A Crooked Path eBook

A Crooked Path

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A CROOKED PATH

A NOVEL

By Mrs. *Alexander*,

Author of “The Wooing O’t,” “A Life Interest,” Etc.

NEW YORK THE F. M. LUPTON PUBLISHING COMPANY, NOS. 72-76 WALKER STREET.

A CROOKED PATH.

CHAPTER I.

“*Gathering clouds*.”

The London season had not yet reached its height, some years ago, before the arch admitting to Constitution Hill had been swept back to make room for the huge, ever-increasing stream of traffic, or the plebeian ’bus had been permitted to penetrate the precincts of Hamilton Place. It was the forenoon of a splendid day, one of the earliest of June, and at that hour the roadway between the entrance to Hyde Park and the gate then surmounted by the statue of the Duke of Wellington on his drooping steed was comparatively free, when two gentlemen coming from opposite directions recognized each other, and paused at the gate of Apsley House—the elder, a stout, florid man of military aspect, middle age, and average height, with large gray mustache and small, slightly bloodshot eyes; the younger, who was tall and bony, might have been thirty, or

even forty, so grave and sedate was his bearing, although his erect carriage, elastic step, and clear keen dark eyes suggested earlier manhood.

Both had the indescribable well-groomed, freshly bathed look peculiar to Englishmen of the “upper ten.”

“Ha! Errington! I didn’t know you were in town. I thought you were cruising somewhere with Melford, or rusticating at Garston Hall. I think your father expected you about this time.”

“I don’t think so. I was summoned by telegraph from Paris. My father was seized with a paralysis last week. He had just come up to town, and for a few days was dangerously ill, but is now slowly recovering.”

“Very sorry to hear of it. A man of his stamp would have been of immense value to the country. He had begun to take a very leading part in local matters. I trust he will come round.”

“I fear he will never be the same again. I doubt if he will be able to direct his own affairs as he used.”

“That’s bad! You are not in the business, I believe?”

“No; I never took any part in it. I almost regret I did not. It would, I imagine, be a relief to my father, now that his mind is less clear, to know that I was at the helm. But we have a capital man as manager, quite devoted to the house. I shall get my father down to the country as soon as I can, and I trust he’ll come round.”

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“No doubt he will. He was wonderfully hale and strong for his years.”

“Ay! how d’ye do, Bertie?” interrupted the first speaker, holding out his hand to a young man who came up from Hyde Park and seemed about to pass with a smile and a nod. “Who would have thought of meeting you in these godless regions? I hear you are busy ‘slumming’ from morning till night.”

“Well, Colonel,” returned Bertie—a slight, fair, boyish-looking man—“I am so far false to my new vocation as to have lost some irrevocable moments looking at the horses and horsewomen in the Row.”

“Aha! the old leaven, my dear boy! You are on the brink of perdition.—Don’t you know Bertie Payne?” he continued, to his newly met friend. “He was one of my subs before he renounced the devil and all his works. He was with us at Barrackbore when you were in India.”

“I do not think we have met,” the other was beginning, when a young lady—toward whom the Colonel had already cast some sharp, admiring glances as she stood on the curbstone holding a hand of the smaller of two little boys in smart sailor suits—uttered a cry of dismay. The elder child had rushed into the road, as if to stop a passing omnibus, not seeing that a hansom was coming up at speed.

The young man called Bertie dashed forward, and barely succeeded in snatching the child from under the wheel. A scramble of horses’ feet, an imprecation or two shouted by the irritated driver, a noisy declaration from the “fare” that he should lose his train, and the scuffle was over.

The little man, held firmly by the shoulder, was marched back to his young guardian.

“Thank you!—oh, thank you a thousand times! You have saved his life!” she exclaimed, fervently, in unsteady tones. Then to the child: “How could you break your promise to stay by me, Cecil? You would have been killed but for this gentleman!”

“I wanted to catch the ‘omlibus’ for you, auntie!” he cried, with an irrepressible sob, though he gallantly tried to hold back his tears.

“Hope the little fellow is none the worse of his fright,” said the Colonel, advancing and raising his hat. “Can I be of any use?—can I call a cab?”

“No, thank you; I will take an omnibus and get home as soon as I can. Cecil will soon forget his fright, I fear—”

“Sooner than you will,” remarked Bertie. “There is a Royal Oak omnibus. Will that do?”

“Yes, thank you.”

“Come along, then, my young man; I will not let you go.”

Bertie put the trio into the vehicle, and the lookers-on saw that he shook hands with “auntie” as the conductor jumped on his perch and they rolled on.

“Gad! there’s a chance for you!” cried the Colonel as Bertie joined him. “An uncommon fine girl, by George! What a coloring! and a splendid pair of black eyes!”

“I suspect extreme fright did a good deal for both, poor girl. Her eyes are brown, not black.”

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“Brown! Nonsense! Didn’t *you* think they were black?”

“I did not observe them,” returned the grave personage he addressed, indifferently. “The boy had a narrow escape. I must say good morning,” he added.

“Stop a bit,” cried the Colonel. “I must see you again before you leave town. Dine with me to-morrow at the Junior. And, Bertie—”

“Thanks, no, I am engaged.” He said good-by and walked on.

“Queer fellow that,” said the Colonel, looking after him. “He got into some money troubles in India, left the army, and got converted. Now he is not exactly a Salvation soldier, but something of the kind. He’ll be at you one of the days for a subscription to convert the crossing sweepers or some such undertaking. But you’ll dine with me to-morrow. I’ll tell you all the Clayshire gossip.”

“Thank you, I shall be very happy.”

“Then good-by for the present, I am engaged to lunch to meet one of the prettiest little widows you ever saw in your life, but she has no cash. Here, hansom,” calling to the driver of a cab which was passing slowly. “I am a little late.” He jumped in and drove off.

His friend, with a slight grave smile, continued his walk to the Alexandria Hotel, the portals of which received him.

Meantime the hero of the cab incident sat very demurely by his young aunt, as the omnibus rolled slowly up Park Lane, occasionally stealing inquisitive glances at her face.

“You have been a *very* naughty boy, Cecil!” she exclaimed as her eyes met his. “How could I have gone home to mamma if I had been obliged to leave you behind?”

“But you needn’t, you know; you could have tied me up in a bundle and taken me back. Mamma would have known it wasn’t your fault.”

“I am not so sure of that, and you have made poor Charlie cry,”—drawing the younger boy to her side.

“Charlie is just a baby,” contemptuously.

“He is a better boy than you are.” Silence.

“Auntie, do you think the gentleman who pulled me back was the old gentleman’s son?”

“No, I do not think he was.”

“Why don’t you, auntie?”

“I can hardly say why.”

“I have seen that gentleman—the old gentleman—in Kensington Gardens,” said little Charlie, nestling up to his aunt. “He spoke to mammy the day she took me to feed the ducks.”

“I think that is only a fancy, dear.”

“No; I am quite sure.”

“Oh, you are always fancying things; you are a silly,” cried Cecil, now quite recovered, and turning to kneel upon the seat that he might look out, thereby rubbing his feet on the very best “afternoon” dress of a severely respectable female, whose rubicund face expressed “drat the boy!” as strongly as a face could.

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The rest of the journey was accomplished after the usual style of such travels when the aunt and nephews went out together. Cecil was constantly rebuked and made to sit down, and as constantly resumed his favorite position; so that he ultimately reached home with beautifully clean shoes, having wiped “the dust off his feet” effectually on the garments of his fellow-passengers, while his little brother nestled to his auntie’s side and gazed observantly on his fellow-travellers, arriving at curious conclusions respecting them, to be afterward set forth to the amusement of his hearers.

Leaving the omnibus at the Royal Oak, the trio diverged to one of the streets between that well-known establishment and the Bayswater Road—a street which had still a few trees and small semi-detached villas, with front gardens left at one end, the relics of a past when Penrhyn Place was “quite the country”; while at the other, bricks, mortar, scaffolding, and a deeply rutted roadway indicated the commencement of mansions which would soon swallow up their humbler predecessors.

At one of these villas, the garden of which was tolerably neat, the little boys and their aunt stopped, and were admitted by a smart but not over-clean girl, who welcomed the children with a cheerful, “Well, Master Cecil, you are just in nice time for dinner! Come, get your things off; your gran’ma has a treat for you.”

“Has she? Oh, what is it? Do tell, Lottie!”

“Don’t mind, dear, if you are tired; your morning-gown will do very well, as we are alone.”

“No, no; I must honor Cecil’s birthday with my best dress. These trifles are important.”

“I suppose so,” returned her daughter, looking after her gravely, as she left the room.

Mrs. Liddell was tall, and the lines of her figure considerably enlarged. Yet she had not quite lost the grace for which she was once remarkable. Her light brown hair had a pale look from the increasing admixture of gray, and her blue eyes seemed faded by much use. It was a kind, thoughtful, worn face from which they looked, yet it could still smile brightly.

“She looks very, very tired,” thought her daughter. “I must make her lie down if I can; it is so hard to make her rest!” She too looked uneasily at the mass of writing on the table, and then went away to remove her out-door attire.

The birthday dinner gave great satisfaction. It was crowned by a plum-pudding, terrible as such a compound must always be in June; but it was a favorite “goody” with the young hero of the day. Grandmamma made herself as agreeable as though she was one of a party of wits, and drank her grandson’s health in a bottle of choice gooseberry, proposing it in a “neat and appropriate” speech, which gave rise to much uproarious

mirth and delight. At last the feast was over; the children retired to amuse themselves with a horse and a wheelbarrow—some of the birthday gifts—in the back garden (a wilderness resigned to their ravages), and Mrs. Liddell and her daughter were left alone.

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“Now, mother, *do* come and lie down on the sofa in the drawing-room. I see you are out of sorts. You hardly tasted food, and you are dreadfully tired; come and rest. I will read you to sleep.”

“No, Kate; there can be no rest for me, my darling,” returned her mother, rising, and beginning to put the plates and glasses together with a nervous movement. “I *am* out of sorts, for I have had a great disappointment. *The Family Friend* has refused my three-volume novel, and I really have not the heart to try it anywhere else after such repeated rejections. At the same time Skinner & Palm write to say they cannot use my short story, ‘On the Rack,’ for five or six months, as they have such a quantity of already accepted manuscripts.”

“How provoking!” cried Katherine. “But come away; the drawing-room is cooler; let us go there and talk things over.”

Mrs. Liddell accepted the suggestion, and sank into an arm-chair, while her daughter let down the blinds, and then placed herself on a low ottoman opposite her.

There was a short silence; then Mrs. Liddell sighed and began: “I counted so much on that short story for ready money! Skinner always pays directly he has published. Now I do not know what to do. If I take it back I may fail to dispose of it, yet I cannot wait. But the novel—that is the worst disappointment of all. I suppose it was foolish, but I felt *sure* about that.”

“Of course you did,” cried Katherine, eagerly. “It is an excellent story.”

“It is not worse than many Santley brings out,” resumed Mrs. Liddell; “but one is no judge of one’s own work. It was with reluctance I offered it to *The Family Friend*, and you see—” her voice faltered, and she stopped abruptly.

Katherine knew the tears were in her eyes and swelling her heart. She restrained the impulse to throw her arms round her; she feared to agitate her mother; rather she would help her self-control.

“Well, dear, I am no great judge, but I am quite sure that such a story as yours must succeed sooner or later. So we will be patient.”

“Ah! but, Katie, the landlord and the butcher will not wait, and, my child, I have only about five pounds. I made too sure of success for I did so well last year. Then Madame de Corset will soon be sending in her bill for that famous dress of Ada’s, and she will want the money she lent me.”

“Then Madame de Corset must wait,” said Katherine, firmly. “Ada is really your debtor. Where could she live at so small a cost as with you? Where could she be so free to run

about without a thought for the children? What has become of her? Couldn't she stay with Cecil on his birthday?"

"She is gone to luncheon with the Burnetts. It is as well to keep up with them; their influence might be useful to the boys hereafter; but I do wish I could pay her."

"I wish you could, for it would make you happier; but she really owes you ten pounds and more."

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“What shall I do about that novel? If I could get two hundred—even one hundred—-pounds for it, I should do well. I began to hope I might make both ends meet with my pen. Oh, Katie dear, I am ashamed of myself, but for the first time in my life I feel beaten. I feel as if I could not come up to time again. It has been such a long, weary battle!” She pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

“I wish *I* could give you rest, darling mother!” said Katherine, taking her hand and fondling it. “I fear I have been too useless—too thoughtless.”

“You have done all you could, my child; one cannot expect much from nineteen. But I wish—I wish I could think of any means of deliverance from my present difficulty. A small sum would suffice. Where to find it is the question. I counted too much on those unlucky manuscripts, and now I do not know where to turn; I see a vista of debt.” A sudden fit of coughing interrupted her.

“You have taken cold, mother,” cried Katherine. “I heard you coughing this morning. I was sure you would suffer for sitting near the open window in the study last night.”

“It was so hot!” murmured Mrs. Liddell, lying back exhausted.

“Yes, but it was also frightfully damp. Tell me, mother, is there anything we can sell?—-anything—”

Mrs. Liddell interrupted her. “Nothing, dear. The few jewels I had preserved went when I was trying to furnish this house. I fancied we should do well in a house of our own, and I was so anxious to make a home for my poor boy’s widow!”

“When do you expect any more money?”

“Not for nearly two months, and then another quarter’s rent will be due.”

“Mother,” said Katherine, after a moment’s silence, “would not my father’s brother, of whom I heard you speak, help you? It is dreadful to ask, but he is so near a kinsman, and childless.”

“It is useless to think of it. He and your father quarrelled about money, and he is implacable. His only child, a son, opposed him, and he drove him away. Poor fellow! he was killed in Australia.”

“Why have hard-hearted wretches heaps of money, while kind, generous souls like you never have a farthing?”

“That is a mystery of long standing,” said Mrs. Liddell, with a faint smile. “Katie, I cannot think or talk any more. I will go and lie down in my own room. There neither Ada nor the children can disturb me. Oh, my darling, how can I ever die in peace if I leave *you*

to do battle with the bitter, bitter world unprovided for?" Her voice quivered, and the hand she laid on her daughter's trembled.

"Do not fear for me, mother. I am tougher and more selfish than you are. It is time I worked for you. How feverish you are! Come up to your own room. You will see things differently when you have had a little sleep. If the worst comes, *I* will tell Ada that we must give up the house and go back to lodgings. We never had difficulties before we came here."

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“No, for we never had debts. Now I have, and I have this house for nearly three years longer. It is not so easy to shake off engagements as you would a cloak that had grown too heavy.”

So saying, Mrs. Liddell rose and ascended to the room she shared with her daughter, whom she allowed to take off her dress and put on her wrapper, to arrange her pillows, to bathe her brow in eau-de-cologne and water, and soothe her with those loving touches, those tender cares, that the heart alone can prompt, till in spite of the cloud and thick darkness that hid her future, Mrs. Liddell was calmed by the delicious sense of her daughter’s love and sympathy.

“I will make a list of editors,” said Katherine—“I mean those whom you have not tried—-and go round to them myself. Perhaps I may bring you luck.”

“Yes; your young life is more likely to have fortune on its side: the fickle jade has forsaken me.”

Katherine made no reply beyond a gentle kiss. She sat silently by her mother’s side, till feeling the hand that held hers relax its hold, she slowly and softly withdrew her own, comforted to perceive that balmy sleep had stolen upon the weary woman.

Still she sat there thinking with all the force of her young brain, partly remembering, partly anticipating.

Of her father she had scarce any knowledge. She was but four years old when he died, and her only brother was nearly fourteen. The eldest and youngest of Mrs. Liddell’s children were the survivors of several.

Katherine’s memory of her childish days presented the dim picture of a quaint foreign town; of blue skies, bright sunshine, and abundant vegetation; of large rooms and a smiling black-eyed attendant in a peculiar head-dress; of some one lying back in a large chair, near whom she must never make a noise. Then came a change; mother always in black, with a white cap, and often weeping, and of colder winters, snow and skating —a happy time, for she was always with mother both in lesson and play time, whilst Fred used to go away early to school. Next, clear and distinct, was the recollection of her first visit to London, and from this time she was the companion and confidante of her mother. They were poor—at least every outlay had to be carefully considered—but Katie never knew the want of money. Then came the excitement and preparation attending Fred’s departure for India, the mixture of sorrow and satisfaction with which her mother parted from him, of how bitterly she had cried herself; for though somewhat tyrannical, Fred had been always kind and generous.

How well she remembered the day he had left them never to return—how her mother had clasped her to her heart and exclaimed: "You must be all in all to me now, Katie. I have done but little for you yet, dear, Fred needed so much."

A spell of happy, busy life in Germany followed, enlivened by long letters from the young Indian officer, whose career seemed full of promise. But when Katherine was a little more than thirteen sorrow fell upon them. Fred's letters had become irregular; then came a confession of weakness and debt, crowned by the supreme folly of marriage, concluding with a prayer for help.

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Mrs. Liddell was cruelly disappointed. She had hoped and expected much from her boy. She believed he was doing so well! She told all to Katie, who heartily agreed with her that Fred must be helped. Some of their slender capital was sold out and sent to him, while mother and daughter cheerfully accepted the loss of many trifling indulgences, drawing the narrow limits of their expenditure closer still, content and free from debt, though as time went on Katherine cast many a longing glance at the world of social enjoyment in which their poverty forbade her to triumph.

Mrs. Liddell had always loved literature, and her husband had been an accomplished though a reckless and self-indulgent man. She had wandered a good deal with him, and had seen a great variety of people and places. It occurred to her to try her pen as a means of adding to her income, and after some failures she succeeded with one or two of the smaller weekly periodicals. This induced her to return to London, hoping to do better in that great centre of work. Here the tidings of her son's death overwhelmed her. Next came an imploring letter from the young widow, who had no near relatives, praying to be allowed to live with her and Katherine—sharing expenses—as the pension to which an officer's widow and orphans were entitled insured her a small provision.

So Mrs. Liddell again roused herself, and managed to furnish very scantily the little home where Katherine sat thinking. But the addition to their income was but meagre compared to the expenses which followed in the train of Mrs Frederic Liddell and her two "little Indian boys."

All the efforts of the practical mother and daughter did not suffice to keep within the limits they dreaded to overpass. Mrs. Liddell's pen became more than ever essential to the maintenance of the household, while the younger widow considered herself a martyr to the most sordid, the most unnecessary stinginess.

A tapping at the door and suppressed childish laughter called Katherine from her thoughts. She rose and opened the door quickly and softly.

"Hush, Cecil! be quiet, Charlie! poor grannie is asleep. Come with me downstairs; I will read to you if you like."

"Oh yes, do," said Charlie.

"I don't care for reading," cried Cecil. "Can't you play bears?"

"It makes too much noise. I will play it to-morrow if grandmamma is better. Shall I tell you a story?"

"No," said Cecil; "*I* will tell *you* one."

"Very well. I shall be delighted to hear it."

“I would rather have you read, auntie,” said the little one.

“Never mind, Charlie; I will read to you after.”

“Shall we sit in the garden? We have made it quite clean and tidy.”

“No, dear; grannie would hear us there. Come into the dining-room.”

