by showing my name on them, I slipped away and got a cab that took me to the Portland house. I thought I would be free, but the police officers kept calling to make other inquiries and get me to make other affidavits about the color of your hair, your age, your residence, the name of your husband, and what not. Then they had no sooner given me a breathing spell than the reporters and foreign correspondents began to troop in."

"Reporters?" Mrs. Goddard pronounced the word as if she were learning to speak English.

"Yes, you don't mean to say you haven't seen the afternoon papers!" Mrs. Nolan drew three damp ones from her cloak pocket. "I can't imagine what you have been doing all day. They have been yelling your name all over Liverpool."

"I thought it would get into print, of course," said Mrs. Goddard. She had calmed down considerably and now set herself to the task before her.

"Of course, I can't go without clothes," she murmured, reflectively, "and let those stupid limbs of the law ship every rag I have back to the major. It would upset him awfully! Now, let me think."

The product of her meditation was worthy of her ingenuity. She laid aside the newspapers, of which she had only read a few big headlines, and sat down at a table where there was a pen, paper and ink, and began to write as follows:

"Whereas, I, Jeanne Goddard, wife of Major Rowland Goddard, of Lyndhurst-on-the-Hudson, New York, do hereby acknowledge that I owe my companion, Lucy Nolan, for past services, the sum of one thousand dollars, which debt I do secure by a mortgage on all my personal effects, such as my jewelry, trunks and all their various contents, such as wearing apparel, etc. In case of my death while we are abroad I hereby authorize her, the said Lucy Nolan, to retain the forementioned property till my husband, the said Major Goddard, has satisfied her claim in full. To this I herewith set my hand and seal.

"Jeanne Goddard."

"What does all this mean?" questioned Mrs. Nolan, when she had read it twice, each time with contracted brows and a doubtful shake of the head.

"You must go and inquire the address of the most reliable lawyer in Liverpool. Pay him his fee in advance, give him this paper and tell him that you want him to get my luggage turned over to you. You must explain that I have always been—that I always was a hard individual to get money out of, and that as I already owed you a thousand dollars you refused to go abroad with me without some sort of security. Tell him that you intend to take the things right back to America, believing that Major Goddard will settle your claims as soon as you do. Are you willing to do this?"

"Oh, I don't mind at all," said Mrs. Nolan, smiling. "I have just begun to get my hand in and rather like the excitement. The English are so polite. I think I can tell a tale straight enough."

The two plotters did not meet till the following afternoon. About four o'clock Mrs. Nolan entered, her face radiant with good news.

"I had very little trouble," she announced. "I secured the services of the best barrister in Liverpool. He charged $50; but he said he would stand as my security in case of any legal complication. I tell you I felt good when I saw the trunks unloaded at my hotel."

"Then we shall go on to London to-night," exclaimed Mrs. Goddard. "The train leaves at eight o'clock. Meet me at the station. When we get to London we shall rent a furnished villa in the suburbs somewhere and be dead to the world for awhile at least. We'll have a lot of fun, Lucy."

CHAPTER XII.

It was about 12 o'clock on the tenth day after the sailing of the Cleopatra. Maj. Goddard, Mr. Talley and Blanche were in the dining-room about to sit down to luncheon, Miss Dean having sent down word that she would be detained in her room.

The door bell had rung, but none of the trio had heard it. Just at this juncture James came in bearing a telegram on a tray. He handed it to the major, who opened it slowly.

"I wonder what this is?" he murmured.

"Mrs. Goddard has arrived safe," suggested Talley; "this is the tenth day, you know."

"No, it is not a cablegram," answered Goddard, whose eye was well schooled in such matters; "it is from the city."

The others watched his face as he unfolded the sheet of paper. They saw him start, and his eyes open wide.

"Surely, she could not—" he began, and there paused.

"May I see it?" asked Talley, his thoughts on falling stocks, bank failures and possible financial crashes. The young man engaged in speculation now and then.

