

# JOHN WINTHROP'S DEFEAT.

A Novel.

BY JEAN KATE LUDLUM.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

(Continued.)

She drew a little away from him, the flush deepening in her face, touching the beautiful face, falling even to the lace at her throat; her lips trembled with her speaking.

"John Winthrop," she said, "I am a proud woman. As I tell you, I could find it in my heart to hate myself for loving you, were it not that hatred has died from my heart. You saved my life the other day. Perhaps you think that I did not know it? But for that alone I do not love you. Why should I? Would not any man have saved a woman so? And why should I forgive you that old wound to my pride, to my truth, to my womanhood? Now, thinking that you should have believed me guilty of perjury at that trial and sworn against the truth for the saving of a few more dollars, perhaps, from my husband's fortune, I feel the hot shame in my face that I can still say that I love you. According to the exact measure of your justice I should let you die and yield not one kind word. Were I a man perhaps I would do it. But I am a woman, and it may be that a woman's injustice makes her weak."

His face was working strangely; his hold on her hands tightened; his eyes held hers.

"Alecia," he said, "Alecia Graham, who told you that there was ever such thought of you in my mind? Do you not know that such belief of you would be impossible to any one? Would I, loving you, accuse you of such perjury? I believed you utterly. I believed you even when my will, fighting with my heart, bade me condemn you. Always in my thoughts you have been everything that is good, though I struggled to argue it down. I knew my heart long ago, and struggled with it. No woman had such power over me before; and would I, I urged with my heart, allow the one woman who must hate me to possess such power? It has been a bitter battle from that day, and I am defeated, in spite of the will I had prided myself overcome any pain the heart might hold; but I never accused you of wrong, Alecia. Who suggested such thought to you?"

The sweet lips closed tightly over the knowledge; she shook her head; her eyes were exquisite in their light and color.

"What does it matter?" she said, steadily. "Perhaps one is too ready to believe ill of even the one whom one loves. I hold no hardness in my heart toward any one, John Winthrop."

He was silent for a moment, lying with closed eyes, no great change upon him save the short, steady breathing. Then opening his eyes upon her, he said slowly, and with a touch of his old sternness in his weak voice:

"Perhaps I know who told you that, Alecia. If I do, as you say—what matter? Love should not too readily believe ill. All that is gone. I am only very happy, knowing that you love me."

Then, by and by, he whispered faintly:

"You forgive me, Alecia—everything?"

And she answered softly, her low voice like music in its tenderness:

"I forgive you everything, John, dear—for us both."

Again the gray eyes closed with peace upon the face, but the kneeling woman did not move or turn her eyes away lest his should open, seeking hers. The minutes ticked away upon the clock across the room. Twenty minutes—thirty—forty-five—fifty—sixty minutes—one hour. And still no other change upon the sleeper; and still the woman did not rise from her knees or remove her hands from his.

One of the physicians, believing that death had come unrecognized, crossed the room and stood beside her with his eyes upon the quiet face among the pillows. Then he stooped and laid his fingers lightly over the pulse in the thin, sinewy wrist.

"I congratulate you," he said, gravely, his eyes upon Mrs. Winthrop's gentle face, although he knew that he was also speaking to this other immovable woman. "The fever has turned. He will recover, madam."

But Alecia did not move, did not speak, did not, apparently, comprehend the meaning of his words or turn her eyes from the peaceful, sleeping face.

With a swift movement of her hands as though in gratitude, Mrs. Winthrop moved around the bed to Alecia's side. Laying one hand tenderly upon her shoulder, she said, sweetly and brokenly:

"Come away, Mrs. Graham, dear, and rest. They have saved his life."

## CHAPTER XXII.

GRAIN FROM CHAFF.

Moonlight over the ocean and the

golden path across the waters like a road to the Celestial City! Jewels scattered along the beach where the breakers threw their spray, murmuring a strong, deep, musical song of the world's love and the pride of human hearts! Silence and peace and beauty. Even the sand hills were formed in mysterious heaps of golden light, and shadow stretching away to the beach.

Alecia Graham was sitting at her window in the full tide of this glory of moonlight, her pale-blue wrapper making more exquisite the pale beauty of her face and the golden hair loosened about her shoulders. Her hands were lying idly in her lap, very slim frail and white upon the blue of her gown. She was smiling with her face turned toward the soft shadows beyond the window's circle of radiance.

Beatrice was sitting there, hidden by the fall of lace drapery and the intense light within the window. Her face was unseen, but her voice was sometimes very stern and sometimes low with tenderness and love.