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Established there, the boys one on each side of her, Katherine listened to the young story-teller, who began fluently: "There was once two little boys called Jimmie and Frank. Frank was the biggest; he was very strong and very courageous; and he learned his lessons very well when he liked, but he did not always like. The two little boys had an aunt; she was nice and pleasant sometimes, but more times she was cross and disagreeable, and she spoiled Jimmie a great deal. One day they went out to walk a long way, and saw lots of people riding, and Jimmmie grew tired, and so did Frank, but Frank would not complain, and their aunt was so unkind that she would not call a hansom; so when they came to a great street Frank thought he would catch an omnibus, and he ran out quick—quick. He would have caught it, but his aunt was so silly and such a coward that she sent a man after him, who nearly dragged him under the feet of a horse that was coming up, and they would both have been killed if Frank had not called out to the cabman to stop."

"Oh, Cecil, that is you and I. *What* a story! Auntie is not unkind, and you did not call out," cried Charlie.

Katherine could not help laughing at the little monkey's version of the incident.

"Cecil, Cecil, you must learn to tell the truth—" she was beginning, when the door was opened, and a small, slight lady in black silk, with a profusion of delicate gray ribbons, jet trimming, and foamy white tulle ruching, stood in the doorway. She was very fair, with light eyes, a soft pink color, and pale golden brown hair—altogether daintily pretty.

"Oh, mammy! mammy! where have you been all my birthday?" cried the elder boy, rushing to her.

"My own precious darling, do not put your dear dirty little paws on my dress!" she exclaimed, in alarm. "I was *obliged* to go, my boy; but I have brought you a bag of sweets; it is in the hall. Dear me! how stuffy this room is! Mrs. Burnett's house is *so* cool and fresh! It looks into a charming garden at the back; and oh, how delightful it must be to be rich!" She had advanced into the room as she spoke, and began to untie and smooth out her bonnet strings.

"It must indeed," returned Katherine, with a deep sigh.

"I will go and put on an old dress; this one is too pretty to spoil, and the house is *so* dusty. Do you think it becoming, Katherine?"

"Yes, very"—with an indulgent smile. "You ought always to wear half-mourning; it suits you admirably."

"I think it does; but I must put it off some day, you know. Cecil dear, go and ask cook to make me a cup of tea. I will have it up in my room. Charlie, don't cuddle up against

your aunt in that way; it makes her too hot, and you will grow crooked." Charlie jumped down from his chair and held up his face.

"There, dear," giving a hasty kiss. "Don't worry."

"Mammy," said Cecil, with much solemnity, "I was nearly killed to-day."

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“Nonsense, dear! This is one of your wonderful inventions. What does he mean, Katherine?”

“He might have been. He darted from me at Hyde Park Corner, intending to catch an omnibus, and would have been run over if a gentleman had not snatched him from under the horses’ feet.”

“My precious boy!” laying her hand on his head, but keeping him at a distance. “How wrong of you, Katherine, to let his hand go!”

“I did not let it go; I was not holding it,” returned Katherine, dryly.

“At Hyde Park Corner?” pursued Mrs. Frederic Liddell, eagerly. “Was the gentleman soldierly and stout, with gray mustaches?”

“No. He was young and slight and clean-shaved.”

“That is curious; for Colonel Ormonde was saying at luncheon to-day that he had saved, or helped to save, such a pretty little boy from being run over. I don’t exactly remember what he said. I was listening to Mrs. De Vere Hopkins, and Mrs. Burnett’s boy was making a noise. Colonel Ormonde said he was just like a little fellow he had seen nearly run over that morning. I am sure Tom Burnett is not half as handsome as my Cecil.”

“I should not have been run over if auntie had left me alone.”

“Go and get mother’s tea, and you, Charlie, fetch her some nice bread and butter,” said Katherine, who, though six or seven years her sister-in-law’s junior, looked at first sight older. “There *was* an elderly gentleman such as you describe, talking with the young man who rescued Cecil, and he was very polite and interested in Cecil, who broke away from me, though he had promised to stay by my side.”

“Promised,” repeated Mrs. Frederic, lightly, and carefully dusting her bonnet with her handkerchief. “What can you expect from a child’s promise? But poor Cecil rarely does right in your eyes.”

“Nonsense, Ada!”

“Not at all. I am very observant. But tell me, did Colonel Ormonde take much notice of Cecil?”

“I do not know. I was too much frightened to see anything but the dear child himself.”

Mrs. Frederic did not reply for a moment; she seemed to be thinking deeply. “Where did you get those flowers—those you bought on Saturday for sixpence?”

“Oh! at the little florist’s on Queen’s Road. It was late in the evening, you know, or they would not have been so cheap.”

“I should like some to-morrow to make the drawing-room look pretty, if possible, for Colonel Ormonde said he would call. He wishes to see some of my Otocammed photographs. Heigho! it is a miserable place to receive any one in.”

“Well, you see, it must do.”

“Really, Katherine, you are very unsympathetic. If you have a fault, dear, it is selfishness. You don’t mind my saying so?”

“Oh, not at all. I am thankful for the ‘if.’”

“Where is your mother?”

“Lying down. She is tired, and has a horrid headache.”

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“I’m sure I don’t wonder at it, toiling from morning till night for those wretched papers. I was telling Mrs. Burnett to-day that my mother-in-law was an authoress, but when I mentioned that she wrote for *The Family Friend* and *The Cheerful Visitor*, Lady Everton, who writes in *The Court Journal* and various grand things of that kind, said they were quite low publications, and never got higher than the servants’ hall.”

“You need not have gone into particulars, Ada. Whether my mother writes well or ill, the pressure on her is too great to allow of her picking or choosing; she must catch at the quickest market.”

“I’m sure it is a great pity. That is the reason I stay on here, and let you teach Cis and Charlie, though Colonel Ormonde says the sooner boys are out of a woman’s hands the better.”

“If Colonel Ormonde is the old man I saw this morning, he looks more capable of judging a dinner than what is the best training for youth.”

“Old!” screamed the pretty widow. “He is not old; he is only mature. He is very well off, too. He has a place in the country. And as to mentioning those papers, I know nothing of such things. *The Nineteenth Century*, or *Bow Bells*, or *The Family Friend*, they are all the same to me. Only I am sure such a nice lady-like woman as Mrs. Liddell should not write for the servants’ hall. She must have been so handsome, too! Fred, poor fellow, was her image. You will never be so good-looking, Kate.”

“No, I don’t suppose I shall,” returned Katherine, with much equanimity.

“Are there any letters for me?” asked Mrs. Frederic, looking round as she lifted her bonnet from the table.

“Here are two.”

“Ah! this is from Harry Vigors. I suppose he is coming home. And oh! this is Madame de Corset’s bill”—putting down her bonnet and opening it. “Eleven pounds seventeen and ninepence-half-penny. Why, this is abominable! She promised it should not be much more than ten pounds. There is five per cent off for ready money. Oh, I’ll pay it immediately. How much will that be altogether, Kate? Eleven shillings? Well, that is worth saving. It will buy me two pairs of gloves. Now I’ll go and rest. Tell me when Mrs. Liddell is awake.”

CHAPTER II.

BREAKING NEW GROUND.

Katherine took care that her sister-in-law should not have an opportunity of private conversation with Mrs. Liddell, that evening at least.

She rolled up and arranged the disordered manuscripts, putting the small study in order, and locking away the rejected tales. Then she proposed conducting the young widow to the florist's, as the evening grew cooler, and made herself agreeable by listening attentively to the little woman's description of the luncheon party, and her repetition of all the pretty things said to her by the various gentlemen present, especially by Colonel Ormonde.

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“Of course I do not mind their nonsense, but however my heart may cling to dear Fred’s memory, I must think of my precious boys,” was her conclusion. To which Katherine answered, “Of course,” as she would have answered any proposition, however wild, provided only she could save her mother from worry, at least for that evening.

Next day was showery and dull. True to her resolution, Katherine put her mother’s lucubrations into their covers, and prepared to start on her projected round.

“I am not sure I ought to let you go, Katie dear,” said Mrs. Liddell, as her daughter came into the study in her out-door dress. “It is rather a wild goose chase. Why should you succeed for me when I have failed for myself? Besides, personal interviews are of no avail. No editor will take work that does not suit him, however interesting the applicant.”

“Nevertheless I will go. I shall bring a new element into the business, and I *may* be lucky! Why have you plunged into these horrid accounts?” pointing to a pile of small books, and a sheaf of backs of letters scribbled over with calculations. “This is not the way to cheer yourself.”

“My love, it is a change of occupation, at least, to revert to the old yet ever new problem of life—how to extract thirty shillings from a sovereign. I am trying to see where we can possibly retrench. What is Ada doing?”

“She is decking the drawing-room and herself for the reception of Colonel Ormonde, who is coming to afternoon tea.”

“What, already?”

“She is quite excited, I assure you. Is it not soon to think of——”

“Do not judge her harshly. She is a woman not made to live alone. In due time I shall be glad to see her happily married, for she *will* marry.”

“Tell me, is that irreconcilable uncle of mine really still alive? How long is it since you heard anything of him?”

“Oh, more than six or seven years. But I am sure he is alive. I should have heard of his death. I suppose he is still living on in Camden Town.”

“Not a very agreeable quarter,” returned Katherine, carelessly. “Good-by, mother dear! Do not expect me to dinner. I can have something whenever I come in.”

Katherine walked briskly toward town, intending to save some of her omnibus fare, for she had planned a long and daring expedition—an undertaking which taxed all her courage. In truth, though she had never known the ease or luxury of wealth, she had been most tenderly brought up. Her mother had constantly shielded her from all the

roughness of life, and the deed she contemplated seemed to her mind an almost desperate effort of independent action.

Through one of the very few sleepless nights she had ever experienced she had thought out an idea which had flashed through her brain while Mrs. Liddell was explaining her difficulties, and which she had carefully kept to herself.

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She saw clearly enough the hopelessness of their position; probably with the intensity of youth she exaggerated it, which was scarcely necessary, as a small rut is apt to widen into a bottomless pit if it crosses the path of those who are living up to the utmost verge of a narrow income. As she reviewed the endless instances of her mother's self-abnegation which memory supplied—her cheerful industry, her brave struggle to live like a gentlewoman on a pittance, her tender thought for the welfare and happiness of her children—she felt she could walk through a burning fiery furnace if by so doing she could earn ease and repose for her mother's weary spirit.

"She is looking ill and worn," thought Katherine, "and years older. She has never been the same since that attack of bronchitis last year. Ada and the boys are too much for her, though they are dear little fellows; but they are costly. If Ada would even give us twenty pounds a year more it would be a great help."

The project Katherine had evolved through the night-watches was to visit her uncle and ask him, face to face, for help! It is, she argued, harder to say "no" than to write it; even if she failed she should know her fate at once, and not have to endure the agony of waiting for a letter. Nor, were she refused, need her mother ever know now she had humiliated herself in the dust.

How her young heart sank within her at the thought of being harshly, contemptuously rejected! It was a positive painful physical sense of faintness that made her limbs tremble as she pressed on faster than she was aware. "But I *will* do it—I will! If I succeed no humiliation will be too great," she said to herself. "I will speak with all my soul! When I begin, this horrible feeling that my tongue is dry and speechless will go away. I must find out where this awful old man is; what is his street and number. I dared not ask mother. First I will try the publisher; as the 'servants' hall' publications have rejected it, I shall offer *Darrell's Doom* to a first-rate house. Why not try Channing & Wyndham? They cannot say worse than 'no,' and I shall no doubt see a Directory there." Thus communing with herself, she took an omnibus down Park Lane and walked thence to the well-known temple of the Muses in Piccadilly.

Arrived there, a civil clerk took her card—which was her mother's—and soon returning, asked if she had an appointment. "No, I have not, but pray ask Mr. Channing or Mr. Wyndham to see me; I will not stay more than a few minutes." The young man smiled slightly; he was accustomed to such assurances. Almost as Katherine spoke, a stout "country gentleman" looking person came into the warehouse, slightly raising his hat as he passed her. A sudden inspiration prompted her to say, "Pray excuse me, but are you Mr. Wyndham?"

"I am."

"Then do let me speak to you for five minutes."

“With pleasure,” said the great publisher, graciously, and ushered her into a sort of literary loose box or small enclosure in the remote back-ground.

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“I have ventured to bring you a manuscript,” began Katherine, smiling with all her might, with an abject desire to propitiate the arbiter of her mother’s fate.

“So I see,” he returned, ruefully but politely.

“It is a beautiful story, and I thought it ought to be published by a great house like yours,” pursued Katherine.

“Thank you,” he said, with a twinkle in his eye. “Pray is it your own?”

“Mine! Oh dear no! It is my mother’s. She is not very strong, so *I* brought it.”

There was a slight faltering in her voice that suggested a good deal to her hearer. “Then you are not Mrs. W. Liddell,” glancing at the card, “but Mrs. Liddell’s daughter. Pray put down that heavy parcel. Three volumes, I suppose?”

“Yes, three volumes, but they are not very long, and the story is most interesting.”

“No doubt. I hope it is not historical?”

“Oh no! quite modern.”

“So much the better. Well, Miss Liddell, I will look at the manuscript, or rather our reader shall, and let you know the result in due course; but I must warn you that we are rather overdone with three-volume novels, and there are already a large number of manuscripts awaiting perusal, so you must not expect our verdict for some little time.”

“When you will, but oh! as soon as you can,” she urged.

“I will keep your address, and you shall hear at the earliest date we can manage. Good-morning. Very damp, uncomfortable day.”

Katherine felt herself dismissed, and almost forgot her ulterior intention. “Would you be so very good as to let me look at the Directory, if you have one?”

“Certainly,” said Wyndham, who was slipping the card under the string of poor Katherine’s parcel. “Here, Tompkins, let this young lady see the Directory. Excuse me —I am a good deal pressed for time;” and with a bow he went off, the manuscript under his arm.

“Well, it is really in his hands, at all events,” thought Katherine, looking wistfully after it.

A boy with inky hands here placed that thick volume, the Post-Office Directory, before her, and she proceeded to search confusedly among the endless pages of names, a little strengthened and cheered by her brief interview with the publisher. It seemed that

she was in a lucky vein: trouble is always conducive to superstition. When visible hope fails, poor human hearts turn to the invisible and the improbable.

At last she paused at “John Wilmot Liddell, 27 Legrave Crescent, Camden Town, N. W.” That must be her uncle; they were all Wilmot Liddells. How to reach his abode was the question.

The inky boy soon gave her the requisite information. “You take a Waterloo ’bus at Piccadilly Circus; it runs through to Camden Town; that is, to the beginning of Camden Town,” he said. Katherine thanked him, and again set forth.

It was a long, tedious drive. The omnibus was crammed with warm passengers and damp umbrellas, but Katherine was too racked with impatience and fear to heed small discomforts. Would her dreaded relative order her out of his sight at once? Was her interview with the publisher a good omen?

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At last she reached the end of her journey, and addressing herself to the tutelary policeman solemnly pacing past the Tavern where the omnibus paused, she asked to be directed to Legrave Crescent.

It was an old-fashioned row of houses, before them a few sooty trees in a half-moon of grass, one side railed off from the street and dignified with gates at either end—gates which were always open.

The place had a still, deserted air, but about the middle stood a cab, on which a rheumatic driver, assisted by a small boy, was placing a cumbrous box. As Katherine approached she found that the house before which it stood bore the number she sought, and on reaching it she found the door held open by a little smutty girl, the very lowest type of slavey, with unkempt hair, and a rough holland apron of the grimiest aspect. On the top step stood a stout woman, fairly well dressed in a large shawl and a straw bonnet largely decorated with crushed artificial flowers; a very red, angry face appeared beneath it, with watery eyes and a coarse, half-open mouth. All this Katherine saw, but hardly observed, so strongly was her attention attracted to a figure that stood a few paces within the entrance—a tall, thin old man, bent and leaning on a stick. He was wrapped in a long dressing-gown of dull dark gray, evidently much worn; slippers were on his feet, and a black velvet skull-cap on his head, from under which some thin straggling locks of white hair escaped. His thin aquiline features and dark sunken eyes were alight with an expression of malignant fury; one long claw-like hand was outstretched with a gesture of dismissal, the other grasped the top of his stick. "Begone, you accursed drunken thief!" he was almost screaming in a shrill voice. "I would take you to the police, court if there was anything to be got out of you; but it would only be throwing good money away after bad. Get you gone to the ditch where you'll die! You guzzling, muzzling fool, to leave my house without a shilling after all your pilfering!"

While he uttered these words with frightful vehemence, the woman he addressed kept up a rapid undercurrent of reply.

"Living with a miserable screwy miser like you would make a saint drink! Do you think people will serve you for nothing, and not pay themselves somehow? The likes of you are born to be robbed—and may your last crust be stole from you, you old skinflint!" With this last defiance, she turned and threw herself hastily into the cab, which crawled away as if horse and driver were equally rheumatic.

"Shut the door," said the old man, hoarsely, as if exhausted.

"Please, sir, there's a lady here," said the little slavey. Katherine, who was as frightened as if she were face to face with a lunatic, had a terrible conviction that this appalling old man was her uncle. How should she ever address him? What an unfortunate time to have fallen upon!

“What do you want?” asked the old man, fiercely, frowning till his shaggy white eyebrows almost met over his angry black eyes.

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“I want to see Mr. John Wilmot Liddell.”

“Then you see him! Who are you?”

“Katherine Liddell, your niece.”

“My niece!” with inexpressible contempt and disbelief, “Well, niece or not, you may serve a turn. Can you read?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Come, then—come in.” He turned and walked with some difficulty to the door of the front parlor. Half bewildered, Katherine followed mechanically, and the small servant shut the front door, putting up the chain with a good deal of noise.

The room to which Katherine was so unceremoniously introduced was of good size, covered with a carpet of which no pattern and very little color were left. The furniture was old-fashioned and solid; a dining-table covered with faded green baize was in the middle, and a writing-table with several drawers was placed near the fireplace, beside which stood a high-backed leather arm-chair, old, worn, dirty. A wretched fire was dying out in the grate, almost choked by the red ashes of the very cheapest coal.

An odor of dust long undisturbed pervaded the atmosphere, and the dull damp weather without added to the extreme gloom. Indeed the door of this apartment might well have borne Dante’s inscription over the entrance to a warmer place.

Mr. Liddell went with feeble rapidity across to where a large newspaper lay upon the floor, and resting one hand on the writing-table, stooped painfully to raise it.

“There! read—read the price-list to me. I am blind and helpless, for that jade has hid my glasses. I know she has. I cannot find them anywhere, and I *must* know how Turkish bonds are going. Read to me. I’ll hear what you have to say after.” He thrust the paper into her hand, and sat down in the high-backed chair.

Poor Katherine felt almost dazed. She took a seat at the other side of the table, and began to look for the mysterious list. The geography of the mighty *Times* was unknown to her, and even in her mother’s humbler penny paper the City article was a portion she never glanced at. While she turned the wide pages, painfully bewildered, the old man “glowered” at her.

“I don’t think you know what you are looking for,” he cried, impatiently.