The major gave him the telegram and turned away. He was deathly pale and tripped on a rug as he walked towards the door. Blanche looked over Talley's shoulder. The message was from the agents of the Cleopatra's company on Broadway, and ran as follows:

"We regret to inform you that your wife, in a temporary fit of insanity, during a severe storm two days before the Cleopatra arrived at Liverpool, threw herself overboard and was not rescued. Our information comes direct from the captain of the Cleopatra, who adds that full particulars are being sent to the New York papers."

"Isn't it awful—poor old man!" said Talley, looking at Blanche, but she seemed to have lost the power of speech. She turned white to the roots of her hair. Going into the little reception-room adjacent, she found her guardian standing at a window. She laid her hand on his arm.

"Oh, I am so—sorry!" she said, tenderly.

But he only laid an unsteady hand over hers, pressed it a little, and said:

"Thank you, dear little girl; leave me alone now, please."

And as she moved away she saw him sink into a big armchair and cover his face with his hands.

That afternoon the papers came bearing a long account of the tragedy. The major was in his room and sent one of the maids down for them, so no one saw his face while he was reading the details, which shocked him as if every word of the account had been true.

"Did you ever imagine that Mrs. Goddard was not quite right mentally?" asked Talley when he was able to catch Blanche alone that afternoon.

"Yes," she answered. "I suspected—or rather she confessed to a tendency in that direction the night before she sailed. She said she hoped the voyage would cure her."

"Ah, that sort of thing never entered my head," said the private secretary. "I thought she had the clearest head of any woman alive, but bright people do lose their balance."

They saw little of the major that day. He remained in his room. Friends called to offer condolences and letters and telegrams of sympathy piled up on his desk in his study, but he saw no one nor opened any communication. The next day he went to the city, and there in a small hotel where he was unknown to any of the inmates he took up his abode.

He was as nearly insane as a man of sound mind can become. His existence became a routine of mental torture. He spent each day in walking through streets where he was not known. At night he would lie awake till his physical nature would refuse longer to bear the burden his wife had put upon him, and then his strong frame sank under the blessing of sleep.

He realized fully what she was expecting of him, and he hardly knew if he would be equal to carrying out her plans. At the expiration of the first week after the reception of the news a letter arrived in his private letter box on Sixth avenue. He was almost afraid to open it. It seemed like a communication from the dead—or worse, a command from hell. And when he had finally devoured it, and found that Jeanne and Mrs. Nolan were comfortably domiciled in a little furnished villa near Kensington Gardens and really enjoying life in perfect security from detection—even then, I say, he had no more hopeful horizon.

It was the sin of it all that ground his finer nature down into despair, and he was wise enough to know it. However, there was even in Jeanne's letter much of the potent charm which had been since his marriage his directing influence, and he read and reread the graphic account of her adventures till the awful picture was stamped on his brain. She wrote often, and her epistles were always replete with good humor, her old vivacity and endearing expressions.

In that way a month passed. He scarcely spent an hour out of each day at Lyndhurst. Often he went out on an afternoon train and took the next back to New York. The man who had charge of the private letter boxes stared at him curiously every time he came in and with quivering fingers unlocked his box.

The major began to disregard his dress; often his neckties were not carefully tied, nor his boots polished, nor his silk hat ironed. He no longer frequented the armory of his old regiment, nor his club. He had no desire to meet men he knew.

It was after he had received a letter from Jeanne urging him not to delay any longer in the matter of making Blanche his wife, owing to the great likelihood of the girl's dying suddenly, that he bethought himself that he had neglected his ward very much, considering her solicitude in his behalf. He knew the girl was thinking of him, for every time he entered his room at Lyndhurst he saw evidence of her thoughtfulness in fresh flowers cut in the conservatory by her own hands.

On this day, when he arrived at Lyndhurst, he went into the library. His father, who had been in his lifetime a distinguished surgeon, had left a good collection of valuable medical works. It was Jeanne's allusion to Blanche's critical condition that caused him to look up a description of her malady. "Aortic aneurism," he murmured, as he ran through the index of a big book. But the finding of the article on the subject, and the colored illustrations of the delicate organs on the point of bursting from the pressure of blood, sickened him.

