

CHAPTER XXI-Continued. -12-

"My own reputation," she mur-"is absolutely of no consemured. quence, but remember that you live promised to become his-!" here, and-"

"Don't be silly !" he interrupted. "What does that matter? And besides, according to you and all the rest of you here, these things don't affect a man's reputation-they are expected of him. See, I have rung the bell for breakfast. Now I am going to telego for your clothes."

They breakfasted together, a little later, and she made him smoke. He stood before the window, looking down upon the river, with his pipe in his mouth and an unfamillar look upon his face.

"Do you suppose that Louise knows anything?" he asked at length.

"I should think not," she replied. "It is for you to tell her. I rang up the prince's house while you were in the bathroom. They say that he has a broken rib and some bad cuts, sustained in a motor accident last night, but that he is in no danger. There was nothing about the affair in the newspapers, and the prince's servants have evidently been instructed to give this account to inquirers."

A gleam of interest shone in John's face.

"By the bye," he remarked, "the prince is a Frenchman. He will very likely expect me to fight with him."

"No hope of that, my belligerent friend," Sophy declared, with an attempt at a smile. "The prince knows that he is in England. He would not be guilty of such an anachronism. Besides, he is a person of wonderfully well-balanced mind. When he is himself again, he will realize that what happened to him is exactly what he asked for."

John took up his hat and gloves. He glanced at the clock-it was a little past eleven.

"I am ready," he announced. "Let me drive you home first."

His motor was waiting at the door, and he left Sophy at her rooms. Before she got out, she held his arm for a moment.

"John," she said, "remember that Louise is very high-strung and very sensitive. Be careful !"

"There is only one thing

told me, with a smile, that it was the that tangled mass of chimneys and

Louise shrank back. "He told you that?"

John was on his fect. The fever was blazing once more.

"He told me that, face to face !" "And you?"

"If we had been alone," John anphone down for a messenger boy to him. I drove the words down his her dressing-gown around her, pulled

he had left, and hurt him rather badly, which she had striven to rest, and I'm afraid. Sophy took me home somehow, and now I am here." She leaned a little forward on the couch. She looked into his face searchlikeness to Stephen had never been back of the chair.

more apparent. "Listen !" she said. "You are a Puritan. While I admire the splendid selfrestraint evolved from your creed, it is "It is all over !" partly temperamental, isn't it? I was me, do you love me?"

"Love you?" he repeated. "You of the damned if I didn't? Could I come to you with a man's blood upon

my hands if I didn't? If the prince lives, it is simply the accident of fate. Iy. his body. Love you !"

He rose slowly to her feet. She eaned with her elbow upon the mantelpiece, and her face was hidden for moment.

"Let me think !" she said. "I don't know what to say to you. I don't know you, John. There isn't anything left of the John I loved. Let me look igain !"

She swung around.

"You speak of love," she went on suddenly, "Do you know what it is? Do you know that love reaches to the heavens, and can also touch the nethermost depths of hell? If I throw myself on your knees before you now, if I link my fingers around your neck, if I whisper to you that in the days

that were past before you came I had done things I would fain forget, if I to come down-" told you that from henceforth every

second of my life was yours that my

ised to become my wife. He raised | beating in her brain was too insistent, | voice a little broken. "You want me | showed no signs of movement. Then | and that if so it was his right. Look his glass-I can see him now. He too clamorous. Somewhere beyond really? I am to come?"

anniversary of the day on which you telegraph poles, somewhere on the oth- ly. er side of the gray haze which hung o'clock !" about the myriad roofs, John and Louise were working out their destiny, speaking at last the naked truth to

each other. She started suddenly back into the room. There was a knocking at the the hall porter, he talked to a neighdoor, something quite different from swered simply, "I should have killed her landlady's summons. She wrapped

throat. I threw him back to the place the curtains around the little bed on moved toward the door. She turned the handle softly. "Who is that?" she asked

John almost pushed his way past ingly, anxiously as if looking for her. She closed the door with nervesomething she could not find. His lips less fingers. Her eyes sought his face. were set in hard, cold lines. The her lips were parted. She clung to the

"You have seen Louise?" she exclaimed breathlessly.

"I have seen Louise," he answered.