“I do not indeed! If you will show it to me——”

He snatched it from her, and pointed out the part he wished to hear. “Read from the beginning,” he said.

Katherine obeyed, her courage returning as she found herself thus strangely installed within the fortress she feared to attack. She stumbled occasionally, and was sharply set upon her feet, in the matter of figures, by her eager hearer. At last she came to Turkish six per cents.

“Eighty-seven to eighty-eight and a quarter.”

“Ha!” muttered the old man, “that’s an advance! good! nothing to be done there yet. Now read the railway stocks.”

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Katherine obeyed. When she came to “Florida and Teche debentures, sixty-two and a half to sixty-five and three-fourths,” she was startled by a sort of shrill shout. “Ay! *that’s* a rise! Some rigging design there! I must write—I must. Where, where has that——-harridan hid my glasses? Why, it is almost twelve o’clock! the boy will be here for the paper immediately. And the post! the post! I must catch the post. Can you write?”

“Oh yes! Shall I write for you?”

“You shall! you shall! here’s paper”—rising and opening an ancient blotting-book, its covers all scribbled over with tiny figures, the result of much calculating, he hastily set forth writing materials, his lean, claw-like, dirty hands trembling with eagerness. “Hear, hear, write fast.”

Katherine, growing a little clearer, and amazed at her own increasing self-possession, drew off her gloves, and taking the rusty pen offered her, wrote at his dictation:

“*To Messrs. Rogers & Stokes, Corbett Court, E. C.*:

“GENTLEMEN,—Sell all my Florida shares if possible to-day, even if they decline a quarter.

“I am yours faithfully—”

“Now let me come there!” he exclaimed. “I’ll let no one sign my name. I’ll manage that. There? there! Direct an envelope. Oh Lord! I haven’t a stamp—not one! and its ten minutes’ walk to the post-office.”

“I think—I believe I have a stamp,” said Katherine, drawing her slender purse from her pocket and opening it.

“Have you?” eagerly. “Give it to me. Stick it on! Go! go! There is a pillar just outside the left-hand gate there; and mind you come back. I will give you a penny. Ah, yes, you shall have your penny?”

“I hope you will hear me when I return,” she said, appealingly, as she left the room.

“Ay, ay; but go—go now.”

When Katherine returned she found the old man, with the half-opened door in his hand, waiting for her.

“Were you in time?” he asked, eagerly.

“Oh yes, quite. I saw the postman coming across the road to empty the box as I was dropping the letter in.”

“That’s well. I will rest a bit now, and you can tell me what you please. First, what have you come here for?”

It was an appalling question, and nothing but the simple truth occurred to her as an answer. Indeed, some irresistible power seemed to compel the reply, spoken very low and distinct, “I came here to beg.”

The old man burst into a singularly unpleasant laugh. “Well, I like candor. Pray what business have you to beg from me?”

“Because I know no one else to turn to—because, you are so near a kinsman. Let me tell you about my mother.” Simply and shortly she gave the history of their life and struggles, of the coming of her brother’s young widow and orphans, of the disappointment of her mother’s literary expectations, of the present necessity. The quiver in her young voice, the pathetic earnestness with which she told her story, the deep love for her mother breathing through the recital, might well have moved a heart of ordinary coldness, but it seemed to small impression on her grim uncle.

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“You come of a wasteful extravagant lot,” he said, faintly, “if you are what you represent yourself to be—of which there is no proof whatever. How do I know you are the daughter of Frederic Liddell?”

This was an objection Katherine had never anticipated, and knew not how to meet. She colored vividly and hesitated; then, struck with the ghastly pallor of the old man’s face, she exclaimed, “You are ill! you are fainting!” drawing near him as she spoke.

“I am not ill,” he gasped. “I am weak from want of food. I have tasted none since yesterday afternoon.”

“Will you not order some?” said Katherine, looking round for a bell.

“There is nothing in the house. That drunken robber I have just driven out went off to her revels last night and left me without anything; but while she was away a tradesman came with a bill I thought was paid, and so I discovered all her iniquity.”

“You must have something,” cried Katherine, seriously alarmed. “Can I get you some wine or brandy?” and she rang hastily.

Mr. Liddell drew a bunch of keys from his trousers pocket, and feebly selecting one, put it in her hand, pointing to the sideboard.

The first cellaret Katherine opened was quite empty, the opposite one held two empty bottles covered with dust, and another, at the bottom of which was about a wineglass of brandy. She sought eagerly for and found a glass, and brought it to the fainting man, pouring out a small quantity, which he sipped readily enough. “Ah!” he said, “I was nearly gone. I must eat. I suppose that wretched brat can cook something. Ring again.” Katherine rang, and rang, but in vain.

“May I go down and see what has become of her?”

“If you please,” he murmured, more civilly than he had yet spoken.

Katherine, with increasing surprise and interest, descended the dingy stair and entered a chaotic kitchen.

Such a scene of dirt and confusion she had never beheld. Nothing seemed fit to touch. The little girl’s rough apron lay on the floor in the midst, and she herself was tying on a big bonnet, while a small bundle lay on a chair beside her. She started and colored when Katherine stood in the doorway. “Mr. Liddell has sent me to look for you. He is very ill. Why did you not answer the bell?”

“Because I was going away to mother,” cried the girl, bursting into tears. “I could not stay here by myself. Mr. Liddell is more like a wild beast than a man when he is angry,

and I have had a night and a day as would frighten a policemen. I can't stay—I can't indeed, miss."

"But you *must*," said Katherine, impressively. "I am Mr. Liddell's niece, and at least you must do a few things for me before you go."

"Oh! if you are here, miss, I don't mind. I can't think as how you are Mr. Liddell's niece."

"I am, and I must not leave him till he is better. What is your name?"

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“Susan, ma’am.”

“Well, Susan, is there any bread or anything in the larder?”

“Not a blessed scrap, miss, and I *am* so hungry”—a fresh burst of tears.

“Don’t cry. Do as I bid you, and then you had better ask your mother to come here. Now get me some fresh water.”

“There’s only water in the tap; the filterer is broke.”

“Well, give me a jugful. And are you too hungry to make up the fire?”

“I’ll manage that, ’m; we had a hundred of coal in yesterday morning before the row.”

“Then clear away the ashes and get as clear a fire as you can. I will get some food.”

The desperate, deserted condition of the old man seemed to rob him of his terrors, and all Katherine’s energy was roused to save him from the ill effects of his own fury. She hastened back to the dining-room. Mr. Liddell was sitting up, grasping the arms of his chair.

“There is nothing downstairs. Will you allow me to go and buy you some food? You will be ill unless you eat.”

“Can’t that child fetch what is needful?” he said, with an effort.

“I am afraid she may not return.”

“Then you had better go. I’ll open the door to you when you come back.”

“I will go at once. But you must give me a little money. I would gladly pay for the things, but I have only my omnibus fare back.”

“How much do you want?” he returned, drawing forth an old worn green porte-monnaie.

“If you will be satisfied with a chop, two shillings will get all you want,” said Katherine.

“There, then; bring me the change and account,” he returned, handing her the required sum.

Since her mother had become a housekeeper Katherine had done a good deal of the marketing and household management, and had put her heart into her work, as was natural to her. She therefore felt quite competent to make these small purchases.

“You will want a little more wine or something,” she ventured to suggest.

“I have plenty—plenty. Make haste!”

Katherine called the little girl, told her she was going out, and promised to bring her back some food. Then she sped on her way to some shops she had noticed on her way, and soon accomplished her errand. This necessity for action put her right with herself, and gave her the courage she needed. With a word to the fainting old miser, she descended to the chaotic kitchen, where she rejoiced the heart of the small slavey by the sight of the cold beef and bread she had brought for her. Then she set to work to cook the chops she had purchased. This done, to the amazement of the little servant, she looked in vain for a cloth to spread upon the only battered tray she could find. She was obliged to be content with dusting it and placing the result of her cooking between two warm plates thereupon. Then she carried the whole up to her starving relative. Mr. Liddell had fallen into a doze from exhaustion, and looked quite wolfish when, rousing up, his eyes fell upon the sorely needed food.

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“You have been quick, but it is surely wasteful to cook *two* chops.”

“You will not find them too much, I hope. I am sure you ought to eat both.”

“I do not know, but the meat is good.” He fell to and ate with relish. Katherine asked where she could find some wine for him. He again produced his keys, selected one, and told her to open a door at the end of the room, which she fancied led into another. It was a cupboard, plentifully filled with bottles of various descriptions, from among which, by her patient’s direction, she selected one labelled cognac, and gave him some in water.

Katherine sat down and watched the old man demolish both chops with evident enjoyment. Then he paused, drank a little brandy and water, and drew over the plate containing the butter, and smelled it very deliberately.

“You have extravagant ways, I am afraid,” he said. “This is fresh butter.”

“That piece only cost fourpence-halfpenny,” she said, gravely, “and the little you eat you had better have good.”

“Fourpence-halfpenny!” he repeated, and fell into profound meditation, from which he broke with a sudden return of anger. “What a double-dyed villain and robber that infernal woman has been! She told me that prices had risen to such a height that the commonest salt butter was eighteenpence a pound, that every chop was a shilling, that —that—” Then breaking off, with an air of the deepest pathos he exclaimed: “Thirty shillings a week I gave her to keep the house, and she has left the butcher unpaid for six months. But *I* will not pay him. He shall suffer. Why did he trust her? What did you pay for these things?” he ended, abruptly, in a high key.

Katherine silently handed him the back of a letter on which she had scribbled down the items.

“What is the use of showing me this, when I cannot read—when I have no glasses?” he exclaimed, impatiently.

“True. I must try and find them for you. Where did you first miss them?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I had them on when I went to see that——woman out of the house.”

Calling Susan to assist in the search, Katherine looked carefully in the hall, but in vain, when her young assistant gave a cry of joy; she had almost trodden on them as they lay between a mangy mat and the foot of the stairs.

The recovery of his precious glasses did more to soothe the ruffled spirit of the recluse than anything else. He wiped them tenderly, and looking through them, observed that

they were all right. Then he sat in profound silence, while Susan, under Katherine's directions, cleared up the hearth, and removed the heap of dust and ashes which had nearly put out the fire. When she had retired, carrying off the tray, Mr. Liddell turned his keen eyes on his young visitor, and said:

"You came in the nick of time, and you seem to know what you are about; but I dare say I should have pulled through without you. Now about your story. Before anything else I must be assured that you are really Frederic Liddell's daughter. Not that your being so gives you the smallest claim upon me."

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“I suppose it does not,” returned Katherine, sadly. “Still, if you could help us with a loan at this trying time it might be the saving of our fortunes, and both my mother and myself would do our best to repay you.”

“That’s but indifferent security,” said the miser with a sardonic grin.

“I feel sure that my mother’s novel will succeed. It is a beautiful story—and you know how some of the best books have been rejected—and when it is taken they will give her at least a hundred pounds for it!” cried Katherine, eagerly.

“Good Lord! a hundred pounds for trashy scribblings.”

“They are not trash, sir,” returned Katherine, with spirit.

“And what sum do you want on this first-class security?” he asked.

“Oh, thirty or forty pounds!” she said, her heart beating with wild anxiety.

“Thirty pounds! Why, that is a fortune!”

“It would be to us,” said Katherine, fighting bravely against a desperate inclination to cry.

“And all you have to offer in exchange is a mortgage on an unpublished novel?”

“We have nothing in the world but the furniture,” she replied, with a slight sob.

“Furniture!” repeated Mr. Liddell, sharply. “How much?—how many rooms have you?”

“A drawing-room and dining-room, my mother’s study, and four bedrooms, besides—”

“Well!” exclaimed Liddell, interrupting her, “you’ll have a hundred pounds’ worth in it, and I dare say it cost you two. Now you have shown you have some knowledge of the value of money, and you have served me well at this uncomfortable crisis. I’ll tell you what I will do; I’ll write to my solicitor to go and see you, at the address you have told me, to-morrow. He shall find out if you are speaking the truth, and look at your goods and chattels. If he reports favorably I will do something for you, on the security of the furniture. You haven’t given a bill of sale to any one else, I suppose?”

“A bill of sale?—I do not know what you mean.”

“Ah! perhaps not.” He rose and hobbled to his writing-table, where he began to write. “What’s your address?” he asked. Katherine told him. Presently he finished and turned to her. “Put this in the post. Look at it. Mr. Newton, my solicitor, will take it with him when he calls, to-morrow or next day. No!” suddenly. “I will send the girl with it to the

pillar, and you shall stay till she returns. You may or you may not be honest; but I will never trust any one again."

"As you like," returned Katherine, overjoyed not to be utterly refused. "And before I go, do let me try and find some one to be with you. It is dreadful to think of your being alone in this large house with only that poor little girl! and she is inclined to run away! I think her mother is coming here; let me stay till she comes."

"I don't want any one," said the old man, fiercely. "I am hale and strong; the child can do all I want. You got some food for her I see. The strength of that meat will last till to-morrow. Then you must come to hear what I decide, and you can do what I want, *if* you *are* my niece!"

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“Do—do let me find some one to stay with you! I cannot bear to think of your being alone.” The old man stared at her curiously, and a sort of mocking smile parted his lips. “May I at least ask Susan if her mother can come? for I am sure the girl will not stay alone.”

“Very well,” he said; “but be sure you do not promise her money! She *may* come here to keep the child company—not for my sake.”

Katherine hastened to question Susan, and found that her mother, a char-woman, lived near. She despatched the little girl to fetch her, and, after some parleying, agreed to give her half a crown if she would remain for the night, determining to pay it herself rather than mention the subject to the ogre upstairs. Then she put her hat straight and resumed her gloves. “I must bid you good-morning now,” she said. “This mother of Susan’s looks a respectable woman, and will not ask you for any money. Will you not let me get you some tea and sugar before I go, and something for—”

“No!” cried the old man. “I have some tea. It is all that——robber left behind her. I want nothing more. Mind you come back to-morrow. If you are my brother’s daughter (though it is no recommendation!) I’ll do something for you. If you are *not*, I’d—I’d like to give you a piece of my mind.” He laughed a fiendish, spiteful laugh as he said this.

“Then accept my thanks beforehand,” said Katherine smiling a little wearily.

She was very tired. It was an oppressive day, and she had been under a mental strain of no small severity. Now she was longing to be at home to tell her mother all her strange adventures, and she had yet to find out by what route she should return.

Once more she said good-by. Mr. Liddell followed her to the door, with an air of seeing her safe off the premises, rather than of courtesy, and Katherine quickly retraced her steps to the place where she had alighted, hoping to find that universal referee, a policeman, who would no doubt set her on her homeward way.

CHAPTER III.

THE LAWYER’S VISIT.

While her young sister-in-law was thus seeking fortune in strange places, Mrs. Fred Liddell was spending a busy and, it must be confessed, a cheerful morning, preparing for the anticipated visit of Colonel Ormonde.

It was rather inconsiderate, she thought, of Katherine to go out and leave all the extra dusting of the drawing-room to her. If she, Katherine, had remained at home she would have taken the boys, as she always did, and then Jane, the house and children’s maid, would have been able to help.

If Katherine would only stay out all day she could forgive her—but she would be sure to come in for dinner, and so appear at afternoon tea, which by no means suited Mrs. F. Liddell's views.

The Colonel had given so very highly colored a description of the young lady who was with the little boy so nearly run over on the previous morning that the pretty widow's jealousy was aroused.

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In spite of her flightiness and love of pleasure she had a very keen sense of her own interest, and perceiving Colonel Ormonde's decided appreciation, she had made up her mind to marry him.

This, she felt, would be more easily designed than accomplished. Colonel Ormonde was an old soldier in every sense, and an old bachelor to boot, with an epicurean taste for good dinners and pretty women. He might sacrifice something for the first, but the latter were too plentiful and too come-at-able to be worth great cost. Still, it was generally believed he was matrimonially inclined, and Mrs. Fred thought she might have as good a chance as any one else, had she not been hampered with her two boys.

It would be too dreadful if Ormonde's fancy were caught by Katherine's bold eyes and big figure. So Mrs. Fred wished that her sister-in-law might not put in an appearance.

"She is not a bit like other girls," thought the little woman, as she finally shook the duster out of the open window and set herself to distribute the flowers she had bought the previous evening to the best advantage. "She has no dear friends, no acquaintances with whom she likes to stop and chatter; she never stays out, and I don't think she ever had the ghost of a lover. When *I* was her age I had had a dozen, and I was married. Poor Fred! Heigho! I wish he had left me a little money, and I am sure I should never dream of giving him a successor. But for the sake of the dear boys I should never think of marrying! How cruel it is to be so poor, and to be with such unenterprising people! If Mrs. Liddell would only venture to make an appearance, and just risk a little, she might dispose of Kate and of me too. There *are* men who might admire Kate, and there they go on screwing and scribbling. I wish my mother-in-law would write for some big magazine—*Blackwood* or *Temple Bar*—or not write at all! That will do, I think. That is the only strong arm-chair in the house; it will stand nicely beside the sofa. Oh, have you come in already, children?"—as the two boys peeped in. "Couldn't Jane have kept you out a little longer! Don't attempt to come in here!"

"Jane had to come back to lay the cloth. Mamma, where is aunty?"

"She has not come in yet. Why, dear me, it is nearly one o'clock! Go and get off your boots, my darlings, and ask grandmamma when she expects aunty."

Mrs. Liddell did not know when Katherine might return, and, moreover, she was getting uneasy. She did not like to say much about her errand, for she knew her daughter-in-law thought but indifferently of her writings, and with an indescribable "crass" dislike of what she could not do herself, would have been rather pleased than otherwise to know that a manuscript had been rejected.

In looking over one of the drawers in her writing-table Mrs. Liddell had found that Katherine had left the shorter story behind. This rendered her prolonged absence less accountable, for she could have interviewed several publishers of three-volume novels

in the time. The poor lady naturally feared that they must have refused even to look at her work, or Katherine would have returned.

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When dinner was over, and four o'clock came, Mrs. Liddell's anxiety rose high; she could not bear her daughter-in-law's presence, and retired into her own den.

"Won't you stay and see Colonel Ormonde? He used to be quite friendly with poor Fred in India, and I should like him to see what a nice handsome mamma-in-law I have," said Mrs. Fred, caressingly: she rather liked her mother-in-law, and felt it was as well to be on affectionate terms with her.

"No, my dear; my head is not quite free from pain, and I want to give Katherine something to eat when she comes in; she will be very hungry. Then I can see that the children do not get into any mischief in the garden."

The younger lady then went to pose herself with a dainty piece of fancy-work in the drawing-room, and the elder to sit at her writing-table, pen in hand, but not writing; only thinking round and round the circle of difficulties which hedged her in, and longing for the sight of her daughter's face.

At last it beamed upon her through the open door-window which led out on the stairway to the garden; her approach had been seen by her little nephews, who had admitted her through the back gate.

"You must not come in now, dears; I want to talk to grannie. If you keep away I will tell you a nice story in the evening."

"My dearest child, what has kept you? I have been uneasy; and how dreadfully tired you look!"

"I am tired, but that is nothing. I think, dear, I have a little good news for you."

"Come into the dining-room. I have some dinner for you, and we can talk quietly. Ada is expecting a visitor."

