

THE LITTLE YOUNG LADYSHIP

BY
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SYNOPSIS.

Lord Gresham goes, incognito, to Edgcombe, Conn., to see John Forbes, a wealthy planter. He is known to the family as Captain Gresham. Gresham sympathizes with Forbes' daughter Dorothy when an objectionable bumpkin proposes to her. This brings them closer together. Eventually he discloses his identity as Captain Lord Patrick Gresham. The scene shifts to Glendaire Castle, Lord Gresham's ancestral home in Ireland, where there is found the Honorable John Gresham, a morbid man cursed with a mental disorder. On learning that "Pat" has wedded Dorothy John is thrown into a fit that terrifies Remira, whom he wishes to marry, and brings the realization to her that she must never marry him. Patrick and his young wife travel in foreign lands for three years, in the course of which a boy is born to them. On their return they receive a royal greeting from the tenantry and the population of the town of Ballyreese. Their young heir, being taken into John's arms, suddenly strikes him full in the face. Mr. and Mrs. Forbes arrive at Glendaire and plan to take Remira with them on their travels. At this John suffers another mental seizure. While in a towering rage he rides across country to a distant cottage where he has quartered a boy nine or ten months older than his baby nephew. There is a striking resemblance between the two children that prompts John to attempt to palm him off as Patrick's elder son. John's condition becomes grave. He plunges into dissipation and determines to murder his brother. Patrick is brought home gravely wounded, having been shot from ambush. He is threatened with blindness.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

SIX days had passed since what every one called, but nobody considered, the accident. McBirney had promised to test the Earl's sight in a day or two. The inflammation had been subdued, the bandaging was less severe and the room darkened through the day. Only at night were the curtains thrown wide. The nurse no longer served on night duty, and the door between Pat's room and Dot's stood ajar now so that she could watch him and wait upon him. It was a still night, and Pat awoke without cause and without motion. Far away in the silent house the clock struck three; there were hours yet to pass before morning, and it was unlikely that he would sleep again. Lack of exercise and of air, confinement, pain and fears of blindness had made his nights wakeful and hard to bear.

Blindness! These last few days had taught him what that meant. The helplessness of it, the blank queer loneliness, worst when he was not alone. The fear of being loved by Dot only through pity and a sense of duty. The useless years of empty days. Never to see his wife again. Never to see all the gradual changes which would make a man of Pitty Pat. Never to hunt or ride or drive or shoot. To live like an old woman in a bath chair. To know only what he was told, to have only what he was given, to be useless, a burden and—he would always come back to it—an object of pity. And they would tell him tomorrow. McBirney would come with his damned professional soothing purr to tell him that his life was over, his eyes were closed. Pat could imagine it all, and the touch of Dot's steady little hand on his. She had been with him at every dressing and examination; she would surely not leave him to face the last alone. And the nurse cooling in sincere reassurance. Perhaps Mrs. O'Leary would be there; she had been much in the sick room, a welcome and valued comforter and entertainer. Well! he would disappoint them all of their scene; he would know now.

He slipped the bandage from his head and lay a little while with his eyes closed, but uncovered. He knew that he must be cautious. Also he was afraid. Then slowly, very slowly, he opened his eyes. Straight in front of him there was a pale oblong, cut into smaller oblongs by black intersecting lines. Everything else was black. He stared at it stupidly for a moment and then recognized it as the open window. At least, he told himself, he could distinguish light from darkness. He closed his eyes again to ponder on this mercy. He, who had always had the eyes of a hawk, almost wept for joy to think that he could distinguish a window against a moonlit sky. Presently he looked again. High up in one corner of the oblong a great star burned. Again he thanked high heaven and then noticed with consternation that the star was fading. "I'll shut my eyes for three minutes," said he; "then I'll look at it again. If it's gone, I'm a goner, too." He counted sixty three fevered times and then looked for his star. It was fainter than before, but, with a gasp of relief, he saw the reason. The edge of the moon showed in the other corner of the window.

His exclamation, soft as it had been, reached Dorothy. She had spent the night lying wide-eyed on her golden bed in her golden room. She no longer thought. She had lost the power. Her mind was now a desert place across which horrible images and imaginations passed or stopped or came again without order, without reason, without control. At first she had tried to comfort herself with the thought that the woman of her husband's first love had lived and loved and suffered and died while she was a child at Edgcombe. But gradually this idea lost its power to console. To understand all might be to forgive all, but she knew so little, nothing but what old Mrs. Moran had told her, what John had hinted at, what Pat had tacitly admitted. "A small, dark, little girl," Mrs. Moran had said, "with little hands and little feet." Then—quick upon this thought came another. The saying of another old woman—"The Greshams are a bad lot, my dear. Go to the picture gallery, look at the women who loved and trusted;" then, "You know this address if you ever want me," and John's "Better go home to America and arrange matters from there." How could she arrange a life with no Pat in it!