She looked a little helplessly around brought up to see things differently, her. Then she selected the one chair and I do see them differently. Tell in the tiny apartment that was likely to hold him, and led him to it.

"Please sit down," she begged, "and know it! Could I suffer the tortures tell me about it. You musn't despair like this all at once. I wonder if I could help!"

"No one can help," he told her grim-"It is all finished and done with. I tell you that if we had been alone I I would rather not talk any more about should have driven the breath out of it. I didn't come here to talk about it. I came to see you. So this is where you live!"

He looked around him, and for a moment he almost forgot the pain which was gnawing at his heart. It was such a simple, plainly furnished little room, so clean, so neat, so pathetically elo- ine that the bell was ringing, that Soquent of poverty. She drew closer together the curtains which concealed the little chints-covered bed, and came and sat down by his side.

around his arm. Her eyes sought his anxiously.

"But you mustn't climb down, John," she insisted, ""You are so much nicer where you are, so much too good for the silly, ugly things. You must fight this in your own way, fight it according to your own standards. You are too good

"Am I too good for you, Sophy?"

"I am sure," he answered steadfast-"I shall expect you at eight John went back to his rooms fighting all the time against a sense of unreality, a sense almost of lost identity. He bought an evening newspaper and read it on the way. He talked to

bor with whom he ascended in the lift-he did everything except think. In his rooms he telephoned to the restaurant for a waiter, and with the menu in his hand, a few minutes later, he ordered dinner. Then he glanced

at his watch-it was barely seven o'clock. He went down to the barber shop, was shaved and had his hair cut, encouraging the barber all the while

to talk to him. He gave his hands over to a manicure, and did his best to talk nonsense to her. Then he came upstairs again, changed his clothes with great care, and went into his little sitting room.

It was five minutes to eight, and dinner had been laid at a little round ing look. table in the center of the room. There was a bowl of pink roses-Sophy's favorite flower-sent in from the florist's; the table was lighted by a pinkshaded lamp. John went around the room, turning out the other lights, until the apartment was hung with shadows save for the little spot of color in the middle. An unopened bottle of champagne stood in an ice-pail, and two specially prepared cocktails had been placed upon the little side table. There were no more preparations to be made.

He turned impatiently away from the window and glanced at the clock. It was almost eight. He tried to imagphy was standing there on the threshold in her simple but dainty evening dress, with a little smile parting her lips. The end of it all! He pulled She clasped her hands tighter down the blind. No more of the window, no more looking out at the lights, no more living in the clouds! It was

time, indeed, that he lived as other men. He lifted one of the glasses to his lips and drained its contents. Then the bell rang. He moved forward to answer its summons with

cause I am giving up the one thing which

could make my life a paradise. I shall

be in the train when you read this, on my

Good-by! I give you no advice. Some

day I think that life will right itself with

the full glass on the sideboard. It

"You will be alone, sir?" the man

"I shall be alone," John answered.

CHAPTER XXIII.

the slow movements of Jennings as he

cleared the table. Straight and grim

in his chair, with the newspaper by

That, for the space of a quarter of

an hour or so, was the sole attempt at

conversation between the two broth-

ers. Then Jennings appeared with a

decanter of wine and two glasses,

the champagne before you go."

next week.

inquired.

at last.

brief reply.

man replied.

before him.

all women !"

glumly, "You know it!"

you.

beating heart. As he opened it, he received a shock. A messenger boy stood en !' outside." He took the note which the

SOPHY.

they drank together, the older man and his servant. Still John never moved. Jennings drained his glass, placed the decanter by his master's side, and withdrew.

"So the poison's still there, brother?" Stephen asked.

"And will be so long as I live," John confessed gloomlly. "For all that, I'll not drink your toast."

"Why not?"

"There was a little girl-you saw her when you were in London. She is married now, but I think of her sometimes; and when I do, you and old Jennings seem to me like a couple of in a strange tongue. I couldn't underblithering idiots cursing things too wonderful for you to understand !"

Stephen made no protest. For a time he smoked in silence. Curiously enough, as they sat together, some of the grim fierceness seemed to have passed ." om his expression and settled upon John. More than once, as he looked across at his younger brother, it almost seemed as if there was something of self-reproach in his question-

"You dined at the ordinary in Market Ketton?" Stephen asked at last. "I did."