But Katherine could not eat until she told her adventures. First she described her interview with Mr. Channing.

"It is something certainly to have left my unfortunate MS. in his hands; still I dare not hope much from that," said Mrs. Liddell.

"Then, mother dear," resumed Katherine, "I ventured to do something for which I hope you will not be angry with me—I have found John Liddell! I have invaded his den; I have spoken to him; I have cooked a chop for him, as I used for you last winter; and though I have been sent empty away, I am not without hopes that he will help us out of our difficulties."

“Katie, dear, what *have* you done?” cried her mother, aghast. “How did you manage—-how did you dare?” Whereupon Katherine gave her mother a graphic account of the whole affair.

“It is a wonderful history,” said Mrs. Liddell. “I feel half frightened; yet if Mr. Liddell’s solicitor is an honest, respectable man, he will surely be on our side; at the same time, I am half afraid of falling into John Liddell’s clutches. He has the character of being a relentless creditor: he will have his pound of flesh! If he gives this money as a loan, and I fail in paying the interest, he will take me by the throat as he would the greatest stranger.”

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“Why should you fail?” cried Katherine. “You only want time to succeed. I am sure you will sell your books, and then we can pay principal and interest; besides, old Mr. Liddell could *not* treat his brother’s widow as he would a stranger.”

“I am not so sure.”

“And you are not angry with me for going to him?”

“No, dear love; I am proud of your courage. Had I known what you intended, I should have forbidden you. I should never have allowed you to run the risk of being insulted: it was too much for you. I wish I could shield you from all such trials, my Kate; but I cannot—I cannot.” The unwonted tears stood in her kind, faded eyes.

“Ah, mother, *you* have borne the burden and heat of the day long enough alone; I must take my share now, and I assure you, after my adventures to-day, I feel quite equal to do so. I have been too long a heedless idler; I want to be a real help to you now. Do you think I have done any good?”

“Yes, certainly! but everything depends on this man who is coming to-morrow. Your poor father used to know Mr. Liddell’s solicitor, and I think liked him; of course he may have a different one now. Still it is a gleam of hope; which is doubly sweet because *you* brought it.”

Katherine hastily pressed her handkerchief to her eyes, and choked down the sob that would swell her throat. She was dreadfully tired, physically and mentally.

“Ada asked me for that money this morning as soon as you were gone. I told her I could not return it for a while, and she did not look pleased, naturally enough.”

“I think she is very selfish,” said Katherine.

“No, dear, only thoughtless, and younger than her years. She is always nice with me, and would be with you if you had more patience. You must remember that no character is stronger than its weakest part, and hers is—”

“Self,” put in Katherine.

“No! love of admiration and pleasure,” added her mother.

“Well,” returned Katherine, good-humoredly, “they both are very nice.”

Here the person under discussion came hastily into the room, in the crispest of lilac and white muslins, with a black sash and bows, and a rose at her waist, looking as fresh as if the heaviest atmosphere could not touch her.

“Oh, you have arrived, Katherine! I wish you would come and see Colonel Ormonde. He wants so much to speak to you!”

“But I do not want to speak to him. I don’t want to see any one.”

“Do come, Katie! I assure you you have made quite an impression; come and deepen it,” cried Mrs. Frederic, with a persuasive smile, while she thought, “She is looking awfully bad and pale, and Katherine without color is nowhere; her eyes are red too.—-Come, like a dear,” she persisted, aloud, “unless you want to go up and beautify.”

“No, I certainly do not,” said Katherine, rising impatiently. “I will go with you for a minute or two, but I am too tired to talk.”

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“Your hair is in utter disorder,” remarked her mother.

“It is no matter,” returned Katherine, following her sister-in-law out of the room.

Her dress was by no means becoming. It was of thin black material, the remains of her last year’s mourning; the white frill at her throat was crushed by the friction of her jacket, and some splashes on the skirt gave her a travel-stained aspect. But no disorder could hide the fine warm bronze brown of her abundant hair, nor disguise the shape of her brows and eyes, though the eyes themselves lost something of their color from the paleness of her cheeks; nor did her weariness detract from the charm of her delicate upturned chin.

“Here is my naughty sister-in-law, who has been wandering about all the morning alone, and making us quite uneasy.”

“What! In search of further adventures—eh?” asked Colonel Ormonde, rising and making an elaborate bow. He spoke in a tone half paternal, half gallant, in right of which elderly gentlemen sometimes take liberties.

“I went to do a commission for my mother,” said Katherine, indifferently.

“Ah! if we had a corps of such *commissionnaires* as you are, we should spend our lives sending and receiving messages,” returned the Colonel, with a laugh. He spoke in short authoritative sentences, with a loud harsh voice, and in what might be termed the “big bow-wow” style.

“You must not believe all Colonel Ormonde says,” observed the fair widow, smiling and slightly shaking her head. “He is a very faithless man.”

“By George! Mrs. Liddell, I don’t deserve such a character from *you*. But”—addressing Katherine, who had simply looked at him with quiet, contemplative eyes—“I hope you have recovered from your fright of yesterday. I never saw eyes or cheeks express terror so eloquently.”

“Yes, I was dreadfully frightened, and very, very grateful to the gentleman who saved poor Cecil. I hope he was not hurt?”

“Shall I tell him to come and report himself in person?”

“No, thank you.”

“Wouldn’t you like to thank him again? It might be a pleasant process to both parties—-eh?”

Katherine smiled good-humoredly, while she thought, “What an idiot!”

“Katherine is a very serious young woman,” said Mrs. Frederic—“quite too awfully in earnest; is always striving painfully to do her duty. She despises frivolities and never dreams of flirtation.”

“This is an appalling description,” said Ormonde. “Pray is it on principle you renounce flirtation?”

“For a much better reason,” replied Katherine, wearily. “Because I have no one to flirt with.”

“By Jove! there’s a state of destitution! Why, it is a blot on society that you should be left lamenting.”

“Yes; is it not melancholy?” replied Katherine, carelessly. “Ada, I am so tired I am sure you will excuse me if I go away to rest?”

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“Before you go,” said Ormonde, eagerly, “I have a request to make. A chum of mine, Sir James Brereton, and myself are going up the river on Thursday, with some friends of Mrs. Liddell’s—a picnic affair. Your sister-in-law has promised to honor me with her company, and I earnestly hope *you* will accompany her. I promise you shall be induced to rescind your anti-flirtation resolutions.”

“Up the river?” repeated Katherine, with a wistful look, and paused. “On Thursday next? Thank you very much, but I’m engaged—quite particularly engaged.”

“Nonsense, Katie!” cried her sister-in-law. “Where in the world are you going? You know you never have an engagement anywhere.”

“Come, Miss Liddell, do not be cruel. We will have a very jolly day, and I’ll try and persuade your hero of yesterday to meet you.”

“I should like to go very much, but I really cannot. I thank you for thinking of me.” She stood up, and, with a slight bow, said, “Good-morning,” leaving the room before the stout Colonel could reach the door to open it.

“Phew! that was sharp, short, and decisive,” said Ormonde.

“Yes, wasn’t it? She is quite a character. Leave her to me if you wish her to go. I will manage it.”

“Yes, do. She is something fresh, though she is not so handsome as I thought. I suspect there is a strong dash of the devil in her.”

“I cannot say *I* have seen much of it,” said the young widow, frankly. She was extremely shrewd in a small way, and had adopted an air of candid good-nature as best suited to her style and complexion. “Handsome or not, if you would like to have her at your party, I will try to persuade her to come.”

“Thanks. What a little brick you are!” said Ormonde, admiringly. “No nonsense with you, or trying to keep a pretty girl out of it. I say, Mrs. Liddell, it must be an awful life for you, shut up in this stuffy suburban box?”

“Well, it is not cheerful; but I have no choice, so I just make the best of it,” she returned, with as bright a smile as she could muster. “No use spoiling one’s eyes or one’s temper over the inevitable. Then I am really fond of my mother-in-law, poor soul! She would spoil me if she had the means; and Katherine—well, she isn’t bad.”

“By George! if you make your mother-in-law fond of you, you must be an angel incarnate.”

“An angel!” echoed the little lady. “That would never do. No, no; it is because I am so desperately human I get on with them all.”

“Delightfully human, you mean. No house could be dull with you in it. There’s nothing like pluck and good-humor in a woman.”

“Well, Heaven knows I want both!”

“I am afraid I must be off,” said the Colonel. “I am going to dine with Eversley, and he has a villa at Rochampton—quite a journey, you know. Where is the little chap that was nearly run over?”

“Playing in the garden, very happy and very dirty. I dare not have him in—he always climbs up and hangs about me, for I have my best dress on!”—the last words in large capitals.

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“A deuced becoming dress too; but it’s not so fine as what you had on yesterday.”

“No, of Course not; there are degrees of best dress. Yesterday’s was my *very* best go-to-luncheon dress, and must last me a whole year.”

“A year! By Jove! And you always look well dressed! You are a wonderful woman! Now I must be off. Mrs. Burnett says she will send the carriage for you on Thursday. We drive down to Twickenham.”

“Oh, thank you, Colonel Ormonde! I am sure I am indebted to you for that lift,” said Mrs. Frederic, while she thought, “He might have driven me down himself.”

“*Au revoir*, then. Always hard to tear myself away from such a charming little witch as you are.”

Ormonde kissed her hand and departed.

“Jolly, plucky little woman,” he thought, as he walked toward the Bayswater Road, looking for a hansom. “Just the sort to save a man trouble, and get full value out of a sovereign.” He continued to muse on the wonderful discovery he had made of a woman perfectly planned, according to man’s ideal—sweet, yielding, tenderly sympathetic, willing and capable to ward off all annoyances from her master, full of feeling for *his* troubles, and not to be moved by her own to sad looks, unbecoming tears, or downcast spirits—all softness to him, all bristling sharpness to the rest of the world. “Such a woman would answer my purpose as well as a woman with money, and she is an uncommonly tempting morsel. But then those infernal boys! I am not going to provide for another fellow’s brats, and they can’t have more than sixty pounds between them from the fund! No; I must not make an ass of myself, even for a pretty, clever woman, who has rather a hankering for myself, or I am much mistaken. That sister-in-law of hers is the making of an uncommon fine woman. There’s a dash of a tragedy queen about her, but it will be good fun to play her against the widow.”

And the widow, as she rang for the house-maid to remove the tea-things, indulged in a few speculations on her side. “He was evidently disappointed with Katherine. I am not surprised. She is looking ill, and she has *such* ungracious manners! Of course she will come to this Richmond party when I ask her, and I must ask her. Ormonde is a good deal smitten with me, but he’ll not lose his head. It is an awful thing to be poor and to have two boys. Oh, how dreadful it is to live in this horrible dull hole! I wonder if Colonel Ormonde will ever propose for me! He is very nice and pleasant, but he is awfully selfish. I hate selfishness. Perhaps if Mrs. Liddell would undertake to keep the little boys altogether it might make matters easier. Poor children! if I were only rich I would never wish to part with them; but who can hold out against poverty?”

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The night which followed was sleepless to Mrs. Liddell. How could she close her eyes when so much depended on the visit she hoped to receive to-morrow? If this agent of John Liddell's was propitious, she might get breathing-time and be able to wait till her manuscript brought forth some fruit; if not—well she dared not think of the reverse. She listened to the soft, regular breathing of her daughter, who was wrapped in refreshing slumber, and thanked God for the quick forgetfulness of youth. It was like a fresh draught of life and hope to think of her courage and perseverance in finding out and affronting her miserly uncle. Good must come of it.

Day dawned bright and clear, and the little party met as usual at breakfast. Neither mother nor daughter had breathed a word of their hopes or fears to the pretty widow. Breakfast over, they all dispersed to their usual avocations. Katherine, downstairs, was consulting cook, and Mrs. Liddell was wearily sorting and tearing up papers, when the servant came into the study and said, "Please, 'm, there's a gentleman wanting you.'

"Where have you put him?" asked Mrs. Liddell, glancing at the card presented to her, on which was printed, "Mr. C. B. Newton, 26 Manchester Buildings."

"He is by the door, 'm."

"Oh, show him into the dining-room. Where is Mrs. Frederic?"

"Gone out, 'm."

"I will come directly," and Mrs. Liddell hastily locked a drawer and put a weight on her papers; "Tell Miss Liddell to come to me," she said as she passed.

A short, thick-set man of more than middle age, slightly bald, with an upturned nose, quiet, watchful eyes of no particular color, and small sandy mutton-chop whiskers, was standing near the window when she entered. He made a quick bow, and stepped nearer "Mrs. Liddell?" he asked.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Liddell."

"I have called on the part of my client, Mr. John Liddell, of Legrave Crescent, to make certain inquiries. This note, which I received from him yesterday afternoon, will explain the object of my visit."

"Pray sit down, Mr. Newton"—taking a chair as she spoke, while she read the small, crabbed, tremulous characters written on the page presented to her. The note contained directions to call on Mrs. Liddell and ascertain if she really was the widow of his late brother; also what security she could offer for a small loan.

Her color rose faintly as she read.

“You must not regard the plainness of business phraseology,” said the visitor, in dry, precise tones. “My client means no offence.”

“Nor do I mean to take any,” she replied, handing him back the note. “Pray how am I to prove my own identity?”

“It would not, I suppose, be very difficult; but, as it happens, *I* can be your witness. I quite well remember seeing you with Mr. Liddell, your late husband, some sixteen or seventeen years ago.”

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“Indeed! I am surprised that I do not recall you. I generally have a good memory, but —”

“*I* am not surprised. I was unhappily the bearer of an unpleasant message, which excited Mr. Liddell considerably, and your attention was absorbed by your efforts to calm him.”

“I remember,” said Mrs. Liddell, coloring deeply. “It was a trying time.”

“We will consider this inquiry answered. As regards the loan”—the door opening to admit Katherine interrupted him; he rose and bowed formally when her mother named her; then he resumed his sentence—“as regards the loan, I must first know the amount it is proposed to borrow, in order to judge of the security offered.”

“I asked my uncle for thirty pounds, but I should be very glad if he would lend us forty.”

“No, Katie; I dare not take so much,” interrupted her mother. “Remember, it must be repaid; and,” addressing the lawyer, she added, “the only security I have to offer is the furniture of this house—furniture of the simplest, as you will see.”

“Have you seen Mr. Liddell?” asked Mr. Newton, a slight expression of surprise passing over his face.

“My daughter has,” said Mrs. Liddell.

“Yes; I ventured to visit him, because”—she hesitated, and then went on, frankly—-“because we wanted this money very much indeed; and I found him in a sad condition.” Katherine went on to describe the scene of yesterday, dwelling on the desolate position of the old man. “I felt frightened to leave him alone; he seems weak, and unfit to take care of himself. I hope, Mr. Newton, you will go to him and induce him to have a proper servant. I am going, because I promised in any case to go; and I must give the little servant’s mother the half-crown I promised her.”

“I have been somewhat uneasy respecting Mr. Liddell. For a considerable time I had my doubts of his cook housekeeper; but he is a man of strong will and peculiar views. Then the fear of parting with money increases with increasing years. I am glad Miss Liddell succeeded in making herself known to him; he is a peculiar character—very peculiar.” He paused a moment, looking keenly at Katherine, and added: “With a view to arranging for the loan you require, I must ask to look at your rooms. I do not suppose I am a judge of such things, but the knowledge of former transactions, my recollection of our last interview, determines me to come myself rather than to send an ordinary employee.”

“I feel your kind consideration warmly,” said Mrs. Liddell. “Follow me, and you shall see what few household goods I possess.”

Gravely and in silence Mr. Newton was conducted to the drawing-room, the best bedroom, Mrs. Liddell's, and the children's rooms. The examination was swiftly accomplished. Then the sedate lawyer returned to the dining-room and began to put on his right-hand glove. "I presume," he said—"it is a mere, formal question—I presume there is no claim or lien upon your goods and chattels?"

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“None whatever. I want a little temporary help until—” She paused.

“My mother has been successful in writing short stories. Channing & Wyndham have a three-volume novel of hers now, and I am sure they will take it; then she can pay Mr. Liddell easily.”

The lawyer smiled a queer little withered, half-developed smile. “I trust your anticipations may be verified,” he said. “Now, my dear madam, I need intrude on you no longer; I shall go on to see Mr. Liddell. But though I shall certainly represent that he may safely make you this small advance, it is possible he may refuse; and it is certain he will ask high interest. However, I shall do my best.”

“It will be a great accommodation if he consents. And if he is rich surely he will not deal as hardly with his brother’s widow as with a stranger.”

“Where money is concerned, Mr. Liddell recognizes neither friend nor foe. He will wish some form of the nature of a bill of sale to be signed.”

“Whatever you both think right,” said Mrs. Liddell.

Here some shouts from the garden drew Newton’s attention to the window, through which Cecil and Charlie could be seen endeavoring to put some noxious insect on the neck of the nurse-maid, who had taken them their noonday slices of bread and butter. “My grandsons,” said Mrs. Liddell, smiling—“My poor boy’s orphans.”

“Hum!” said the little man; and he stood a moment in thought.

“I think Miss Liddell said her uncle expressed a wish that she should return to see him?”

“He made me promise to go back to-day.”

“Then by no means disappoint him. He is a very difficult man to manage, and if your daughter”—to Mrs. Liddell—“could contrive to interest him, to make him indulge in a few of the comforts necessary to his years and his position, it would be of the last importance, and ultimately, I hope, not unprofitable to herself.”

“I fear the last is highly improbable; but Katherine will certainly fulfil her promise.”

“I am going to drive over to Legrave Crescent myself: if it would suit Miss Liddell to accompany me, I shall be most happy to be her escort.”

“Thank you; I shall be very glad.”

“My brother-in-law will not imagine there is any collusion between you?” asked Mrs. Liddell, with a smile. “Men of his character are suspicious.”

“No; I think I may venture so far, though Mr. Liddell *is* suspicious.”

“Then I must ask you to wait while I put on my hat,” said Katherine, and left the room.

She had changed her dress when her mother followed her. “My love, you had better take a few shillings, and try and come back soon. Why, Katie, considering you had to do cooking yesterday, you ought not to have put on your best frock, dear, for I see little chance of another.”

“Oh, mother, I could *not* go out in my old black cashmere with Mr. Newton. Why, he is the perfection of neatness.”

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“Here is Ada, just coming in.”

“What a volley of questions she will ask! Now, mother, do *not* satisfy her. Tell her my rich uncle has sent his solicitor to interview us, and that I am going to dine with him. I wish I could have had some dinner before I went, for I am going to Hungry Hall.”

“Courage, darling! If we *can* get this loan it will be a great relief. Do not keep him waiting any longer—there are your gloves. Come back as soon as ever you can.”

CHAPTER IV.

“A RIFT IN THE CLOUDS.”

“Where in the world is Katherine going, and who is that man?” exclaimed the younger widow, her light blue eyes wide open in amazement, when Katherine had passed her with a smiling “Good-by for the present,” and walked down the road beside the precise lawyer.

“She is going-to her uncle, Mr. John Liddell, who expressed a wish to see her to-day, and that gentleman is Mr. Liddell’s solicitor,” returned the elder lady, smiling to think how soon she had been driven in upon the reserved force of her daughter’s suggestion.

