

her husband, and he had never before shown himself so spiteful, knowing when he married that her heart was given to another. She had told him everything, but he was only too glad to marry her on any terms, and she naturally left his taunt to be unjust to herself. Valerie had made many enemies because she could never dissemble; her nature was too straightforward, and if she disliked any one they soon discovered the fact from her inability to hide her feelings. Not that she was ever rude. On the contrary, she was scrupulously polite, and to those she liked her manner was free and confiding.

## CHAPTER XV.

## ON THE AVON.

Three o'clock found Valerie walking rapidly along the river bank, where presently she came to a clump of willows that had been her trysting place in days gone by. It was a lovely nook in a bend of the river, and old associations becoming too strong for her, she allowed vent to the bitterness and pain which filled her heart.

"Perhaps I shall never see him again," she whispered to herself, "and if I do there is the old agony to endure all over again. Oh, Lewis, Lewis, why did you do it? Will a woman ever love you as I have loved you?—and, God help me, as I do now, and ever shall. I have nothing in my life to live for, and nobody cares for me. If he had only told me once, just once, that he loved me, I could cheerfully have borne years of pain, and it would have helped me so in the battle of life, and would have sweetened its bitterness; but he never told me."

A boat slowly gliding into the alcove arrested Valerie's attention, causing her to sit up and peep through the branches to see if it were anyone she knew, and she immediately recognised the gentleman and the girl with whose boat she had collided that morning. She was wondering how she could slip away without them seeing her, when these words fell on her ears:

"Oh, please let me go back to my

Granddad; I do want to see him ever so much; Bruce, an' he'll be so lonely now without me. I'm all he has, too, 'cept Dodger, an' Mary Ann."

"Why, my dear, I thought you loved me."

"An' I do; but I feel sick for Granddad. There's no one to get his meals for him, an' why can't we go to him, for we was married, you said. An' you told me you'd take me back to Granddad, an'—an'—"

Here the girl's voice broke, and tears trembled on her lashes as she looked appealingly at her companion, who left his seat opposite, and, sitting down beside her, placed his arm around her waist and drew her head to his breast.

"Have patience, my little wife, and try to content yourself awhile with me. Why, it is only a month since you told me that you could not live without me, just after we were married, you know."

"I know, an' it's true; but I love Granddad, too, an' I want to show him all my grand frocks what you gave me."

"Aimee, I will tell you what I will do. I will go to your grandfather and confess, and then come back and tell you all about it, and perhaps bring him back with me. Will that do, little one?"

Aimee clapped her hands, and flung her arms around the man's neck as she said:

"Oh, yes, yes; an' I'll tell Granddad how good you are to me, an' that you haven't a wife in England at all, an' we'll all be so happy again."

A flush dyed the man's face as he said:

"Are you not happy now, little one? I thought you were."

And Valerie, from her seat on the bank, thought she had never beheld such a guileless and beautiful countenance as Aimee's. The face was so childlike and trustful, and she wondered who she and her companion could be. "They must be strangers," thought Valerie, "for I know every face almost in Christ-church," and a sigh of envy escaped her as she rose to go. With a start the man heard it, and glanced up, and saw with surprise the same face that he had seen at Sumner. He knew she must have heard what he and Aimee had said, and, if so, would be in a position to

give information were inquiries to reach her ears regarding the girl. He must stop her at all risks, and entreat her silence; besides, he held her secret, and he meant to use it, or threaten to do so, if she did not promise silence.

"Aimee, I wish to speak to that lady who was sitting up above there just now. You won't be frightened, little one, will you? I won't be long," and, springing on to the bank, Sir Branden Langstone was soon at Valerie's side.

"Pardon me, madam, but will you kindly tell me if you overheard a conversation in a boat just now over yonder," he said, pointing to the alcove.

Valerie was so surprised that for the moment she remained silent, and the man went on:

"—that is, would you mind not mentioning having either seen the girl in the boat, or what was said?"

"Certainly. But I do not understand you. Is there anything wrong in the girl being with you? It would seem so, judging from your manner."

Instead of answering her questions, Sir Branden said:

"I might take this opportunity to tell you that I have seen you before, and—pardon me—overheard your outbreak of passionate scorn against your husband at Sumner about a month ago. One of your expressions was that you would like to have killed him at the altar. Am I correct? We are evidently fated to overbear each other's confidences," and Sir Branden smiled, while Valerie's face paled, and she felt sick and faint with the shame that consumed her. What did he know, what had she said, for she felt instinctively that the man was bad to the core. His polished manner and handsome face did not deceive her as they did poor little Aimee. But then she had lived in the world, and Aimee had not. Valerie was quick to read character, and invariably correct in her judgment. She did not err on the present occasion, and shivered a little as she half turned from the man at her side. Then she said, with an effort:

"You—you are not a gentleman, sir, to have listened to a conversation not intended for your ears."

"You forget, madam, that I overheard in perhaps a less culpable manner

than you displayed just now. I was asleep on the rocks, and your voice awoke me while you were you also asleep just now."

"No," said Valerie, homely. "I was sitting there when your boat came into the alcove, and I stayed to look, unseen, at the lovely girl who was with you, and, of course, I heard what you both said."

"I have your promise, then, to keep silence as to what you have seen, and heard this afternoon in the boat?"

Valerie bowed, little dreaming how soon she would be called upon to break her promise, and as she moved away Sir Branden gracefully raised his hat and stood with the sun playing on his bare head, until she turned a bend in the river and was lost to sight. Then he hurried back to Aimee.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## IN THE CHURCHYARD.

Valerie Day was a passionate lover of Nature, and nothing pleased her better than to go to some secluded spot where she could dream and think of the past undisturbed by human sounds. On the present occasion, when she came to the lovely, picturesque little church at Avonside, with its ivy-covered walls and white tombstones dotted about on each side of the long, straight path, she opened the gate and walked in. Her footsteps fell silently on the wattle-barked path as she made her way to the church steps, where she sat down tired out with her long walk. After the lapse of a few minutes she noticed an old man moving amongst the gravestones, followed by a dog. Presently he caught sight of her, and came slowly towards her.

"Excuse me, lady, but maybe ye live hereabouts," he said, halting a few steps away.

"I live nearer New Brighton, but I know every step about here. Can I help you in any way?"

"Aweel, maybe ye can. I've lost a wee bit lassie, an' I've traced her this far, sae a poor, wee bit lambie, as inner-

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