"Then you heard the news?"

"Who could help it?" John muttered. There wasn't much else talked about.'

"Bailiff Henderson has been over here," Stephen went on. "There's a small army of painters and decorators coming down to the castle next week. You saw the announcement of the wedding in the morning Post, maybe?" John assented without words. Stephen smoked vigorously for a few moments, Every now and then he glanced across to where John was sitting. Once again the uneasiness was in his eyes; an uneasiness which was almost self-reproach.

John moved a little restlessly in his chair.

"Let's drop it, Stephen," he begged. "We both know the facts. She is going to marry him, and that's the end of it. Fill your glass up again. Here's mine untouched. I'll drink your toast with you, if you'll leave out the little girl who was kind to me. I'll give it to you myself-confusion to all wom-

"Confusion to-"

down the road, John! On that night I was on my way to the castle; but I broke down, and in the morning the world was all different, and I went back to London. It has been different ever since, and there has never been any question of anything between the prince and me, because I knew that it was not love."

John was shaking in every limb. His eyes were filled with fierce questioning. Stephen sat there, and there was wonder in his face, too.

"When you came to me that morning," she went on "you spoke to me stand you, you seemed so far away.



"I've Come for You!"

I wanted to tell you the whole truth. but I didn't. Perhaps I wasn't sureperhaps it seemed to me that it was best for me to forget, if ever I had cared, for the ways of our lives seemed so far apart. You went away, and L drifted on; but it wasn't true that I ever promised to marry the prince. No one had any right to put that paragraph in the newspaper!"

"But what are you doing here, then?" John asked hoarsely. "Aren't you on your way to the castle?" She came a little nearer; her arms went around his neck. "You dear stupid !" she cried. "Haven't I told you? I've tried to do without you, and I can't. I've come for you. Come outside, please! It's quite light. The moon's coming over the hills. I want to walk up the orchard. I want to hear just what I've come to hear!" He passed out of the room in a dream, under the blossom-laden boughs of the orchard, and up the hillside toward the church. The dream passed, but Louise remained, flesh and blood. Her lips were warm and her arms held him almost feverishly. "In that little church, John, and quickly-so quickly, please !" she whispered.

to say," he answered. "There is only one way in which I can do it."

and glancing every now and then with it holy and sacred for you-John, unseeing eyes at the streams of people upon the pavements. Finally he liberate care. Then he rang the bell, whose hand he had dropped gold. and was shown into her little drawing-room, which seemed to have become the truth?" he asked hoarsely. a perfect bower of pink and white Illac.

He sat waiting as if in a dream, unable to decide upon his words, unable even to sift his thoughts. The one purpose with which he had come, the one question he designed to ask, was burning in his brain. The minutes of her absence seemed tragically long.

Then at last the door opened and Louise entered. She came toward him with a little welcoming smile upon her lips. Her manner was gay, almost affectionate.

"Have you come to take me for a ride before lunch?" she asked. "Do you know, I think that I should really like it! We might lunch at Ranelagh on our way home."

The words stuck in his throat, From where she was, she saw now the writing on his face. She stopped short.

"What is it?" she exclaimed.

"Ever since I knew you," he said slowly, "there have been odd moments when I have lived in torture. During the last fortnight, those moments have become hours. Last night the end came."

"Are you mad, John?" she demandeđ.

"Perhaps," he replied, "Listen, When I left you last night, I went to the club in Adelphi Terrace. There was a well-known critic there, comparing you and Latrobe. On the whole he favored you, but he gave Latrobe the first place in certain parts. Latrobe, he said, had had more experience in life. She had had a dozen loversyou, only one !!

She winced. The glad freshness face. Her eyes became strained. "Well?"

"I found Graillot, I cornered him. I asked him for the truth about you. He put me off with an evasion. I came down here and looked at your window. It was three o'clock in the morning. I dared not come in. A very demon of unrest was in my blood. I stopped at the night club on my way back and touched the bell. back. Sophy was there. I asked her plainly to put me out of my agony. She was like Grafilot. She fenced with me. And then-the prince came !"

"The prince was there?" she faltered.