“What! that terrible old miser poor Fred used to talk of? Why, he will take a favorable turn, and leave everything to Katie! Oh, dear Mrs. Liddell, that will not be fair. *Do* contrive to let him see Cis and Charlie. We will declare that Cecil is his very image. Old men like to be considered like pretty young creatures. I always get on with crabbed old men. Let *me* see him too. Katherine must not keep the game all in her own hands. Let me have a chance.”

“I don’t fancy Katie has much of a chance herself,” returned Mrs. Liddell, as she followed her daughter-in-law into the dining-room. “It is an old man’s whim, and he will probably never wish to see her again.”

“Very likely. You know dear Katherine does not do herself justice; her manners are so abrupt. You do not mind my saying so?”

“Not in the least.” Mrs. Liddell had a fine temper, and also a keen sense of humor. Though fond of and indulgent to her daughter-in-law, she saw through her more clearly than Katherine did, as she gave full credit for the good that was in her, in spite of her little foibles and greediness. “Katherine is much more abrupt than you are.”

“Exactly. She will never be quite up to her dear mother’s mark. Few step-mothers and daughters get on as we do, and I am sure you would look after poor Fred’s boys as if they were your own.”

“So would Katherine. Of that you may be sure, my dear.”

“Oh yes; she is very fond of them, especially Charlie. I do not think she is really just to Cecil.”

“Real justice is rare,” returned Mrs. Liddell, calmly. “There is a note for you, Ada, on the chimney-piece; it came just after you went out.”

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“Why, it is from Mrs. Burnett!”—pouncing on it and tearing it open. “What shall I do?” she almost screamed as she read it. “I am afraid I shall never get there in time. What o’clock is it?—my watch is never right. Half-past twelve, and luncheon is at half-past one. Oh, I must manage it! Read that, dear.—Jane! Jane! bring me some hot water immediately, and come help me to dress.—What is the cab fare to Park Terrace? Eighteenpence?—it can’t be so much. Just lend me a shilling; you can take it out of the ten pounds you are to pay me next week.” And she flew out of the room.

“Mrs. Liddell sat down with a sigh, and read the note which caused this excitement:

“DEAR MRS. LIDDELL,—Do help me in a dilemma! We have a box for Miss St. Germaine’s benefit matinee to-morrow, and Lady Alice Mordaunt wants to come with Fanny and Bea. You know she is not out yet. Now I am engaged to go with Florence to Lady McLean’s garden party at Twickenham. So may I *depend* on you to come and chaperon them? If it were my own girls only, they could go with Ormonde or any one. But Lady Alice is to be escorted to our house by that incarnation of propriety, Mr. Errington; so they must have a chaperon. I therefore depend on you. Luncheon at 1.30. Do not fail. Ever yours affectionately.

E. BURNETT.”

Mrs. Liddell folded up the epistle and placed it in its envelope; then she sat musing. How cruel it would be to break this butterfly on the wheel of bitter circumstance! It would be irrational, she thought, “to expect the strength that could submit to and endure the inevitable from *her*. She will at once suffer more and less than my Katie. Small exterior things will sting Ada and make her miserable. As long as Katherine’s heart is satisfied all else can be borne; but *her* conditions are more difficult. Heigho! for material ills there is nothing so intolerable as debt.” She rose and went to her room with the vague intention of doing some of the hundred and one things which needed doing, one more than another, as was usual in her busy life, but somehow the uncertainty and anxiety oppressing her heart made her incapable of continued action; she was always breaking off to think—and the more she thought, the more uneasy she grew. If she had worked out the thin vein of invention and observation which gained her her humble literary success, one source of income was gone—a source on which she had reckoned too surely. Then she had not anticipated that her daughter-in-law would be so expensive an inmate. Self-denial was a thing incomprehensible to her. As long as she took care of her clothes, and refrained from buying the very expensive garments her soul longed for, she considered herself most exemplary. As for the smaller savings of omnibus and cabs not absolutely needful, she rarely thought of such matters, or, if she did, it made her frightfully cross, and urged her to many spiteful and contemptuous remarks on girls who have the strength of a horse, and do not care what horrid places they tramp through: so that she never was able to lighten the household burdens by a farthing beyond the very small amount she had originally agreed to contribute toward them.

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Her mother-in-law's meditations were interrupted by the young widow skurrying in in desperate haste. "Jane has gone for a cab," she exclaimed; "have you that shilling?"

"Here; you had better have eighteenpence, in case—"

"Oh yes, I had better; and do I look nice?"

"Very nice indeed. I think you are looking so much better than you did last year—"

"That is because I go out a little; I delight in the theatre. Now I must be off. There is the cab—oh! a horrid four-wheeler. Good-by, dear."

Mrs. Burnett was the wife of a civilian high up in the Indian service, and was herself a woman of good family. She had come home in the previous winter in order to introduce her eldest daughter to society, and accidentally meeting Mrs. Frederic Liddell, whom she had known in India, was graciously pleased to patronize her. She had taken a handsome furnished house near Hyde Park, and kept it freely open during the season. Admission to such an establishment was a sort of "open sesame" to heaven for the little widow. She loved, she adored Mrs. Burnett and her dear charming girls, to say nothing of two half-grown sons, "the most delightful boys!" She was really fond of them for the time, and it was this touch of temporary sincerity that gave her the unconscious power to hold the hearts of Mrs. Burnett and her daughters.

She was quite the pet of the family, and always at their beck and call. To keep this position she strained every means; she even denied herself an occasional pair of gloves in order to tip the stately man-servant who opened the door and opened her umbrella occasionally for her.

She found the whole party assembled in the dining-room, and her entrance was hailed with acclamations.

"I had just begun to tremble lest you should not come," cried Mrs. Burnett, stretching out her hand, but not rising from her seat at the head of the table.

"I only had your note half an hour ago," said Mrs. Liddell, with pardonable inaccuracy, feeling her spirits rise in the delightful atmosphere, flower-scented, and stirred by the laughter and joyous chatter of the "goodlie companie."

A long table set forth with all the paraphernalia of an excellent luncheon was surrounded by a merry party, the girls in charming summer toilettes, and as many men as women. Men, too, in the freshest possible attire, all "on pleasure bent."

"Do you know us all?" asked Mrs. Burnett, looking round. "Yes, I think all but Lady Alice Mordaunt and Mr. Kirby."

“I have never had the pleasure of meeting Lady Alice Mordaunt before”—with a graceful little courtesy—“but Mr. Kirby, though *he* has forgotten me, I remember meeting him at Rumchuddar, when I first went out to my poor dear papa. Perhaps you remember *him* —Captain Dunbar, at——?” Thus said Mrs. Liddell, as she glided into her seat between one of the Burnetts and a tall, big, shapeless-looking man with red hair, small sharp eyes, a yellow-ochreish complexion, and craggy temples, who had risen courteously to make room for her.

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“God bless my soul!” he exclaimed, turning red—a dull deep red. “I remember perfectly—that is, I don’t remember *you*; I remember your father. I’m sure I do not know how I could have forgotten you,” with a shy, admiring glance.

“Nor I either,” cried Colonel Ormonde, who sat opposite. “Though Mrs. Liddell does not seem to remember *me*.”

“Why, I only saw you yesterday, and I am sure I bowed to you as I came in.” So saying, Mrs. Liddell lifted her head with a sweet caressing smile to the eldest of the Burnett boys, who himself brought her some pigeon pie; and from that moment she devoted herself to her new acquaintance, utterly regardless of the hitherto tenderly cultivated Colonel.

Kirby, a newly arrived Indian magistrate, was not given to conversation, but he was assiduous in attending to his fair neighbor’s wants, and seemed to like listening to her lively remarks.

Colonel Ormonde glanced at them from time to time; he was amazed and indignant that Mrs. Liddell could attend to any one save himself. He was rather unfortunately placed between Miss Burnett, whose attention was taken up by Sir Ralph Brereton, a marriageable baronet, who sat on her other side, and Lady Alice Mordaunt, a timid, colorless, but graceful girl, still in the school-room, who scarcely spoke at all, and if she did, always to her right-hand neighbor, a stately-looking man with grave dark eyes, which saved him from being plain, and a clear colorless brown complexion. He said very little, but his voice, though rather cold, was pleasant and refined, conveying the impression that he was accustomed to be heard with attention. He too was very attentive to Lady Alice, but in a kind, fatherly way, as if she were a helpless creature under his care.

“I believe we are quite an Indian party,” said Mrs. Burnett, looking down the table. “Of course my children are Indian by inheritance; then there are Mr. Kirby and Mr. Errington”—nodding to the dark man next Lady Alice—“and Colonel Ormonde.”

“I am not Indian, you know; I was only quartered in India for a few years,” returned Ormonde, contradictiously.

“And I was only a visitor for one season’s tiger-shooting,” said Brereton.

“And I do not want to go,” cried Tom Burnett; “I want to be an attache.”

“Oh yes; you speak so many languages!” said his younger sister.

“I certainly do not consider myself an old Indian,” said the man addressed as Errington, “though I have visited it more than once.”

“You an Indian!” cried Ormonde. “Why, you have just started as an English country gentleman. We are to have Errington for a comrade on the bench and in the field down in Clayshire. His father has bought Garston Hall—quite close to Melford, Lady Alice. But I suppose you know all about it.”

“Yes,” said Lady Alice, in a tone which might be affirmation or interrogation. “There are such pretty walks in Garston Woods!”

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“Errington was born with a silver spoon in his mouth,” returned Ormonde. “Garston dwarfs Castleford, I can tell you. It was a good deal out of repair—the Hall I mean?”

“It is. We do not expect to get it into thorough repair till winter. Then I hope, Mrs. Burnett, you will honor us by a visit,” said Errington.

“With the greatest pleasure,” exclaimed the hostess.

“And oh, Mr. Errington, do give a ball!” cried Fanny, the second daughter.

“I fear that is beyond my powers. I do not think I ever danced in my life.”

“Are you to be of the party on board Lord Melford’s yacht?” asked Ormonde, speaking to Lady Alice.

“Oh no. I am to stay with Aunt Harriet at the Rectory all the summer.”

“Ah, that is too bad. You’d like sailing about, I dare say?”

“Oh, yachting must be the most delightful thing in the world,” cried Mrs. Liddell, from her place opposite. “If I were you I should coax my father to let me go.”

“Papa knows best. I am very fond of the Rectory,” said Lady Alice, blushing at being so publicly addressed.

“And *you* understand the beauty of obedience,” said Errington, with grave approval.

“Now, if you intend to see the whole ‘fun of the fair,’” said Mrs. Burnett, “you had better be going, young people. The carriage is to come back for us after setting you down at the theatre. Who are going? My girls, Lady Alice, and Mrs. Liddell? Who is to be their escort? Colonel Ormonde?”

He glanced across the table. Mrs. Liddell sent no glance in his direction; she again devoted her attention to Kirby.

“No, thank you. To be intensely amused from two to six is more than I can stand; besides, I hope to meet you at Lady Maclean’s this afternoon.”

“I have an engagement, a business engagement at three,” said Errington; “but I shall be happy to call for these ladies and see them home.”

“You need not take that trouble,” said Mrs. Burnett. “My son will be in the theatre later, and take charge of them; but there is still a place in the box. Will you go, Mr. Kirby?”

“Oh, pray do!” cried Mrs. Liddell. “You will be sure to be amused; a matinee of this kind is great fun. There is singing and dancing and acting and recitations of all kinds.” She spoke in her liveliest manner and her sweetest tones.

“You are very good. I have not been in a theatre since I arrived; so if you really have a place for me, I shall be most happy to accompany you.”

“That’s settled. Go and put on your hats, my dears,” said Mrs. Burnett; and her daughters, with Lady Alice, left the room.

“Well, Mrs. Liddell, have you persuaded your handsome sister-in-law to join our party on Thursday?” asked Ormonde.

“I have really had no time to speak much to her. An old uncle of hers, as rich as a Jew and a perfect miser, sent his lawyer for her this morning. I suppose he is going to make her his heiress. I hope they will give a share to my poor little boys. I am going to take them to ask a blessing from their aged relative, I assure you.”

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“Oh yes, by George! you try and hold on to him. The little fellows ought to have the biggest share, of course, as the *nephew’s* children. Why, it would change your position altogether if your boys had ten or fifteen thou. between them.”

“Or apiece,” said Mrs. Liddell, carelessly. She was immensely amused by the Colonel’s tone of deep interest. “You may be very sure I shall do my best. I know the value of money.”

“May I ask where this Mr. Liddell resides?” asked Mr. Errington, joining them, with a bow to the young widow.

“I really do not know, though he is my uncle-in-law. Pray do you know him?”

“No; I know of him, but we are not personally acquainted.”

“And is he not supposed to be very rich?”

“That I cannot say; but I have an idea that he is well off.”

With another bow Errington retreated to say good-morning to his hostess.

“Well, whether your sister-in-law comes or not, I hope we are sure of your charming self?” said Ormonde.

“Unless I am obliged to parade my boys for their grand-uncle’s inspection, I am sure to honor you.”

“Of course everything must give away to *that*. I shall come and inquire what news soon, if I may?”

“Oh yes; come when you like.”

“They are all ready, Mrs. Liddell,” remarked her hostess.

Mr. Kirby offered his arm, which was accepted with a smile, and the little widow sailed away with the sense of riding on the crest of a wave. The ladies were packed into the carriage, the polite man out of livery whistled up a hansom for the two gentlemen, and the luncheon party was over.

It was a weary day to Mrs. Liddell—the dowager Mrs. Liddell, as society would have called her, only she had no dower. All she had inherited from her husband was the remnant of his debts, which she had been struggling for some years to pay off, and the care and maintenance of her boy and girl, on her own slender funds.

At present the horizon looked very dark, and she almost regretted for Katherine's sake that she had agreed to make a home for her son's widow and children. Yet what would have become of them without it?

Partly to rouse herself from her fruitless reflections, partly to relieve the house-maid, who had been doing some extra scrubbing, Mrs. Liddell took her little grandsons to Kensington Gardens, and when they had selected a place to play in she sat down with a book which she had brought in the vain hope of getting out of herself. But her sight was soon diverted from the page before her by the visions which came thronging from the thickly peopled past.

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Her life had been a hard continuous fight with difficulty after the first few years of her wedded existence. She had seen her gay, pleasure-loving husband change under the iron grasp of untoward circumstances into a querulous, bitter, disappointed man, rewarding all her efforts to keep their heads above water by sarcastic complaints of her narrow stinginess, venting on her the remorseful consciousness, unacknowledged to himself, that his reverses were the result of his own reckless extravagance. Perhaps to her true heart the cruelest pain of all was the gradual dying out, or rather killing out, of the love she once bore him, the vanishing, one by one, of the illusions she cherished respecting him, till she saw the man as he really was, weak, unstable, self-indulgent, incapable of true manliness. Still she was patient with him to the last; and when she was relieved by friendly death from the charge of so wilful and ungrateful a burden—-though things were easier, because hers was the sole authority—it was a constant strain to provide the education necessary for her boy. But that accomplished, she had a sweet interlude with her daughter in humble peace, and while she did her best to arm the child for the conflict of life, she avoided weakening herself by too much thought for her future. This spell of repose was broken by the necessity for sacrificing some of her small capital to set her son free from his embarrassments. Then came his death and her present experiment in house-keeping in order to give his widow and children a refuge.

For the last four or five years she had made a welcome addition to her small income by her pen, contributing to the smaller weekly periodicals stories and sketches; for Mrs. Liddell had seen much with keen, observant eyes, and had a fair share of humor. This small success had tempted her to spend several months on a three-volume novel, thereby depriving herself of present remuneration which shorter, lighter tales had brought in. She sorely feared this ambitious step was a mistake—that she had over-estimated her own powers. She feared that she could never manage to keep up the very humble establishment she had started. Above all, she feared that her own health and physical force were failing. It was such an effort to do much that formerly was as nothing. That attack of bronchitis last spring had tried her severely: she had never felt quite the same since. And if she were called away, what would become of Katherine? Never was there a dearer daughter than her Katie. She knew every turn, every light and shade in her nature—her faults, her pride and hastiness, her deep, tender heart. A sob rose in her throat at the idea of Katherine being left alone to engage single-handed in the struggle for existence. No! She *would* live!—she would battle on with poverty and difficulty till Katherine was a few years older; till she was stronger and better able to stand alone.

“Yet she is strong and brave for nineteen,” thought the mother, proudly. “Perhaps I have kept her too much by my side. I wish I could let her pay a visit to the Mitchells. They have asked her repeatedly; but we must not think of it at present.”

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Here her little grandsons, who had more than once broken in upon her musings, came running across the grass to inform her they were sure it was tea-time, as they were very hungry.

“Then we shall go home,” said Mrs. Liddell, immediately clearing her face of its look of gloom, and rising to accompany them, cheered by the thought that perhaps Katie’s dear face might be ready to welcome her.

But neither daughter nor daughter-in-law awaited her, and a couple of hours went slowly over—slowly and wearily, for she forced herself to tell the boys a couple of thrilling tales, before they went to bed, to keep them quiet and cool. Then, with promises that both mamma and auntie should come and kiss them as soon as they returned, she dismissed the little fellows.

It was past seven when Katherine at last appeared at the garden gate.

“I am so glad you have come in before Ada,” cried Mrs. Liddell, embracing her. “Are you very tired, dearest?”

“No, not nearly so tired as yesterday; and, mother dear, I think that strange old man will certainly give us the money.”

“Thank God! Tell me all about your day.”

“It was all very funny, but not terrible, like yesterday. My uncle seems determined to make a cook of me. He would not let them buy or prepare any food for him, except a cup of tea and some toast, until I came. How that frail old man can exist upon so little nourishment I cannot imagine; but though I seem to give him satisfaction, he does not express any. While he and Mr. Newton talked I was sent to look at the condition of the rooms upstairs. Such a condition of dust and neglect you could not conceive. Oh, the gloom and misery of the whole house is beyond description!”

“Did you get anything to eat yourself?” asked Mrs. Liddell.

“Yes; Mr. Newton, who is really kind and friendly under his cool, precise exterior, sent for some cakes. He staid a good while. I think he has a good deal of influence on Mr. Liddell. (I can hardly call him uncle.) He was more polite when Mr. Newton was present. When he was going away he said, ’I am happy to say I have convinced Mr. Liddell that you are his niece, and if you and your mother will call upon me at noon to-morrow, the loan you wish for can be arranged, if you will agree to certain conditions, which I should like to explain both to you and to Mrs. Liddell.’ He gave me his card. Here it is. He has written ’twelve to one’ on it.”

“They must be very hard conditions if we cannot agree to them,” said Mrs. Liddell, taking out her porte-monnaie and putting the card into it. “This is indeed a Godsend, Katie, dear. I am thankful you had the pluck to attack the old lion in his den.”

“Lion! Hyena rather. Yet I cannot help feeling sorry for him. Think of passing away without a soul to care whether you live or die—without one pleasant memory!”