"And in spite of everything, Alecia—remembering all the old, cruel wounds from his hands—you love him, and have told him that you do?"

"I spite of everything, Bee."

"And you are not ashamed to own it even to me, Alecia, in your pride and womanhood, with that betraying tenderness in your voice! Why do I not hate you as I believed that I should if ever you gave your love to that man—your enemy and your husband's enemy."

"I have somewhat also to forgive," said Alecia very softly. "Have you forgotten that I told you it would be difficult for me to forgive you had you deceived me, Bee?"

A tremor in Beatrice's voice. She leaned forward into the light of the window, reaching out her hands.

"But I did it because I loved you, Alecia. I could not believe that you truly could ever love that man, and I wished to remove him from your life. Would I wound you knowingly, you beautiful dear? Have you not had enough sorrow in your life? Have I not put away the hate from my heart for this man because of you?"

"But your hatred was unjust always, Beatrice," said the sweeter voice, steadily. "I told you from the first that he was an honorable man."

"But I believed that you defended him only because of your kindly heart," said her sister, in a low voice. "Alecia, would I hurt you willingly? I am very proud, too, but I would not ever have set up my pride against your happiness had I known that it was your happiness."

Silence between them, eloquent with the call of those distant breakers and the cry of a night-bird upon the beach. The house was perfectly still save for those sounds from without. Then Beatrice rose from her chair and went over to her sister. Kneeling at her side she took the two slim hands within her warm hands, holding them closely and with tender recklessness of sorrow, her lifted face beautiful in the moonlight streaming through the window.

"Alecia! Alecia!" she said, bitterly. "My sister, look right down into my soul and see that there remains not one atom of hatred there, not one thought that is not kind, not one wish but for your good. If John Winthrop holds the power to grant you the happiness that you deserve, if he loves you as you should be loved, if he has descended from his heights of arrogance and pride to acknowledge that there are purity and goodness and truth in a woman's heart, then John Winthrop shall have the right to win your love and make your happiness! While I cried out against your softness of heart, was I not cruelly hard? I claiming the tenderness of womanhood! Would I not have crushed my own heart in my pride and unforgiveness? Alecia! Alecia! Here, with my heart bare to you, see that I meant only love!"

Alecia stooped very tenderly and pressed her smiling lips to the mouth of the girl.

"Dear little Bee!" she said. "Always my brave girl! Could I doubt your love, when only you have thought of me?"

Tender silence again between them. The lifted face and the down-bent face touched with the night's light and softness. Then, the sound of light feet in the passage, a moment's pause, and the door was flung wide open without warning, and into the room full in the glory of moonlight, with loosened hair and trailing dress and white face, came Jessica Gray with her eyes of fire.

Beatrice shrank down beside Alecia; but Alecia did not move.

"So!" murmured the liquid voice. "So! But Mrs. Graham has courage to brave her heart and her pride and yield her love to the man who was once her husband's murderer!"

An answering flame in Alecia's eyes and in her quiet face, but her voice was sweet and low and perfectly steady.

"Miss Gray herself is daring," she said. "May I ask what she may mean by her words?"

Jessica laughed scornfully, flinging out her hands with a gesture of passion.

"Has the new love eradicated old memories so soon?" she asked. "Is it not Mrs. Graham's new lover who murdered the old?"

"Your words are exaggerated, Miss Gray," said Alecia, a touch of coldness creeping into her voice. "No one murdered my husband as you so recklessly state. And what has Miss Gray to do with my life of the past or future?"

"Then she lied!" cried Jessica fiercely, with a movement of her hands toward the girl still kneeling beside her sister. "I heard her say it myself! It was in France. She said it openly. Upon the station platform she said that John Winthrop murdered your husband, and that she hated him for it—and that you hated him for it!"

"And was Miss Gray acting as eavesdropper?" queried Alecia, steadily, her eyes never moving from the flaming face. "How else should she have heard what was not intended for her, and which she could not comprehend?"

"And I did not lie!" cried Beatrice, starting to her feet in swift defiance. "The leopard shows her claws too soon, I think!"

"But the leopard can kill sometimes!" cried the swift, liquid voice. "I heard your words, Beatrice Field, and I remembered your cruelty to his mother, and why should I not believe? But I would not tell of your words. I would hide his crime, I said, if it were crime! And, after all, you sit there facing me, and love him!"

"And shall I account to Miss Gray for it?" queried Alecia, in her cold, steady voice.