She watched the moon as it passed across her windows, and until she heard, or thought she heard, a sound in Pat's room.

When Pat had quite identified the moon he closed his eyes once more. "A blind man could see that," he told himself; "I'll try the furniture, the wall paper."

He easily distinguished familiar chairs, and

then thought he detected a movement of the door which separated his room from Dot's. The moonlight struck it fairly. A tall white door showing a little slice of sweet darkness beyond it; sweet because it held his wife. The door moved yet a little more, and he saw that a hand was on it; the hand was followed by a soft round arm; then came some lace, then a hanging sleeve of golden satin, and then Dot, his own incomparable Dot, slipped into the moonlight and stood there listening. No memory of her had ever been so lovely as this reality.

Yet, was this Dot? He had not seen her for more than three weeks. Then she had been radiant; but this woman in the doorway, was she the same Dot? The slight, straight figure was the same, the heavy hair which fell almost to her knees was the same, the fair neck which rose out of the lace held upon her breast by a long blue ribbon, the shapely arms, the little bare feet. Yes! these were all the same. But the face framed by that dusky hair was different, and it was this difference that kept him from springing up and calling to her. Her mouth and great dark eyes were full of haunting questions; she

library for records, and there she sits playing them for herself as happy as a bedbug."

A slight halt in the conversation punctuated his last words. Maloney's face seemed to suggest that Mr. Petty should instantly be cast out into the night, but that complete during-dinner-speaker has several other conversational bombshells in reserve, and the butler, receiving no further orders, withdrew, disgruntled, to the sideboard.

"Say!" said Mr. Petty when the silence, which he had himself created, had lasted long enough; "say, did any one ever tell ye that you two look alike?"

"It has been noticed once or twice," John Gresham answered.



No Memory of Her Had Ever Been So Lovely as This Reality.

"Well, it's so," said Petty. "You certainly do look alike. Twins, be ye?"

"Twins," answered John.

"Well, say," said Abraham Petty, "do tell! You know I'd hate to be a twin," he went on; "most of sort of make ye feel funny—you don't know who ye are' kind of feeling."

"And yet," said John Gresham very quietly, "that is a selfish view to take of it. Think what the world would gain, Mr. Petty, if there had been another of you."

"That's all right, of course," Petty agreed. "But say, there's another thing I noticed—about this likeness, I mean." But John would have none of him, and it was Pat who courteously came to the rescue.

"And what's that?" he asked.

"It's about them kids of yours," answered Abraham. This time he was flattered by the complete attention of every one in the room. He had gayly and instinctively opened the most impossible of all topics. No one had the courage or the resource to take it away from him, and so he pranced triumphantly on. "I saw them kids in the garden this morning and they looked so much alike that I had to ask the nurse girl which was Dot's baby. And I says to Matilda, 'They might be twins; they look so much alike.'"

It was well for Mr. Petty that he required very little encouragement from his auditors. He certainly received none. If he had looked at John he might have been surprised into stopping, for John's expression was one not often worn at dinner tables. But he did not look. "Of course," he went on, "Dot's boy is a little shorter than the other, but he's just as stocky as the other one. Is there much difference between them? How old is your boy, anyway?" he questioned, looking at last toward John.

The silence produced by Mr. Petty's earlier remark was as nothing compared with that which followed this. Every face in the room turned toward John, who, ashen gray, looked only at Dorothy. And every face held varying shades of the same enlightenment. Petty, the incorrigible, grotesque, almost idiotic Petty, had stumbled upon the truth, which had eluded their more complex and over-anxious searching. For it was the truth, the simple, patent truth; no one looking at John and at Pat could doubt it, and Pat, concerned only for his brother's embarrassment, was the first to speak.

"About four years old," said he, thinking that the simple truth might satisfy and silence Mr. Petty.

It was as well that he could not see his audience. Dorothy was lying back in her chair, radiant with relief.

Mrs. Forbes was beaming, though puzzled. But Mr. Forbes was in a black, towering rage, and his anger was aroused almost as much by his own stupidity as by the treachery of John Gresham. Matilda Petty felt that she was in the presence of a psychic thunderstorm and cowered in her place. Mr. Petty felt nothing at all except that he had attracted the attention of his host, and so, having acted the part of Nemesis in John's behalf, he was quite ready to turn his attention to Pat's leading question:

"And what do you think of Ireland, Mr. Petty?"

"I can't say I think much of it," said Mr. Petty sadly, as one knowing and regretting

that his opinion must sadden and humiliate his host. "We have rode around considerable in your automobile and it certainly seems to me that Ireland is a hundred years back of the world in hardware."

For the succeeding five minutes the conversation bristled with mowing machines, harvesters and other agricultural hardware.