"He came up to the table where Sophy and I were sitting. I think I crouching with her face turned westwas half mad. I poured him a glass of ward. She had abandoned all effort

heart beat with yours by day and by night, that I had no other thought, no He drove the car down Piccadilly other dream, than to stay by your side, like a man in a dream, steering as to see you happy, to give all there was carefully as usual through the traffic, of myself into your keeping, to keep

what then?" Never a line in his face softened. He came to a standstill before Louise's looked at her a moment as he had house and stopped the engine with de- looked at the woman in Piccadilly, into

"Are you going to tell me that it is

"Think for a single moment of that feeling which you call love, John !" she pleaded. "Listen! I love you. It has come to me at last, after all these



ing else in life can matter?"

seemed suddenly to fade from her teeth had come together. He was like a man upon the rack.

"It is true? It is true, then?" he you. Let's try it !" led.

oked at him without any reply. Once more the perfume of the lllac fond of you-I haven't had the pride, seemed to choke him. Then she leaned

"The prince spoke the truth," she said. "I think you had better go!"

CHAPTER XXII.

Before the wide-flung window of her attic bedchamber, Sophy Gerard was o'clock."

wine. I told him that you had prom- to sleep. The one thought that was

She looked at him, and her whole boy handed him and tore it open under face seemed to soften. The light in a lamp. There were only a few lines: her blue eyes was sweet and wistful. John, my heart is breaking, but I know

A hewildering little smile curled her lips

"Don't be stupid !" she begged. "A few minutes ago I was looking out of my window and thinking what a poor little morsel of humanity I am, and what a useless, drifting life I have led. But that's foolish. Come now! What I want to persuade you to do is to man, as you call him, to meet me. I am go back to Cumberland for a time, going to ask him to marry me, if he will,

and try hard-very hard indeed-to realize what it means to be a woman like Louise, with her temperament, her intense intellectual curiosity, her

charm. Nothing could make Louise The letter dropped upon the table. different from what she is-a dear, John stood for a moment dazed. Sudsweet woman and a great artist. And, denly he began to laugh. Then he re-John, I believe she loves you !" membered the messenger boy, gave His face remained undisturbed even him half a crown, and closed the door.

by the flicker of an eyelld.

"Sophy," he said. "I have decided his place at the table. He looked at to go abroad. Will you come with the empty chair by his side, looked at me?"

She sat quite still. Again her face seemed to him that he was past all was momentarily transformed. All its sensations. The waiter came in sipallor and fatigue seemed to have van- | lently, ished. Her head had fallen a little back. "You can serve the dinner," John ordered, shaking out his napkin. "Open

She was looking through the ceiling into heaven. Then the light died away almost as quickly as it had come. Her ips shook tremulously.

"You know you don't mean it, John! You wouldn't take me. And if you did, you'd hate me afterward-you'd want

arm went around her waist. She had lost all power of resistance. For the first time in his life of his own deliberate accord, he kissed her-feverishly, almost roughly,

"Sophy," he declared, "I have been a fool! I have come an awful cropper, but you might help me with what's left. I am going to start afresh, I am going to get rid of some of these

years. It lives in my heart, a greater ideas of mine which have brought me thing than my ambition, a greater nothing but misery and disappointthing than my success, a greater thing ment. I don't want to live up to them than life itself. I love you, John! Can't any longer. I want to just forget you feel, don't you know, that noth- them. I want to live as other men live-just the simple, ordinary life, Not a line in his face softened. His Come with me! I'll take you to the places we've talked about together. 1 am always happy and contented with

Her arms stole around his peck.

conds seemed drawn out to an face for a moment, "What can I say? interminable period. He heard the What could any poor, weak little crearolling of the motorbuses in the street. ture like me say? You know I am

> even, to conceal It !" He stood up, held her face for a

her forchead.

""Then that's all settled," he declared. "I am going back to my rooms now. I want you to come and dine with me there tonight, at eight

Her eyes sought his, pleaded with

"What on earth is that?"

They both heard it at the same time -the faint beating of a motor engine in the distance. John set down his you do not mean what you said. I know it was only a moment of madness with glass. There was a strange look in you. I know you will love Louise all your his eyes, life, and will bless me all your life be-

"There are more cars passing along the road now than in the old days," he muttered; "but that's a queer sound. It reminds one-good heavens, way to Bath. I have wired my young how it reminds one !"