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“His memories are anything but pleasant,” returned Mrs. Liddell, gravely. “His wife, of whom I believe he was fond in his own way, left him when their only child, a son, was about ten years old. This seemed to turn his blood to gall. He took an unnatural dislike to his poor boy, and treated him so badly that he ran away to sea. Poor fellow? he used sometimes to write to your father. Their mutual dislike to John Liddell was a kind of bond between them. It is an unhappy story, for, as I told you, he was afterward killed at the gold diggings.

“Very dreadful!” said Katherine, thoughtfully. “What a cruel visiting of the mother’s sin on the unfortunate child!—that horrible bit of the decalogue! With all his icy cold selfishness Mr. Liddell is a gentleman. His voice is refined, and except when he was carried away by hi-fury against his roguish housekeeper he seems to have a certain self-respect. After Mr. Newton went away I read for a long time all the money articles in two penny papers, for the *Times* had been taken away. Then I wrote a couple of letters, and all my uncle said was: ’So it seems you really are my niece. Well, I hope you know more of the value of money than either your father or mother.’ I could not let that pass, and said, ’My father died when I was too young to know him; but no one could manage money better nor with greater care than my mother.’ He stared at me. ’I am glad to hear it,’ he returned, very dryly. He had a note from his stock-broker in reply to one I wrote for him yesterday. He seemed greatly pleased with it. He kept chuckling and murmuring, ’Just in time, just in time!’”

“Perhaps he will fancy you bring him luck.”

“I am awfully afraid he will want me to go and read to him every day, for when I was directing one of the letters he said, as though to himself, ’If she can read and write for me I need not buy a new pair of spectacles.’ It would be too dreadful to be with that cynical hyena every day.”

“Oh, when he gets a good servant he will not want you.”

“I hope not.”

“Now come, you must have your supper, dear. I am sure you have earned it. We will have it quietly together before Ada comes back. I feel so relieved, I shall be able to eat now.”

CHAPTER V.

“INTO THE SHADOWS.”

To avoid Mrs. Frederic Liddell’s almost screaming curiosity was not easy, and to appease it Kate assumed an air of frankness, saying that she believed Mr. Liddell

merely wished to test her powers as secretary, and that she hoped she had not succeeded too well.

“Oh, you lazy thing! You really ought to try and get in with him. Oughtn’t she, Mrs. Liddell?”

“Yes, certainly, if she can; but I fancy it will not be so easy. What are you going to do to-day, Ada?”

“Oh, nothing”—in a rather discontented tone. “Why do you ask?”

“Because I am obliged to go into town on a matter of business, and I want to take Katherine.”

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“Well, I will look after the boys”—condescendingly, as if it were not her legitimate business. “But I really think you worry too much about those tiresome publishers. They would think more of you if you troubled them less. Your mother looks pale and fagged, Katherine.”

“Yes, she does indeed,” looking anxiously at her.

“I am afraid the publishers would leave me too utterly undisturbed if I left them alone,” returned Mrs. Liddell, smiling, and leaving the suggestion uncontradicted. This conversation took place at breakfast.

Mother and daughter made the journey cityward very silently, both a good deal occupied conjecturing what conditions John Liddell could possibly mean to impose. Perhaps only a very high rate of interest, which would cost no small effort to spare from their narrow income.

Mr. Newton received his visitors directly their names were sent up to him. His was an eminent firm; their offices, light, clean, well furnished, an abode which impressed those who entered with the idea of fair dealing, and forbade the notion of dark dusty corners moral or physical.

Katherine’s quick eyes took in the aspect of the place: the bookshelves, where stores of legal learning in calf-bound volumes were ranged: the various brown tin boxes with names in white paint suggestive of the title-deeds “of all the land”; the big knee-hole table loaded with papers; the heavy chairs upholstered in the best leather for the patients who came to be treated; and Mr. Newton himself, more intensely cleaned up and starched than ever, in an oaken seat of mediaeval form.

He rose and set chairs for Mrs. Liddell and her daughter himself; then he rustled among his papers, and spoke down a tube.

“Ahem!” he began. “Your brother-in-law, madam, is a man of peculiar character, but by no means without discrimination. Thank you”—to a clerk who brought in a long folded paper and laid it beside him, disappearing quickly. “By no means without discrimination,” repeated Mr. Newton. “Unfortunately the love of money grows on a childless man, and his terms for the loan you require may not meet your approbation.”

“Pray what are they?” asked Mrs. Liddell.

“My client will accept a bill of sale on your furniture as security, but he will give you a period of eighteen months to repay him, and he will charge ten per cent.; but if you agree to another condition, which I will explain, he will be content with five per cent.”

“This must be a severe condition,” said Mrs. Liddell, with a slight smile.

“No; it may prove a fortunate condition,” said the lawyer, with some hesitation. “In short, I have persuaded Mr. Liddell to allow me to choose him a respectable servant at fair wages. The state into which he has fallen is deplorable. I felt it my duty to remonstrate with him, and he is not averse to my influence. I therefore pressed upon him the necessity of having a better class of housekeeper, a person who could read to him and write for him, and would be above drink and pilfering.”

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“What did he say to that?” asked Katherine, with a bright, amused look.

“He said, very decidedly: ’I will have that girl you say is my niece to be my housekeeper and reader. She gave me the best and cheapest dinner I ever ate; her letter to my stock-broker brought me luck; and I will pay ready money for everything, so she shall not be able to leave books unpaid. If she comes I will be content with five per cent, on the loan, which must do instead of salary; and if she refuses, why, so do I.’ An ungracious speech, Mrs. Liddell, but there is the condition.”

“Do you mean my brother-in-law will refuse to help me if my daughter does not go to manage his house?”

“So he says.”

“But did you not say at first that he would take ten per cent, without this sacrifice?”

“*He* said so at first; then this plan seemed to strike him, and he was very firm about it.”

“It is an awful place to go to.” The words burst from Katherine’s lips before she could stop herself.

“I can hardly agree to such a condition as this,” cried Mrs. Liddell.

“And I must urge you not to reject it,” said Mr. Newton, impressively, “for the sake of your daughter and grandsons. I must point out that by refusing you not only deprive yourself of the temporary aid you require, but you cut off your daughter from all chance of winning over her uncle by the influence of her presence. Propinquity, my dear madam—propinquity sometimes works wonders; and Mr. Liddell has a great deal in his power. I would not encourage false hopes, but this is a chance you may never have again—a chance of sharing her uncle’s fortune. If she refuses, he will never see her again.”

Silence ensued. The choice was a grave difficulty. Mrs. Liddell looked at Katherine, and Katherine looked at the carpet.

Suddenly Katherine looked up quickly, and said, in a clear, decided voice: “I will go. I will undertake the office of secretary and housekeeper—at least until my mother pays off this loan.”

“Katie, my child, how shall you be able to bear it?”

“Miss Liddell has decided wisely and well,” said the lawyer. “I earnestly hope—nay, I believe—she will reap a rich reward for her self-sacrifice.”

“But, Mr. Newton, I cannot consent without some reflection. I too have some conditions to impose.”

“And they are?” put in Newton, uneasily.

“I cannot define them all clearly on the spur of the moment; but I must have leave to go and see my daughter whenever I choose, and she must have the right to spend one day in the week at home.”

“This might be arranged,” said the lawyer, thoughtfully. “Be brave, my dear madam. Sacrifice something of the present to secure future good.”

“Provided we do not pay too high a price for a doubtful benefit. It will be terrible for a young girl to be the bond-slave of such a man as John Liddell.”

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“Well, mother, I am quite willing to undertake the task. Not that I am going to be a bond-slave, but as soon as you have paid your debt, I shall consider myself free.”

“By that time, my dear young lady, I hope you will have made yourself of so much importance to your uncle that he will make it worth your while to stay,” exclaimed Newton, who was evidently actuated by a friendly feeling toward both mother and daughter.

“He must bribe high, then,” returned Kate, laughing.

“Then may I inform Mr. Liddell that you accept his proposition? and you are prepared to begin your duties at once! Remember he considers his acceptance of five instead of ten per cent, frees him from the necessity of paying you any salary.”

“Surely the laborer is worthy of his hire,” said Mrs. Liddell.

“No doubt of it, madam; but the case is a peculiar one.”

Some more particulars were discussed and arranged; Mr. Newton begged Mrs. Liddell to look out for and select a servant, that Katherine might begin with some prospect of comfort. It was settled that an interview should be arranged between Mrs. Liddell and her brother-in-law on the day but one following, at which Mr. Newton was to assist, Finally she signed a paper, and received six lovely new crisp bank-notes, the magic touch of which has so marvellously reviving an effect.

Katherine slipped her arm through her mother’s and pressed it lovingly as they walked to the Metropolitan station for their return journey. “Now, dear, you will have a little peace,” she said.

“Dear-bought peace, my darling. I cannot reconcile myself to such a fate for you.”

“Still, the money is a comfort.”

“It is indeed. I will pay the rent to-day, and to-morrow I will give Ada her money. That will be an infinite relief. And still I shall have a few pounds left. Katie dear, is it not too dreadful, the prospect of eating, drinking, sleeping, and beginning *di nuovo* each morning in that gloomy house? How shall you bear it?”

“You shall see. If I can have a little chat with you every week I shall be able for a good deal. Then, remember, the book still remains. When that succeeds we may snap our fingers at rich uncles.”

“When that time comes,” interrupted her mother, “you will be tied to the poor old miser by habit and the subtle claims which pity and comprehension weave round the sympathetic.”

“Oh, if I ever grow to like him it will simplify matters very much. I almost hope I may, but it is not likely. How strange it will be to live in a different house from you! How dreadfully the boys will tease you when I am away! Come; suppose we go and see the *Cheerful Visitor*—the editor, I mean—before we return, and then we can say we *have* been to a publisher. I really do not think Ada knows the difference between an editor and a publisher.”

“Very likely; nor would you, probably, if you had not a mother who scribbles weak fiction.”

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“It is a great deal better than much that is published and paid for,” said Katherine, emphatically.

“Ah! Kate, when money has long been scarce you get into a bad habit of estimating things merely at their market value. However, let us visit the *Cheerful Visitor* on our homeward way. Of course we must tell Ada of the impending change, but we need not explain too much.”

The journey back was less silent. Both mother and daughter were oppressed by the task undertaken by the latter. But Katherine was successful in concealing the dismay with which she contemplated a residence with John Liddell. “Whatever happens, I must not seem afraid of him or *be* afraid of him,” she thought, with instinctive perception. “I will try to do what is just and right, and leave the rest to Providence. It must be a great comfort to have faith—to believe that if you do the right thing you will be directed and assisted by God. What strength it would give! But I haven’t faith. I cannot believe that natural laws will ever be changed for me, and I *know* that good, honest, industrious creatures die of hunger every day. No matter. Do rightly, come what may, is the motto of every true soul. I don’t suppose I shall melt this old man’s stony heart, but I will do my best for him. His has been a miserable life in spite of his money. There is so much money cannot buy!”

“How dreadfully late you are!” said Mrs. Frederic, querulously, when they reached home. “I really could not keep the children waiting for you, so we have finished dinner; but Maria is keeping the mutton as hot as she can for you. Dear me! how sick I am of roast mutton! but I suppose it is cheap”—contemptuously.

“Poor dear! it shall have something nice to-morrow,” returned Mrs. Liddell, with her usual strong good temper.

“I suppose you are too tired, Katherine, to come with me. The band plays in Kensington Gardens to-day, and I wanted so much to go and hear it.”

“I am indeed! Besides, mother has a great deal to tell you when we have had some dinner.”

“Oh, indeed! Has your book been accepted, Mrs. Liddell? or has that terrible uncle of ours declared Katherine to be his heiress?”

“Have a little patience, and you shall hear everything.”

“I am dying of curiosity and impatience. Here, Sarah, *do* bring up dinner—Mrs. Liddell is so hungry!”

The announcement that Katherine was invited to live with John Liddell created a tornado of amazement, envy, anticipation—with an undercurrent of exultant pride that

they were at last recognized by the only rich man in the family—in the mind of the pretty, impressionable little widow.

“Gracious! What a grand thing for Kate! But she will be moped to death, and he will starve her. Why, Katherine, when it is known that a millionaire has adopted you his den will be besieged by your admirers. You will never be able to stand such a life for long at a time. Suppose I relieve guard every fortnight? You must let me have my innings too. Old gentlemen always like me, I am so cheerful. Then I might have the boys to see him; you know he ought to divide the property between us.”

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“Of course he ought. I wish he would have us alternately; it would be a great relief,” said Katherine, laughing.

“I fancy he is *im*-mensely rich,” continued Ada. “Why, Mr. Errington evidently knew his name.”

“Who is Mr. Errington?” asked Mrs. Liddell, with languid curiosity.

“Did you never hear of the Calcutta Erringtons?” cried Ada, with infinite superiority. “There are as rich as Jews, and one of the greatest houses in India. Old Mr. Errington bought a fine place in the country lately, and this young man—I’m sure I don’t know if he *is* young; he is as grave as a judge and as stiff as a poker—at all events he is an only son. I met him at the Burnett’s yesterday. Well, he seemed to know Mr. Liddell’s name quite well. Colonel Ormonde pricked up his ears too when I said you had gone to see him. It is a great advantage to have a rich old bachelor uncle, Katherine, but you must not keep him all to yourself.”

The next few days were agitated and much occupied. Katherine went for part of each to read and write and market for the old recluse, and he grew less formidable, but not more likable, as he became more familiar. He was an extraordinary example of a human being converted into a money-making and accumulating machine. He was not especially irritable; indeed his physical powers were weak and dying of every species of starvation; but his coldness was supernatural. Fortunately for Katherine, his former housekeeper was greedy and extravagant, so that his niece’s management seemed wise and economical, and she had an excellent backer-up in Mr. Newton.

The old miser was with difficulty persuaded to see his sister-in-law; but Mrs. Liddell insisted on an interview, and Mr. Newton himself supported her through the trying ordeal.

The mother’s heart sank within her at she sight of the gloomy, desolate abode in which her bright daughter was to be immured; but she comforted herself by reflecting that it need not be for long.

Mr. Liddell did not rise from the easy-chair in which he sat crouched together, his thin gray locks escaping as usual from under the skull-cap, his long lean brown hands grasping the arms of his chair, when Mrs. Liddell came in; neither did he hold out his hand. He looked at her fixedly with his glittering dark eyes.

“You wanted to see me?” he said. “Why?”

“Because I thought it right to see and speak with you before committing my only child to your keeping.”

“But you have done it!—She has agreed to the conditions, has’nt she?” turning to Newton. “If you go back, I must have my money back.”

“Of course, my dear sir—of course,” soothingly.

“I am glad that Katherine can be of use to you. I do not wish to retract anything I have agreed to, but I wish to remind you that my child is young; that you must let her go in and out, and have opportunities for air and exercise.”

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“She may do as she likes; she can do anything. So long as she reads to me, and buys my food without wasting my money, *I* don’t want her company. She seems to know something of the value of money, and I’ll keep her in pledge till you have paid me. I’ll never let myself be cheated again, as I was by your worthless husband.”

“Let the dead rest,” said Mrs. Liddell, sadly. “I have paid you what I could.”

“Ay, the principal—the bare principal. What is that? Do men lend for the love of lending?” he returned, viciously.

“Pray do not vex yourself. It is useless to look back—annoying and useless,” said the lawyer, with decision.

“Useless indeed! What more have you to say?”

“I should like to see the room my daughter is to occupy. It is as well she should have the comforts necessary to health, for all our sakes. *You* will not find one who will serve you as Katherine can, even for a high price. I think you feel this yourself,” said Mrs. Liddell, steadily.

“You may go where you like, but do not trouble me. You can come and see your daughter, but *I* shall not want to see you; and she may go and see you of a Sunday, when there are no newspapers to be read; but, mark you I will not pay for carriages or horses or omnibuses; and mark also that I have made my will, and I’ll not alter it in any one’s favor. Your daughter will have her food and lodging and my countenance and protection.”

“She has done without these for nineteen years,” said Mrs. Liddell, with a slight smile. “But you have given me very opportune help, for which I am grateful; so I have accepted your terms. Kate shall stay with you till I have paid you principal and interest, and then *I* warn you I shall reclaim my hostage.”

“She’ll be a good while with me,” he said, with a sneer. “None of you—you, your husband, or your son—ever had thirty pounds to spare in your lives.”

“Time will show,” returned Mrs. Liddell, with admirable steadiness and temper. “Now I will bid you good-day, and take advantage of your permission to look over your house.”

“Let me show you the way,” said Newton. “I shall return to you presently, Mr. Liddell.”

The old man bent his head. “See that the girl comes to-morrow,” he said, and leaned back wearily in his chair.

The friendly lawyer led the way upstairs, and showed Mrs. Liddell a large room, half bed, half sitting, with plenty of heavy old-fashioned furniture. “This was, I think, the

drawing-room," said Mr. Newton; "and having extracted permission from my very peculiar client to have the house cleaned, so far as it could be done, which it sorely needed, the person I employed selected the best of the furniture for this room. We propose to give the next room at the back to the servant. You have, I believe, found one?"

"Yes, a respectable elderly woman, of whom I have had an excellent character."

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After Mrs. Liddell had visited the rooms upstairs—mere dismantled receptacles of rubbish—and they returned to what was to be Katherine's abode, she sat down on the ponderous sofa, and in spite of her efforts to control herself the tears would well up and roll over.

"I feel quite ashamed of myself," said she, in a broken voice; "but when I think of my Katie, here alone, with that cruel old man, it is too much for my strength. She has been so tenderly reared, her life, though quiet and humble, has been so cared for, so tranquil, that I shrink from the idea of her banishment here."

"It is not unnatural, my dear madam, but indeed the trial is worth enduring. Do not believe that the will of which Mr. Liddell speaks is irrevocable. He has made two or three to my certain knowledge, and it would be foolish to cut your daughter off from, any chance of sharing his fortune, which is considerable, I assure you, merely to avoid a little present annoyance."

"It would indeed. Do not think me very weak. It is a passing fit of the dolefuls. I have had much anxiety of late, and for the moment I have a painful feeling that I have sold myself and my dear daughter into the hands of a relentless creditor; that I shall never free my neck from his yoke. I shall probably feel differently to-morrow."

"I dare say you will. You are a lady of much imagination; a writer, your daughter tells me. Such an occupation should be an outlet for all imaginative terrors or anticipations, and leave your mind, your judgment, clear and free. I am sure Miss Liddell will do her uncle and herself good by her residence here. Mr. Liddell has been a source of anxiety to me and to my partners. We have, you know, been his legal advisers for years, and to know that he is in good hands will be a great relief. Rely on my—on our doing our best to assist your daughter in every way."

Mrs. Liddell, perceiving the friendly spirit which actuated the precise lawyer, thanked him warmly, and after a little further discussion of details, took her way home.

From the step she had voluntarily taken there was no retreat, nor, to do her justice, was Katherine Liddell in the least disposed to turn back, having once put her hand to the plough. Indeed the blessed castle-building powers of youth disposed her to rear airy edifices as regarded the future, which lightened the present gloom. Suppose John Liddell were to soften toward her, and make her a handsome present occasionally, or forgive this debt to her mother? What a delightful reward this would be for her temporary servitude! But though Katherine really amused herself with such fancies, they never crystallized into hope. Hope still played round her mother's chance of success with the publishers. Not that she fancied her dear mother a genius; on the contrary, because she *was* her mother, she probably undervalued her work; but she knew that hundreds of stories printed and paid for lacked the common-sense and humor of Mrs. Liddell's.