"It is indeed fatal," he said. "She can't possibly live long, and if I only knew that she would be happier as my wife for the remainder of her life Jeanne might have her wish. It would make Jeanne happier, too, and perhaps she does deserve better luck than to be the wife of a poor man."

Had he been as suspicious and as observant as many detectives he might have noticed that the words "aortic aneurism" had been pressed into the surface of the paper across the text, as if some one had written them with a pencil on a piece of paper resting on the page. The formation of the letters resembled the handwriting of his wife, but he noticed none of these points, and closed the book.

Just then the footman brought in a small parcel and placed it on a table.

"What is that, James?" asked the major.

"A package of medicines for Miss Briscoe, sir."

Goddard went to the table and took the parcel in his hands. Just then Miss Dean entered the room.

"I have been looking for it," she said, indicating the parcel. "Blanche's

"DID YOU WANT TO SEE ME, GUARDIAN?"

medicines gave out last night, and I promised to send them up as soon as they came."

"Is Blanche so very bad off, then?" he asked, his mind full of the grewsome article he had just read.

Miss Dean looked at him steadily.

"I think she needs great care and attention, Maj. Goddard," she said, softly. "I wish I could be brave and speak out my mind to you, as I have imagined myself doing a good many times."

"Well, I am sure you may," he returned. "In fact, if it is anything touching my ward's welfare I should want very much to hear it."

"Then it is not a physical disease that is wrong with my dear friend so much as it is—something else."

"Go on, please," said Goddard, mystified.

"She never will get well or be her old self till—pardon me—till you cease to treat her as you do."

"I don't follow you," said the major, slightly embarrassed.

Miss Dean sat down, holding the parcel in her lap.

"I am saying something Blanche would never forgive," she went on, "but you are not blind, Maj. Goddard. You must have known that Blanche's whole life was wrapped up in you before she left school."

The major was looking at a particular figure in the carpet with unnatural steadiness, and he did not raise his eyes.

"Do you think so, Miss Dean?"

"I know it," declared the champion of one woman's rights. "She and I were intimate in school. She knew my heart—I knew hers. I hated you, sir, when I heard you had married a—the woman you did marry, after having led such a confiding young creature as Blanche to believe you were in love with her and spoiled the life intrusted to you. You did this, sir!"

Goddard started. He had never imagined such strong condemnation could come to him from such source. He found himself unable to formulate a reply. Miss Dean, now hot and flushed, continued:

"You might at least treat the poor child decently. She will never get well as long as she frets about you as she is doing. She has hardly slept an hour any night since your sad news arrived. Don't you see she can't put out the fires you kindled in her heart? If you were happy she might do so, but seeing the man one loves in constant misery is enough to kill any organization as sensitive and delicate as Blanche's. If she could only see you once a day and feel that you look upon her as a friend she would not suffer so, but you are always away."

"I thank you for—for speaking so plainly and showing me my duty," stammered Goddard. "I have been very selfish."

He was about to make a reference to the dread malady which was laying siege to the life of his ward, but, remembering his promise to Jeanne not to speak of it, and fearing Miss Dean's indiscretion, he held his tongue on that point.

"Could I see her now, do you think?" he added, contritely.

"Yes; let me send her down to you," said Miss Dean, impulsively.

"I shall wait here," he said. And as Miss Dean left the room he decided no longer to try to stem the tide which seemed bearing him, he knew not whither. He walked the floor till Blanche came. Her sweet young face showed the ravages of a tortured spirit, but it now shone with a light of anticipation.

"Did you want to see me, guardian?" As she spoke, she held out her hands. He took them and stood for a moment gravely looking into her eyes.

"You have been unhappy, Blanche?" he said.

"How could I be otherwise, and you—" her voice failed her and she coughed to disclaim that it was due to rising emotion.

"I know I have not done my duty," he said. "But I want to begin. Blanche, would you like to have me stay more at home than I have since—since Jeanne went away."