"I hate you!" cried the girl, passionately, with a gesture of her excited hands. "I hate you both—I hate you all, even her, with her quiet speech—his mother—for she kept me still when I am going away to-morrow. I could not breathe the same atmosphere with you—it would stifle me, strangle me, kill me! I am going away, but I came to-night to tell you my hate! What has he to do longer with my life?"

She flung out her hands as though to fling from her this scene of memory and pain, and turned noiselessly and left the room, the door swinging softly behind her.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

DEFEATED INDEED.

The lilac of sunset over the world, struck here and there with gold, where the last rays lifted above the horizon and lay like a benediction upon the shimmering track on the water, across which a sail passing caught snow-light upon it from the glory.

The old group of friends were gathered in the pavilion around Alecia Graham and John Winthrop. Some were sitting upon the benches ranged across the floor, others, less thoughtful of appearances, chose the steep steps leading to the sands as giving better opportunity of watching the sunset effects on the ocean and cloud. All were chatting in an undertone as though the quiet scene touched them into reverence.

"How strangely the mist creeps in from the sea as soon as the sun sets!" said Alecia. She spoke only to her companion, and he bent beside her, his pride in her glowing in his steady eyes.

He was very pale and still weak from that long illness, but daily new strength was returning, as though his happiness gave new life when all else failed.

He smiled now into her lifted eyes. Words were scarcely necessary between them, and long silence sometimes fell ere one replied to the other.

"It is strange," he said slowly, "but it seems to me, Alecia, that my sun has only just risen and no mists threaten its peace."

"That is pretty," said Alecia, laughing, "but not practical, John. I wonder at you sometimes. You are so different than I thought. You know I used to think—"

"Well?" as she paused, his eyes very steadily upon her face.

She was looking across the water to the distant sails, now softly darkening in the twilight, and a wistfulness was on her face that brought an added tenderness to his. With sudden fierceness he bent nearer her.

"Whatever you thought," he said, vehemently, his voice startling her, "what does it matter now, my dearest? Alecia Graham, only heaven knows how I love you!"

By and by, she said softly, as though following out the line of thought awakened by watching the distant ships:

"The longer one lives the more sure comes the knowledge that we can change not one inch the fulfilling of life's plans. We say, in our pride, that such and such shall come, and find, as the days go by, that only the mills of God grind steadily, John, and exceedingly fine."

"But always," said John Winthrop, reverently, drawing her eyes from the darkening sails by the steady power of his gaze, "always with infinite jus-

tice, dearest, and beyond the reach of human comprehension or hate or pride, so bringing the best of life's good in what seemed perhaps to us but humiliating defeat—as I was defeated."

"And, perhaps," added Alecia, gravely, after a long silence, her chin resting in her hand, her elbow upon the back of the bench, her eyes still searching for the sails in the tender darkness, "as I was defeated, too, John! May not a woman's injustice be sometimes as cruel as a man's?"

But John Winthrop would not answer.

[The End.]

### The Colonel's Answer.

Lieutenant-Colonel Hugh L. Scott, of the United States Volunteers, formerly captain of the Seventh Cavalry, is known in the army as an officer who probably knows more about Indian sign language than any other living man. At one time Colonel Scott made a standing offer to any redskin who could show a sign used by any tribe which he did not know. The colonel is also peculiarly absent-minded, a fact which was emphasized at his marriage a few years ago.

As he stood at the altar with his bride, the officiating clergyman asked him the usual question as to taking the woman beside him to be his wife. The colonel placed two fingers upon his left eyebrow. After an embarrassing pause the clergyman repeated the question, and again the two fingers went solemnly to the left eyebrow. It was not until the best man poked the bridegroom in the ribs that he came back to earth and articulated "Yes."—New York Sun.

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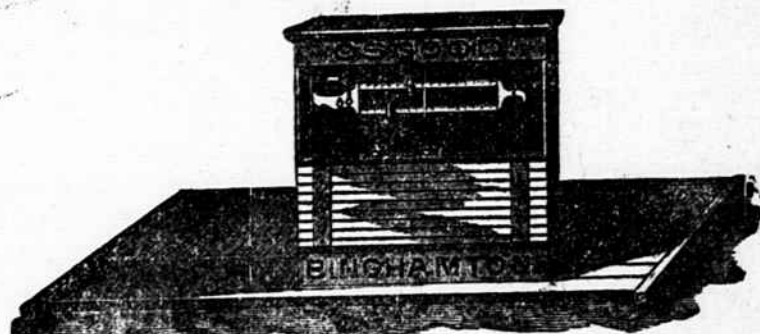
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