> There was a look of agony in his face for a moment. Then once more he raised his glass to his lips.

> "It's passed out of hearing," Stephen said. "It's someone on the way to the castle, maybe."

Still their glasses remained suspended in midair. The little garden gate had opened and closed with a click; there were footsteps upon the flinty He came back into the room and took walk.

> "It's someone coming here!" John cried hoarsely. "Why can't they keep away? It's two years ago this week since I brought her up the drive and you met us at the front door. Two years ago, Stephen! Who can it be?" They heard the front door open. they heard Jennings' voice raised in unusual and indignant protest. Then their own door was suddenly flung wide, and a miracle happened. John's glass slipped from his fingers, and the wine streamed out across the carpet. He shrank back, gripping at the table-

cloth. Stephen turned his head, and It was a room of silence, save for sat as if turned to stone. the hissing of the green logs that "John," she faltered. "it Isn't the car burned on the open hearth, and for

this time-it is I who have broken down! I cannot go on. I have no pride left. I have come to you. Will you help me?"

his side, Stephen Strangewey sat He found himself upon his feet. Stesmoking stolidly. Opposite to him, alphen, too, had arisen. She stood bemost as grim, equally silent, sat John. tween the two men, and glanced from "Things were quiet at Market Ketton today, then, John?" Stephen asked one to the other. Then she looked more closely into John's face, peering forward with a little start of pain, and "There was nothing doing," was the her eyes were filled with tears.

"John," she cried, "forgive me ! You were so cruel that morning, and you seemed to understand so little. Don't you really understand, even now? Have you ever known the truth, I wonder?"

"The truth!" he echoed hoarsely 'Don't we all know that? Don't we all know that he is to give you your rights, that you are coming-

"Stop !" she ordered him.

He obeyed, and for a moment there was silence-a tense, strained silence.

He fetched a glass from the side-'John," she continued at last, "I board, filled it, and held it respectfully have no rights to receive from the prince of Seyre. He owes me nothing. "It's the old toast," Stephen said Listen! Always we have seen life differently, you and I. To me there is "Aye, Master Stephen !" the servant assented. "We've drunk it together for many a long year. I give it ye now with all my heart-confusion to ised him at last, because I believed come them,

"You are sure, John?" she asked, her They both glanced at John, who that he loved me and that I loved him

* * Jennings hastened in to where Stephen was sitting alone.

"Mr. Stephen," he cried, "what's coming to us? There's that Frenci hussy outside, and a motorcar in the drive, and the chauffeur's asking where he's to sleep. The woman wants to know whether she can have the same bedroom for her mistress as last time!"

"Then why don't you go and see about it, you old fool?" Stephen replied. "Pick up those pieces of glass there, lay the cloth, and get some supper ready."

Through the open doorway they heard Aline's voice in the hall.

"Meester Jennings, will you please come and help me with the luggage?"

"Get along with you!" Stephen ardered. "You'd better hurry up while the supper, too. The boy Tom can see to the luggage.'

The old man recovered himseif slowly.

"You're taking 'em in, sir-taking 'em into the house?" he gasped. "What about that toast?"

Stephen refilled two glasses.

"We'd better alter it a little," he declared. "Here's confusion to most women, but luck to John and his wife!"

"Mr. John and his wife!" Jennings repeated, as he set his glass down empty. "I'll just see that them sheets is aired upstairs, sir, or that hessy will be making eyes at Tom !"

He departed, and Stephen was left alone. He sat and listened to the sound of luggage being taken upstairs to Aline's little torrent of directions, good-humored but profuse, to the sound of preparations in the kitchen. In the room the tall-clock ticked selemnly; a fragment of the log every now and then fell upon the hearth.

only one great thing, and that is love; Presently he rose to his feet. He and beyond that nothing counts. I heard the click of the garden gate, tried to love the prince before you the sound of John and Louise returncame, and I thought I did, and I prom- ing. He rose and stood ready to wel-

which he reverently filled. Stephen held his up to the light and looked at it critically. John's remained by his "John," she whispered, hiding her side, unnoticed. "A glass for yourself, Jennings," Stephen ordered. "I thank ye kindly, sir," the old

moment between his hands, and kissed

them, searched them.

to send me back!" He suddenly drew her to him, his