"Oh, I wish you would!" she answered, quickly. "You can't imagine how I have worried. You know I could not tell what might have happened to you."

"Blanche." He felt something grasp his heart as he hesitated. It may have been the hand of his conscience—the revolting of his better nature. Then something like the worst form of his recent despair seemed to settle on his brain. He felt that he was groping towards the accomplishment of an unpardonable deed.

"Blanche, if I were to ask you to be my wife, would you consent—could you, knowing how I feel about the—the other?"

He felt her soft warm hands grasp his tightly. For a moment she stood with eyes downcast, then she looked up and said frankly:

"If you wished it I should be so glad, for something tells me I could then help you, and to do that is what I am certainly praying for."

"Would you consent to an early marriage?"

"I should want to do as you liked about it."

"Would you not care for what people would say about our haste in such a matter?"

"I should not care at all." She was breathing rapidly. "I should feel that I was acting right."

He hesitated a moment; then he said:

"Will you marry me to-morrow? Rev. Mr. Strothers lives about a mile from here, along the river. Talley can first see him and make the arrangements. Will you drive there in the morning and become my wife?"

"If it is your wish, yes."

He drew her head towards him and for a moment it rested on his shoulder. For an instant a memory of his courtship of her during her school days flashed into his mind and he experienced one of the old thrills which had made him feel so much like a boy again. Then he put her from him.

"Be ready, then, by 11 o'clock," he said. "I shall speak to Talley at once."

When she had left the room, a strange, glorious light in her young face, he began again to walk the floor. He was tingling in every vein. His heart had begun to beat excitedly. He tried to think of Jeanne, the awful disease which was eating Blanche's life away, but he could only feel the pressure of his ward's hands, the warmth of her breath on his face, the depth of her great, trustful eyes.

"Great God! what can this mean?" he exclaimed.

He continued to walk back and forth across the room for half an hour, then he stopped suddenly and rang.

James obeyed the summons.

"Where is Mr. Talley?" he asked.

"In the study, at work, sir." James saluted in military fashion.

"That is all." The major went to the study, where he found his private secretary at work at a typewriter.

"Talley," he began, "you wanted to see me yesterday, I believe?"

"I did, major. I believe the amount you were keeping for me is exactly $5,000?"

"You are right, Talley; that is the amount, and, as I told you, you can get it at any time you wish. All you have to do is to draw the check. I will sign it."

"I have it ready now," said the young man, handing Goddard a slip of paper.

"I hope you are not thinking of leaving me?" said the major, as he signed the check.

"Not that, but I am flatly disobeying your injunctions, major. You have tried to keep me out of speculation, but the temptation is too strong to resist. This check covers all my savings, and yet I am going to put every cent of it into G. N. & W. railway stock."

"Oh, you can't be so foolhardy, Talley!"

"I am fortunately on the inside as to the future outcome of the stock," declared the young man. "I have a young friend, Hubert Johnson, the son of the Wall street Johnson. You know him by reputation. Well, this friend of mine happened to overhear a conversation in his father's office which let him on to an important secret. His father and other big speculators have formed a syndicate to depress this stock. It has been going down like lightning for the last two months. It has reached its lowest notch. They are certainly buying all they can lay their hands on. I know I cannot be running any risk. I am in a sure deal. I tell you this because I hope that you will take a hand. I had rather see you make money than anyone, major, for you have been the best friend I have ever had."

"I shall not invest," answered Goddard; "but I wish you luck, Talley. I hope it will make you rich."

"Thank you major." The secretary put the check into his pocket.

"I have an important commission for you, Talley." The major cleared his throat, sat down at his desk, turned in his revolving chair and crossed his legs. A slight color had risen in his face. Talley had never seen him look so handsome.

"I am at your service, major."

"What if I were to tell you I am going to get married, Talley?"

The secretary stared. The carriage of his typewriting machine, with which he was toying, fell with a sharp click.

"Are you in earnest, Maj. Goddard?"

"Quite in earnest, Talley. I have decided to marry my ward."