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How ardently she longed to give her mother something of a rest after the burden and heat of the day, which she had borne so well and so long—a spell of peaceful twilight before the gray shadows of everlasting darkness closed, or the brightness of eternal light broke upon her! Yes, she would stand four-square against the steely terrors of John Liddell's cold egotism and penuriousness, against the desolation and gloom of his forbidding abode, the crushing sordidness of an existence reduced to the merest straws of sustenance, provided she could lighten her mother's load—perhaps secure her future ease; and she would do her task well, thoroughly, keeping a steady heart and a bright face. Then, should the tide ever turn, what deep draughts of pleasure she would drink! Katherine was not socially ambitious; finery and grandeur as such did not attract her; but real joys, beauty and gayety, the company of pleasant people, *i.e.* people who suited *her*, graceful surroundings, becoming clothes, and plenty of them, all were dear and delightful to her.

Some of these things she had tasted when she lived with her mother in the German and Italian towns where she had been chiefly educated; the rest she was satisfied to imagine. Above all, she loved to charm those with whom she associated—loved it in a half-unconscious way. Were it to a poor blind beggar woman, or a little crossing sweeper, she would speak as gently and modulate her voice as carefully as to the most brilliant partner or the greatest lady. This might be tenderness of nature, or the profound instinct to win liking and admiration. As yet it was quite instinctive; but if hurt or offended she could feel resentment very vividly, and was by no means too ready to forgive.

Unfortunately she started with a strong prejudice against her uncle, and sometimes rehearsed in her own mind exceedingly fine speeches which she would have liked to address to her miserly relative on the subject of his cruelty to his son, his avarice, his egotism.

Still a strain of pity ran through her meditations. Was life worth living, spent as his was? How far had his nature been warped by his wife's desertion?

It was an extraordinary experience to Katherine, this packing up of her belongings to quit her home. She took as little as she could help, to keep up the idea that she was entering on a very temporary engagement; besides, as she meant to adhere rigidly to her right of a weekly visit to her mother, she could always get what she wanted.

After Mrs. Liddell, Katherine found it hardest to part with the boys, specially little Charlie, whose guardian and champion she had constituted herself. Her sister-in-law had rather an irritating effect upon her, of which she was a little ashamed, and whenever she had spoken sharply, which she did occasionally, she was ready to atone for it by doing some extra service, so that, on the whole, the pretty little widow got a good deal more out of her sister than out of her mother-in-law.

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But meditations, resolutions, regrets, and preparations notwithstanding, the day of Katherine's departure arrived. It was a bright, glowing afternoon, and the Thursday fixed for the boating party. Mrs. Liddell junior had expended much eloquence to no purpose, as she well knew it would be, in trying to persuade her sister-in-law to postpone the commencement of what the little widow was pleased to call her "penal servitude," and accompany her to Twickenham.

She departed, however, without her, looking her very best, and uttering many promises to come and see Katie soon, to try her powers of pleasing on that dreadful old uncle of ours, to bring the dear boys, and see if they would not cut out their aunty, *etc*.

Mrs. Liddell and her daughter were most thankful to have the last few hours together, and yet they said little, and that chiefly respecting past days which they had enjoyed together—little excursions on the Elbe or in the neighborhood of Florence; a couple of months once passed at Siena, which was a mental epoch to Katherine, who was then about fifteen; promises to write; and tender queries on the mother's side if she had remembered this or that.

The little boys clung to her, Charlie in tears, Cecil very solemn. Both had taken up the sort of camera-obscura image of their elders' views which children contrive to obtain so mysteriously without hearing anything distinct concerning them, and both considered "Uncle John" a sort of modern ogre, only restrained by the policeman outside from making a daily meal of the nearest infant school, and sure to gobble up aunty some day. Charlie trembled at the thought; Cecil pondered profoundly how, by the judicious arrangement of a trap-door in the middle of his room, he might carry out the original idea of Jack the Giant-Killer.

"Pray don't think of coming with me, mother," said Katherine, seeing Mrs. Liddell take out her bonnet. "I could not bear to think of your lonely drive back. Trust me to myself. I am not going to be either frightened or cast down, and I will write to-morrow."

"Then I must let you go, darling! On Sunday next, Katie, we shall see you."

A long, fond embrace, and Mrs. Liddell was indeed alone.

CHAPTER VI.

"SHIFTING SCENES."

Parting is often worst to those who stay behind. Imagination paints the trials and difficulties of the one who has put out to sea as far worse than the reality, while variety and action brace the spirit of him who goes forth.

Katherine's reception, however, was paralyzing enough.

Nothing was in her favor save the mellow brightness of the fine warm evening, though from its south-east aspect the parlor at Legrave Crescent was already in shadow. There, in his usual seat beside the fire—for, though a miser, John Liddell had a fire summer and winter—sat the old man watching the embers, in himself a living refrigerator.

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“You are late!” was his greeting, in a low, cold voice. “I have been expecting you. The woman Newton found for me has been up and down with a dozen questions I cannot answer. I must be saved from this; I will not be disturbed. Go and see what she wants; then, if there is more food to be cooked, come to me for money. Mark! no more bills. I will give you what cash you want each day, so long as you do not ask too much.”

“Very well. Your fire wants making up, uncle.” She brought out this last word with an effort. “I suppose I *am* to call you uncle?”

“Call me what you choose,” was the ungracious reply.

In the hall she found the new servant, whom she had already seen, waiting her orders. She was a stout, good-humored woman of a certain age, with vast experience, gathered in many services, and partly tempted to her present engagement by the hope that in so small a household her labor would be light.

“Will you come up, miss, and see if your room is as you like it?” was her first address. “I’m sure I *am* glad you have come! I’ve been groping in the dark, in a manner of speaking, since I came yesterday; and Mr. Liddell, he’s not to be spoke to. Believe me, miss, if it wasn’t that I promised your mar, and saw you was a nice young lady yourself, wild horses wouldn’t keep me in such a lonesome barrack of a place!”

“I hope you will not desert us, Mrs. Knapp,” returned Katherine, cheerfully. “If you and I do our best, I hope the place will not be so bad.”

“Well, it didn’t ought to,” returned Mrs. Knapp. “There’s lots of good furniture everywhere but in the kitchen, and that’s just for all the world like a marine store!”

“Is it?” exclaimed Katherine, greatly puzzled by the metaphor. “At all events you have made my room nice and tidy.” This conversation, commenced on the staircase, was continued in Katherine’s apartment.

“It ain’t bad, miss; there’s plenty of room for your clothes in that big wardrobe, and there’s a chest of drawers; but Lord, ’m, they smell that musty, I’ve stood them open all last night and this morning, but they ain’t much the better. I didn’t like to ask for the key of the bookcase, but I can see through the glass the books are just coated with dust,” said Mrs. Knapp.

“We must manage all that by-and-by,” said Katherine. “Have you anything in the house? I suppose my uncle will want some dinner.”

“I gave him a filleted sole with white sauce, and a custard pudding, at two o’clock, and he said he wanted nothing more. I had no end of trouble in getting half a crown out of him, and he had the change. If the gentleman as I saw with your mar, miss, hadn’t given me five shillings, I don’t know where I should be.”

“I will ask my uncle what he would like for dinner or supper, and come to you in the kitchen afterward.”

Such was Katherine’s inauguration.

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She soon found ample occupation. Not a day passed without a battle over pennies and half-pennies. Liddell gave her each morning a small sum wherewith to go to market; he expected her to return straight to him and account rigidly for every farthing she had laid out, to enter all in a book which he kept, and to give him the exact change. These early expeditions into the fresh air among the busy, friendly shopkeepers soon came to be the best bit of Katherine's day, and most useful in keeping up the healthy tone of her mind. Then came a spell of reading from the *Times* and other papers. Every word connected with the funds and money matters generally, even such morsels of politics as effected the pulse of finance, was eagerly listened to; of other topics Mr. Liddell did not care to hear. A few letters to solicitor or stock-broker, some entries in a general account-book, and the forenoon was gone. Friends, interests, regard for life in any of its various aspects, all were nonexistent for Liddell. Money was his only thought, his sole aspiration—to accumulate, for no object. This miserliness had grown upon him since he had lost both wife and son. Fortunately for Katherine, his ideas of expenditure had been fixed by the comparatively liberal standard of his late cook. When, therefore, he found he had greater comfort at slightly less cost he was satisfied.

But his satisfaction did not prompt him to express it. His nearest approach to approval was not finding fault.

In vain Katherine endeavored to interest him in some of the subjects treated of in the papers. He was deaf to every topic that did not bear on his self-interest.

"There is a curious account here of the state of labor in Manchester and Birmingham; shall I read it to you?" asked Katherine, one morning, after she had toiled through the share list and city article. She had been about a fortnight installed in her uncle's house.

"No!" he returned; "what is labor to me? We have each our own work to do."

"But is there nothing else you would care to hear, uncle?" She had grown more accustomed to him, and he to her; in spite of herself, she was anxious to cheer his dull days—to awaken something of human feeling in the old automaton.

"Nothing! Why should I care for what does not concern me? You only care for what touches yourself; but because you are young, and your blood runs quick, many things touch you."

"Did you ever care for anything except—except—" Katherine pulled herself up. The words "your money" were on her lips.

"I cannot remember, and I do not wish to look back. I suppose, now, you would like to be driving about in a fine carriage, with a bonnet and feathers on your head. I suppose you are wishing me dead, and yourself free to run away from your daily tasks in this quiet house, to listen to the lying tongue of some soft-spoken scoundrel, as foolish

women will; but the longer I live the better for *you*, till your mother's debt is paid, or my executors will give her a short shrift and scant time."

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“I don’t want you to die, Uncle Liddell,” said Katherine, with simple sincerity, “but I wish there was anything I could do to interest you or amuse you. I am sorry to see you so dull. Why, you are obliged to sleep all the afternoon!”

“Amuse *me*?” he returned, with infinite scorn. “You need not trouble yourself. I have thoughts which occupy me of which you have no idea, and then I pass from thoughts to dreams—grand dreams!”—he paused for a moment. “Where is that pile of papers that lay on the chair there?” he resumed, sharply.

“I have taken them away upstairs; when I have collected some more I am going to sell them. My mother always sells her waste paper—one may as well have a few pence for them.”

“Did you mother say so?” with some animation—then another pause. “Are you going to see her on Sunday?”

“Not next Sunday,” returned Katherine, quite pleased to draw him into conversation. “You know we must let Mrs. Knapp go out every alternate Sunday, and you cannot be left alone.”

“Why not? Am I an imbecile? Am I dying? I can tell you I have years of life before me yet.”

“I dare say; still, it is my duty to stay here in case you want anything. But I shall go home on Saturday afternoon instead, if you have no objection.”

“You would not heed my objections if I had any. You are self-willed, you are resolute. I see things when I care to look. There, I am very tired! You will find some newspapers in my room; you can add them to the others. How soon will dinner be ready?” Katherine felt herself dismissed.

The afternoons were much at her own disposal; and as she found a number of old books, some of which greatly interested her, she managed to accomplish a good deal of reading, and even did a little dreaming. Still, though time seemed to go so slowly, the weeks, on looking back, had flown fast.

The monotony was terrible; but a break was at hand which was not quite unexpected.

The day following the above conversation, Katherine had retired as usual after dinner to write to a German friend with whom she kept up a desultory correspondence; the day was warm, and her door being open, the unwonted sound of the front door-bell startled her.

“Who could it possibly be?” asked Katherine of herself. The next minute a familiar voice struck her ear, and she quickly descended to the front parlor.

There an appalling sight met her eyes. In the centre of the room, her back to the door, stood Mrs. Fred Liddell, a little boy in either hand—all three most carefully attired in their best garments, and making quite a pretty group.

Facing them, Mr. Liddell sat upright in his chair, his lean, claw-like hands grasping the arms, his eyes full of fierce astonishment.

“You see, my dear sir, as you have never invited me, I have ventured to come unasked to make your acquaintance, and to introduce my dear boys to you; for it is possible you have sent me a message by Katherine which she has forgotten to deliver; so I thought —” Thus far the pretty little widow had proceeded when the children, catching sight of their auntie, sprang upon her with a cry of delight.

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“Who—who is this?” asked Mr. Liddell, compressing his thin lips and hissing out the words.

“My brother’s widow, Mrs. Fred Liddell,” returned Katherine, who was kissing and fondling her nephews.

“Did you invite her to come here?”

“No, uncle.”

“Then explain to her that I do not receive visitors, especially relations, who have no claims upon me, and—and I particularly object to children.”

“I shall take my sister-in-law to my room for a little rest,” returned Katherine, wounded by his manner, though greatly vexed with Ada for coming.

“Ay, do, anywhere you like.”

But Mrs. Fred made a gallant attempt to stand her ground.

“My dear sir, you must not be so unkind as to turn me out, when I have taken the trouble to come all this way on purpose to make your acquaintance. Let Katherine take away the children by all means—some people *are* worried with children—but let *me* stay and have a little talk with you.”

Mr. Liddell’s only reply was to rise up. Gaunt, bent, his gray locks quivering with annoyance, and leaning on his stick, he slowly walked to the door, his eyes fixed with a cold glare on the intruder. At the door he turned, and addressing Katherine, said, “Let me know when she is gone;” then he disappeared into the hall.

Little Charlie burst into tears. Cecil cried out, “You are a nasty, cross old man”; while Mrs. Fred grew very red, and exclaimed: “I never saw such a bear in all my life! Why, a crossing-sweeper would have better manners! I am astonished at you, Katie. How can you live with such a creature? But *some* people would do anything for money.”

“I am dreadfully sorry,” said Katherine; “do come up to my room. If you had only told me you were coming I should have advised you against it. You must rest a while in my room.”

“I really do not think I will sit down in this house after the way in which I have been treated,” said the irate widow, while she followed her sister-in-law upstairs.

“Oh yes, do, mammy; I want to see the house,” implored Cecil.

“Why did you not tell me what a dreadful man he is, Katherine, and I should not have put myself in the way of being insulted?”

“I think I told you enough to keep you away, Ada. What put it into your head to come?”

“I scarcely know. I always intended it, and Colonel Ormonde said it was my duty to let him, Mr. Liddell, see the boys. I really did not want to come.”

“I wish Colonel Ormonde would mind his own affairs,” cried Katherine. “I fancy he only talks for talking’s sake.”

“That is all you know,” indignantly; “he is a very clever man of the world, and I am fortunate in having such a friend to interest himself in me.”

“Oh, well, perhaps so. At all events, I am very glad to see the bays, and—you too, Ada. Charlie is very pale. Come here, Charlie.”

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“Oh, auntie, is this your own, own room? Does the cross old man ever come here? Are all those books yours—and the funny little table with the crooked legs? Who is the man in a wig?” cried Cecil. “Mightn’t we stay with you? we would be so quiet? Mother says we are *dreffully* troublesome since you went away. We could both sleep with you in that great big bed! The cross old gentleman would never know. It would be such fun! Do, do, let us stay, auntie!”

“But I am afraid of the old gentleman,” whispered the younger boy. “Does he ever hurt you, auntie dear? I wish you would come home.”

“Charlie is such a coward,” said Cecil, with contempt.

“Don’t talk nonsense, children,” exclaimed their mother, peremptorily. “I should die of fright if I thought you were left behind with that ogre. *I* wouldn’t sacrifice my children for the sake of filthy lucre.”

“Do not talk nonsense, Ada?” said Katherine, impatiently. “I am infinitely distressed that my uncle should have behaved so rudely, but he is really eccentric, and if you had consulted—”

“He is the boys’ uncle as well as yours,” interrupted Ada, indignantly. “Why should they not come and see him? How was I to suppose he was such an unnatural monster?”

“I always told you he was very peculiar.”

“Peculiar! that is a delicate way of putting it. If I were you I should be ashamed of wasting my time and my youth acting servant to an old miser who will not leave you a sou!”

“No, I don’t suppose he will,” returned Katherine, quietly. “Still, I am not the least ashamed of what I am doing; I am quite satisfied with my own motives.”

“Oh, you are always satisfied with yourself, I know,” was the angry answer, “But”—with a slight change of tone—“I am sorry to see you look so pale and ill, though you deserve it.”

“Never mind, Ada. Take off your bonnet and sit down. I will get you a cup of tea.”

“Tea! no, certainly not! Do you think me so mean as to taste a mouthful of food in this house after being ordered out of it?”

“Oh, I am *so* hungry!” cried Cecil, in mournful tones.

“You are a little cormorant: Grannie will give you nice tea when we get home. Put on your gloves, children, I shall go at once.”

“Do come back with us, auntie,” implored the boys. “Grannie wants you ever so much.”

“Not more than I want her,” returned Katherine. “How is she, Ada?”

“Oh, very well; just the same as usual. People who are not sensitive have a great deal to be thankful for. *I* feel quite upset by this encounter with your amiable relative, so I will say good-by.”

“Oh, wait for me; I will come with you. Let me put on my hat and tell Mr. Liddell I am going out.”

“Of course you must ask the master’s leave!”

“Exactly,” returned Katherine, good-humoredly. And she put on her hat and gloves.

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“Well, I shall be glad of your guidance, for I hardly know my way back to where the omnibus starts. Such a horrible low part of the town for a man of fortune to live in! I wonder what Colonel Ormonde would say to it?”

“I am sure I don’t know,” returned Kate, laughing. “Now come downstairs. If you go on I will speak to my uncle, and follow you.”

“I am sorry you have been annoyed,” said Katherine, when having tapped at the door, Mr. Liddell desired her to “come in.” He was standing at an old-fashioned bureau, the front of which let down to form a writing-desk and enclosed a number of various-sized drawers. He had taken out several packets of paper neatly tied with red tape and seemed to be rearranging them.

“I am going to take my sister-in-law back to the omnibus; you may be sure she will never intrude again.”

“She shall not,” he replied, turning to face her. Katherine thought how ghastly pale and pinched he looked. “I see the sort of creature she is—a doll that would sell her sawdust soul for finery and glitter; ay, and the lives of all who belong to her for an hour of pleasure.”

Katherine was shocked at his fierce, uncalled-for bitterness.

“She has lived with us for more than a year and a half, and we have found her very pleasant and kind. Her children are dear, sweet things. You should not judge her so harshly.”

“You are a greater fool than I took you for,” cried Mr. Liddell. “Go take them away, and mind they do not come back.”

Katherine hastened after her visitors and led them by a more direct route than they had traversed in coming. It took them past a cake shop, where she spent one of her few sixpences in appeasing her nephews’ appetite, which, at least, with Cecil, grew with what it fed upon, in the matter of cakes.

The children, each holding one of her hands, chattered away, telling many particulars of grannie and Jane, and the cat, to say nothing of a most interesting gardener who came to cut the grass. To all of which Katherine lent a willing ear. How ardently she longed to be at home with the dear mother again! She had never done half enough for her. Ah, if they only could be together again in Florence or Dresden as they used to be!