Then the other members of the party were able to gather their scattered wits and vocabularies and Mr. Petty got another chance. The empty place upon Dot's right puzzled him. This was the first evening upon which he had seen the whole household gathered about the table. And still there was an empty place.

wish. He's never going to know. But I know, and I'm going to revive your memory. You've stolen!"

John sprang to his feet. "Ah, set down! I'm telling you nothing you don't know. Stolen estate money; thousands of it!"

"How do you know?" snarled John. "Banks," answered Forbes. "I went to Scotland Yard and they agreed with me that you'd bear looking into; all most confidential, of course."

"Scotland Yard!" repeated John. "You dared to discuss me in Scotland Yard?"

"I don't know why not. I may have to be sending for some of them to come down and call. Well, after that it was easy enough. I told you I had letters of introduction to bankers in London and Dublin. That's what I was doing when I went to London. When you go around to those banks maybe you won't find yourself just as popular as pay day. I had nothing to do with that. They were grouchy right from the start; said you gave them more bookkeeping to do than ten other clients called for. Then," he went on, "stealing not being enough, you go and undertake to kill Dorothy on that buck-jumper of yours. Oh, you needn't bother to look indignant—I had a talk with the men afterward. This is the one thing on the list that Dorothy don't know about. Then comes that dastardly trick about Michael. I don't know as I ever before met up with a man who would use his dead wife's child to ruin his brother's home, and I was Sheriff in my home county for ten years, and I saw quite some of the wrong side of human nature. Then when you know the fix-up, you get ready for your brother and know that he is coming home to it, that you can't stop him!"

"How could I know?" sneered John.

"By the telegram you suppressed. I got it out of that creature of yours down to the telegraph office."

"You lie!" said John. "There was no telegram."

"You're mistaken," said Forbes. "Here's the carbon copy. I got it out of him easy enough. I just twisted the top of him toward the east and the rest of him toward the west until I restored his memory. So then you knew the Earl was coming home—a man that almost makes a woman of himself about you and your darned feelings. The only living creature in the world that doesn't wish you were dead. And you're afraid of him, and you take a gun and go out to shoot him in the dark."

"Never!" shrieked John, springing up again. "You can't prove it."

"We don't have to. We know it."

"Who knows it? Who dares to say it?"

"Mother," answered Forbes quietly. "She's the first."

"Mrs. Forbes?" repeated Gresham, in blank amazement. "Mrs. Forbes?"

"Yes, mother. That time I was Sheriff she used to be down to the jail a lot talking to the boys and she got so she could pick out what they were in trouble for before I had a chance to tell her. And that night when you came out of this room, so calm and smiling in your dancing shoes, mother touches my arm and says—'That's the man. Don't you see the old murder look?' Then she talked with young Burke, fooled him into thinking that we all knew, and he gave up his part of the story. That's a nice list of activities, Mr. the Honorable John Gresham. Now, get active just once more and hustle off this place. You needn't bother about the money you stole. I've fixed that with the bankers. All you've got to do is to get—git—and stay."

"And leave you all here to enjoy the work of my hands—the gardens I designed, the house I restored and made habitable; to rest under the trees I planted, to drive about the roads and avenues I laid out. Even the horses and the cattle on the hills are of my choosing; the pheasants of my raising; the plantations of my design. This was my life and work when you and your daughter had never heard of such a place; and when Pat cared so little about it that years went by without his ever coming here. And then, because it suits his damned convenience, Pat comes back and gathers all of you around him and treats me—oh! that cursed five minutes—like a bailiff. Oh, it's a sweet life; and yet, Mr. Forbes, I'm not going. You can tell your daughter what you please. Tell the Earl what you please. In fact, you can do anything you please. This is my house, my place. I made them."

"They would be in America," answered Forbes. "At least a fair share of them would, but your British law is different, and you're only talking wild. Pat could have you chucked out through the big gate like you was a stray pig. You can't put up no fight, and the reason my daughter and I are giving you a chance to get away is that we realize just how you feel. Pat might have married anybody, but he did marry my daughter and she and her boy did break into your chances. There's nothing to do about it. The laws of nature and the laws of the land work on and you get shoved out. As I say, we understand your feelings and we're sorry—good and sorry—that it happened to be us that broke your life. But what we don't understand is the way those feelings led you to act. Embarrassment, gross deception, bad faith, murder and general all round meanness don't seem natural symptoms to us. And that's the reason I'm telling you—for I've got the safety of this household on my hands until Pat is well—that's the reason I'm telling you you've got to be off this place by sun-up. If I find you here afterward there may be an accident."

"Good night," said Gresham. "I shall see you at breakfast."

"I'm afraid not," said Forbes. "I guess you'll be starting out one way or another quite a while before that. I'll see you later. I'll sit outside by the fire in the hall until you're ready to start and I'll see that you get off all right."

"That's what he thinks; and that's what he's going to think, according to Dorothy's

(To Be Concluded.)