"Miss Briscoe?" exclaimed Talley, his face suddenly falling.

"Yes, Miss Briscoe. And we have decided, under existing circumstances, that we will have the affair take place in as quiet a manner as possible. I want you to drive over to Rev. Mr. Strothers at once and see if we may come to his house to-morrow morning. If he consents, then I want you to attend to any other arrangements without delay."

The private secretary had turned quite pale. His eyes were expanded and fixed in a helpless stare on the face of his employer.

"Have you thought over this well, major?" he blurted out, suddenly.

"Why do you ask that?" asked Goddard, suspiciously.

"Pardon me," stammered Talley, "I only thought"—but it was not clear to Talley what he thought.

"I do not understand your—your question, Talley," insisted the major.

"You know Miss Briscoe is young," answered the secretary, "and—and she has been so upset over your recent bereavement that I was afraid that, through sympathy and vast interest in you as her father's friend and her benefactor, she might—"

"I see," broke in the major; "you think she may hastily take a step that might be regretted later, but you need not be afraid, Talley. The truth is, Blanche and I once thought of marrying before I met Mrs. Goddard. I think you need have no fears on that score."

"I did not know of that," said the private secretary, his face still set and white. "I beg your pardon. I shall carry out your instructions. I hope you can overlook my remark just now."

"Easily," said the major, "for it shows your interest in me and Blanche is more than skin deep."

When the major had left the room the young man lowered his head to his desk. He heard the major ring and order the horse and cart.

"God have mercy on me! What have I been allowing myself to think about?" he muttered. "I might have known there was something—behind that awful suffering of hers. I ought to have seen that she loved him!"

CHAPTER XIII.

During that night a light snow began to fall, and as the bridal party left the next morning to be driven to the house of Rev. Mr. Strothers a thin white carpet lay on the earth and fine feathery flakes continued to fall.

The servants had been apprised of the astonishing event and they gathered at the windows which look out upon the drive.

"A very sensible thing for 'em to do," said James. "She is the sort of mistress I want to work for. I should have left the other if she hadn't gone to the bottom of the Atlantic. I haven't lived with the aristocracy for ten years without knowing a sample when I see it. The good Lord has been kind to the major."

"I wish she had waited awhile, just for the looks o' the thing," said Katie, Blanche's favorite maid. "Then she could have had a swell wedding, plenty of presents, and—"

"And give you all her old clothes," sneered James, who was too fat to make use of the major's discarded apparel.

"I get everything I want anyway," was Katie's defense. "It is only because I think she deserves all that any rich young lady has that I object to this kind of a marriage; but if she is only happy, I won't complain."

These gossiping hirelings were at the windows when the returning carriage appeared in sight an hour later. The bride's beautiful face was flushed by the contact with the wind, and she had never looked so happy or moved with so much grace. Talley and Miss Dean had very serious faces as they came up the veranda side by side.

"Well, it is all over," said the major to his bride when they were alone in the luxurious company chamber, where a red fire glowed. He had never been such a mystery to himself as now. He felt as if he were drunken with delicious memories of their old courtship.

"Yes, I am your wife at last," she said, with a smile. "I am your wife, and I am going to make you happy. I feel it away down in my heart."

"You feel it," he repeated, as if in a dream, and he helped her to take off her cloak. He felt her warm breath on his face. He laid the cloak aside, then drew her into his arms and kissed her. "And so do I, dear girl. And so do I."

At that strange moment Jeanne Goddard and all her evil plans seemed as much removed from his life as if she had never entered it. It was as if the old life had come back to him—the life in which his love had for its object a creature so pure and undefiled that it lifted him up and opened his eyes to spiritual possibilities.

"I was at first afraid you would not consent so soon after—after her death," he said.

"I felt that it was my right to have you now," said Blanche, frankly. "She told me how she had deliberately beguiled you from me when she discovered that you loved me. The night before she sailed she confessed she had resorted to every trick and artifice within her power to make you cast me aside."

"She told you that?" the major exclaimed.

"Yes, and not only that, but she said she had some sort of presentiment