Mrs. Fred Liddell kept almost complete silence—a very unusual case with her—and only as she paused before following her little boys into the omnibus did she give any clew to the current of her thoughts. “Should Colonel Ormonde come on Saturday when

you are with us—which is not likely—do not say anything about that horrid old man's rudeness; one does not like to confess to being turned out."

"Certainly not. I shall say nothing, you may be sure."

"Good-by, then. I shall tell your mother you are looking *wretchedly*."

"Pray do not," cried Katherine, but the conductor's loud stamping on his perch to start the driver drowned her voice.

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It was a fine evening, fresh, too, with a slight crispness, and Katherine could not resist the temptation of a walk in Regent's Park. She felt her spirits, which had been greatly depressed, somewhat revived by the free air, the sight of grass and trees. Still she could not answer the question which often tormented her, "If my mother cannot sell her book, how will it all end—must I remain as a hostage forever?" It was a gloomy outlook.

She did not allow herself to stray far; crossing the foot-bridge over the Regent's Canal, she turned down a street which led by a circuit toward her abode. It skirted Primrose Hill for a few yards, and as she passed one of the gates admitting to the path which crosses it, a gentleman came out, and after an instant's hesitation raised his hat. Katherine recognized the man who had rescued Cecil at Hyde Park Corner. She smiled and bowed, frankly pleased to meet him again; it was so refreshing to see a bright, kindly face—a face, too, that looked glad to see her.

"May I venture to inquire for my little friend?" said the gentleman, respectfully. "I trust he was not the worse for his adventure?"

"Not at all, thanks to your promptness," said Katherine, pausing. "I have only just parted with him and his mother. She would have been very glad of an opportunity to thank you."

"So slight a service scarcely needs your thanks," he said, in a soft, agreeable voice, as he turned and walked beside her.

Katherine made no objection; she knew he was an acquaintance of Colonel Ormonde, and it was too pleasant a chance of speaking to a civilized human being to be lost. Her new acquaintance was good-looking without being handsome, with a peculiarly happy expression, and honest, kindly light-brown eyes. He was about middle height, but well set up, and carried himself like a soldier.

"Then your little charge does not live with you?" he asked.

"Not now. I am staying with my uncle. Cecil lives with his mother and mine at Bayswater."

"Indeed! I think my old friend, Colonel Ormonde, knows the young gentleman's mother."

"He does."

"Then, may I introduce myself to you? My name is Payne—Gilbert Payne."

"Oh, indeed!" returned Katherine, with a vague idea that she ought not perhaps to walk with him, yet by no means inclined to dismiss a pleasant companion.

"I fancy your young nephew is a somewhat rebellious subject."

“He is sometimes very troublesome, but you cannot help liking him.”

“Exactly—a fine boy. What bewildering little animals children are! They ought to teach us humility, they understand us so much better than we understand them.”

“I believe they do, but I never thought of it before. Have you little brothers and sisters who have taught you this?”

“No. I am the youngest of my family; but I am interested in a refuge for street children, and I learn much there.”

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“That is very good of you,” said Katherine, looking earnestly at him. “Where is it—near this?”

“No; a long way off. There are plenty of such places in every direction. I have just come from a home for poor old women, childless widows, sickly spinsters, who cannot work, and have no one to work for them. If you have any spare time, it would be a great kindness to go and read to them now and then. The lees of such lives are often sad and tasteless.”

“I should be glad to help in any way,” said Katherine, coloring, “but just now I belong (temporarily) to my uncle, who is old, and requires a good deal of reading—and care.”

“Ah, I see your work is cut out for you: that, of course, is your first duty.”

The conversation then flowed on easily about street arabs and the various missions for rescuing them, about soldiers’ homes, and other kindred topics. Katherine was much interested, and taken out of herself; she was quite sorry when on approaching Legrave Crescent she felt obliged to pause, with the intention of dismissing him. He understood. “Do you live near this?” he asked.

“Yes, quite near.”

“May I bring you some papers giving you an account of my poor old women?”

“I should like so much to have them,” said Katherine. “But my uncle is rather peculiar. He does not like to be disturbed; he does not like visitors; he was vexed because my sister-in-law and the children came to-day.”

“I understand, and will not intrude. But should you be able and willing to help these undertakings, Colonel Ormonde will always know my address. He honors me still with his friendship, though he thinks me a moon-struck idiot.”

“Because you are good. The folly is his,” said Katherine, warmly. Then she bowed, Mr. Payne lifted his hat again, and they parted, not to meet for many a day.

When Mrs. Knapp opened the door she looked rather grave, but Katherine’s mind was so full of her encounter with Gilbert Payne that she did not notice it, seeing which, Mrs. Knapp said, “I’m glad you have come in, miss.”

“Why?” with immediate apprehension. “Is my uncle ill?”

“He is not right, miss. I took him up his cup or tea and slice of dry toast about five, and he was lying back, as he often does, asleep, as I thought, in the chair. I says, ‘Here’s your tea, sir,’ but he made no answer, and I spoke again twice without making him hear; then I touched his hand; it was stone cold; so I got water and dabbed his brow, when he

sat up all of a sudden, and swore at me for making him cold and damp with my—I don't like to say the word—rags. Then he shivered and shook like an aspen; but I made up the fire and popped a spoonful of brandy in his tea—he never noticed. But he kept asking for you, miss. I think he doesn't know he was bad."

Katherine hastened to her uncle, greatly distressed at having been absent at the moment of need. In her eagerness she committed the mistake of asking how he felt now, and received a tart reply. There was nothing the matter with him, nothing unusual —only his old complaint, increasing years and infirmity; still he was not to be treated like a helpless baby.

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Katherine felt her error, and turned the subject; then, returning to it, begged him to see a doctor. This he refused sternly. Finally she had recourse to an article on the revenue in the paper, which soothed him, and she saw the old man totter off to bed with extreme uneasiness, yet not daring even to suggest a night light, so irritable did he seem.

Before she slept she wrote a brief account of what had occurred to Mr. Newton, and implored him to come and remonstrate with his client.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

Katherine Liddell had never spent so uneasy a night, save when her mother had been ill. Her nerves were on the stretch, her ears painfully watchful for the smallest sound. What if the desolate old man should pass away, alone and unaided, in the darkness of night! The sense of responsibility was almost too much for her. If she could have her mother at her side she would fear nothing. She was up early, thankful to see daylight, and eager for Mrs. Knapp's report of her uncle.

Generally the old man was afoot betimes, and despised the luxury of warm water. This morning Mrs. Knapp had to knock at his door, as he was not moving, and after a brief interview returned to inform Katherine that Mr. Liddell grumbled at her for being up too early, and on hearing that it was half past eight, said she had better bring him a cup of tea.

Katherine carried it to him herself. He took very little notice of her, but said he would get up presently and hear the papers read.

When she came back with some jelly, for which she had sent to the nearest confectioner, he ate it without comment, and told her she might go.

It was a miserable morning, but about noon, to her great delight, she saw Mr. Newton opening the garden gate. She flew to admit him.

"I am so thankful you have come!"

"How is Mr. Liddell?"

"He seems quite himself this morning, except that he is inclined to stay in bed."

"He must see a doctor," said Mr. Newton, speaking in a low voice and turning into the parlor. "We must try and keep him alive and in his senses for every reason. I am glad he is still in bed; it will give me an excuse for urging him to take advice, for of course I shall not mention your note."

“No pray do not. He evidently does not like to be thought ill.”

“Pray how long have you been here—nearly a month? Yes, I thought so. I cannot compliment you on your looks. How do you think you have been getting on with our friend?”

“Not very well, I fear,” said Katherine, shaking her head. “He rarely speaks to me, except to give some order or ask some necessary question. Yet he does not speak roughly or crossly, as he does to Mrs. Knapp; and something I cannot define in his voice, even in his cold eyes, tells me he is growing used to my presence, and that he does not dislike it.”

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“Well, I should think not, Miss Liddell,” said the precise lawyer, politely. “I trust time may be given to him to recognize the claims of kindred and of merit. Pray ask him if he will see me, and in the mean time please send a note to Dr. Brown—a very respectable practitioner, who lives not far; ask him to come at once. I must persuade Mr. Liddell to see him, and if possible while I am present.”

The old man showed no surprise at Mr. Newton’s presence; it was almost time for his monthly visit, and as he brought a small sum of money with him, the result of some minor payments, he was very welcome.

Katherine, immensely relieved, sat trying to work in the front parlor, but really watching for the doctor. Would her uncle see him? and if not, ought she still to undertake the responsibility of such a charge?

At last he arrived, a staid, thoughtful-looking man; and before he had time to do more than exchange a few words with her, Mr. Newton appeared and carried him off to see the patient.

They seemed a long time gone; and when they returned the doctor wrote a prescription —a very simple tonic, he said. “What your uncle needs, Miss Liddell,” he said, “is constant nourishment. He is exceedingly weak; the action of the heart is feeble, the whole system starved. You must get him to take all the food you can, and some good wine—Burgundy if possible. He had better get up. There is really no organic disease, but he is very low. He ought to have some one in his room at night.”

“It will be difficult to manage that,” said Mr. Newton.

“I shall look in to-morrow about this time,” said the doctor, and hurried away.

“How have you contrived to make him hear reason?” asked Katherine, eagerly.

“I took the law into my own hands, for one thing, and I suggested a powerful motive for living on. I reminded him that he and another old gentleman are the only survivors in a ‘Tontine,’ and that he must try to outlive him. So the cost of doctor, medicine, *etc*., *etc*., ought to be considered as an investment. Do not fail to get him all possible nourishment. If he rebels, send for me.”

“I will indeed. I am almost afraid to stay here alone. Might I not have my mother with me?”

“Do not think of it”—earnestly. “I was going to say that I believe you are decidedly gaining on your uncle; but the intrusion of Mrs. Frederic Liddell yesterday was very unfortunate. My rather peculiar client is impressed with the idea that you invited her.”

“Indeed I did not!” cried Katherine.

“I did not suppose you did, but her appearance seems to have given Mr. Liddell a shock.” Mr. Newton paused, and then asked in a slow tone, as if thinking hard, “What was your sister-in-law’s maiden name?”

“Sandford,” said Katherine.

“Sandford? That is rather a curious coincidence. The late Mrs. John Liddell was a Miss Sandford.”

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“Is she dead, then?”

“Yes; she died eight or nine years ago.”

“Could they have been related?”

“Possibly. Some likeness seems to have struck your uncle.”

There was a short silence, and Mr. Newton resumed. “I trust you do not find your stay here too trying? I consider it very important that you should persevere, though it is only right to tell you that Mr. Liddell has made a will—not a just one, in my opinion—and it is extremely unlikely he will ever change it.”

“That does not really affect me. Of course I should be very glad if he chose to leave anything to my mother or myself, but I shall do my best for him under any circumstances. Besides, I have a sort of desire to make him speak to me and like me—perhaps it is vanity—quite apart from a sense of duty. He is so like a frozen man!”

“Try, try by all means, my dear young lady.”

“What I do not like is the hour or half hour after market. The wolfish greed by which he clutches the change I bring back, the glare in his eyes, the fierce eagerness with which he asks the price of everything—he is not human at such times, and I almost fear him.”

“It is a dreadful picture, but perhaps the details may soften in time.”

“How shall I get money for all he wants?” asked Katherine, anxiously.

“I shall impress upon Mr. Liddell the necessity of his case, and even make out that the good things he requires cost more than they do. I will beg him to allow me to supply the money during his indisposition and enter it in his account. Here, I will give you five pounds while we are alone.”

“Thank you so much! You see I dare not get into debt. I will keep a careful account of all expenditure, and ask him—my uncle, I mean—not to give me any money, then there will be no confusion.

“Very well. I will go back to him now. He will be almost ready to come in here. Write to me frequently. I shall try to look in to-morrow for a few minutes.”

Katherine stirred the fire, and placed a threadbare footstool before the invalid’s easy-chair, thanking Heaven in her heart for sending her such an ally as the friendly lawyer.

Then Mr. Liddell appeared, leaning on Newton’s arm, and not looking much worse than usual, Katherine thought. He took no notice of her until she put the footstool under his

feet; then, wonderful to relate, he looked down into her grave, kindly face and smiled, not bitterly or cynically, but as if, on the whole, pleased to see her. He seemed a little breathless, yet he soon began to speak to Newton as if in continuation of their previous conversation—"And is Fergusson really a year younger than I am?"

"Yes, quite a year, I should say, and he takes great care of himself. I do not think he has really so good a constitution as you have, but he takes everything that is strengthening—good wine, turtle soup, and I do not know what."

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“Ah, indeed!” returned Mr. Liddell, thoughtfully.

“I have been explaining to Mr. Liddell,” said the lawyer, turning to Katherine, “that it would be well to let me give you the house-keeping money for the present, so that he need not be troubled about anything except to get well; and when well, my dear sir, you really must go out. Fresh air—”

“Fresh fiddle-sticks,” interrupted the old man; “I have been well for years without going out, and I’ll not begin now. I’ll give in to everything else; only, if *I* am obliged to take costly food as a medicine, I expect the rest of the household to live as carefully as ever.”

“I shall do my best, uncle,” said Katherine, softly.

After a little more conversation the lawyer took his leave, and then Katherine applied herself to read the papers which had been neglected.

It was not till toward evening she was able to write a few lines to her mother describing Mr. Liddell’s illness, and begging she would come to see her on Saturday, as she (Katherine) could not absent herself while her uncle was so unwell.

After this things went on much as usual, only Mr. Liddell never resumed his habits of early rising; he was a shade less cold too, though at times terribly irritable.

He took the food prepared for him obediently enough, but with evident want of appetite, rarely finishing what was provided.

Mr. Newton generally called every week, and Katherine wrote to him besides; she was strict in insisting on the audit of her accounts, which the accurate lawyer sometimes praised. By judicious accounts of Fergusson, the other surviving member of the Tontine, he managed to keep his client in tolerable order. Katherine, though grateful to him for his friendly help, little knew how strenuously he strove to lengthen the old miser’s days, hoping he would make some provision for his niece, while he dared not offer any suggestion on the subject, lest it should produce an effect contrary to what he desired.

Mrs. Fred Liddell was bitterly disappointed by the result of her visit to the rich uncle. A good deal, indeed, hung upon it. A wealthy succession was certainly a thing to be devoutly wished for in itself, but the sharp little widow felt that provision for her boys and a dowry for herself meant marriage, *if* she chose, with Colonel Ormonde.

And she very decidedly did wish it. Her imagination, which was vivid enough of its kind, was captivated by the Colonel’s imposing “bow-wow” manner, the idea of a country place—an old family place too—by his diamond ring and florid compliments, his self-satisfied fastidiousness and his social position. In short, to her he seemed a fashionable hero; but she was quite sure he never would hamper himself with two little

portionless boys. Ada Liddell was by no means unkind to her children; she was ready to pet them when they met, and give them what did not cost her too much; but she considered them a terrible disadvantage, and herself a most generous and devoted mother.

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The day after she had been so ignominiously expelled from John Liddell's house she put on the prettiest thing she possessed in the way of a bonnet—a contrivance of black lace and violets—and having inspected the turn-out of the children's maid in her best go-to-meeting attire, also the putting on of the boys' newest sailor suits, the curling of their hair, and many minor details, she sallied forth across Kensington Gardens to the ride, feeling tolerably sure that, in consequence of a hint she had dropped a day or two before, when taking afternoon tea in Mrs. Burnett's drawing-room, Colonel Ormonde would probably be amongst the riders on his powerful chestnut, ready to receive her report. She was quite sure he was very much smitten, and eager to know what her chances with old Liddell might be; and as her mother-in-law had a bad habit of presiding over her own tea-table, it would be more convenient to talk with her gay Lothario in the Park.

Many admiring glances were cast upon the pretty little woman in becoming half-mourning, with the two golden-haired, sweet-looking children and their trim maid, which did not escape their object, and put her into excellent spirits. She felt she had gone forth conquering and to conquer. About half-way down the row she recognized a well-known figure on a mighty horse, who cantered up to where she stood, followed by a groom.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Liddell; I thought this piece of fine weather would tempt you out," cried Colonel Ormonde, dismounting and throwing his rein to the groom, who led away the horse as if in obedience to some previously given command. "I protest you are a most tantalizing little woman!" he exclaimed, when they had shaken hands and he had patted the children's heads. "I have been looking for you this half-hour. Where did you hide yourself?"

"I did not hide myself. I am dying to tell you about my uncle."

"Ah! was he all your prophetic soul painted him?"

"He was, and a good deal more. He is quite an ogre, and lives in a miserable hovel. How Katherine can degrade herself by grovelling there with him for the sake of what she can get passes my understanding."

"Deuced plucky, sensible girl! She is quite right to stick to the old boy. Hope she will get his cash. Gad! with her eyes and *his* thousands, she'd rouse up society!"

"Well, I believe she intends to have them all. She was quite vexed at my going over to see the ogre, and I think has prejudiced him against my poor darling boys, for as soon as he saw them he called out that he could not receive any one, that he was ill and nervous. But I smiled my very best smile, and said I had come to introduce myself, and I hoped he would let me have a little talk with him. The poor old ogre looked at me rather kindly and earnestly when I said that, and I really do think he would have listened

to me, but my sister-in-law would make me come away, as if the sight of me was enough to frighten a horse from his oats; so somehow we got hustled upstairs, and there was an end of it."

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“Ah, Mrs. Liddell, you ought not to have allowed yourself to be outmanoeuvred,” cried the Colonel, who greatly enjoyed irritating his pretty little friend. “Your *belle-soeur* (as she really is) is too many for you. Don’t you give up; try again when the adorable Katherine is out of the way.”

“I fully intend to do so, I assure you,” cried Mrs. Frederic, her eyes sparkling, her heart beating with vexation, but determined to keep up the illusion of ingratiating herself with the miserly uncle. “Pray remember this is only a first attempt.”

“I am sure you have my devout wishes for your success. How this wretched old hunk can resist such eyes, such a smile, as yours, is beyond my comprehension. If such a niece attacked *me*, I should surrender at the first demand.”

“I don’t think you would”—a little tartly. “I think you have as keen a regard for your own interest as most men.”

“I am sure you would despise me if I had not, and the idea of being despised by you is intolerable.”

“You know I do not”—very softly. “But it is time I turned and went toward home.”

“Nonsense, my dear Mrs. Liddell! or, if you will turn, let it be round Kensington Gardens. Do you know, I am going to Scotland next week, to Sir Ralph’s moor; then I expect a party to meet Errington at my own place early in September; so I shall not have many chances of seeing you until I run up just before Christmas. Now I am going to ask a great favor. It’s so hard to get a word with you except under the Argus eyes of that mother-in-law of yours.”

“What can it be?” opening her eyes.

“Come with me to see this play they have been giving at the Adelphi. I have never had a spare evening to see it. We’ll leave early, and have a snug little supper at Verey’s, and I’ll see you home.”

“It would be delightful, but out of the question, I am afraid: Mrs. Liddell has such severe ideas, and I dare not offend her.”

“Why need she know anything about it? Say—oh, anything—that you are going with the Burnetts: they have gone to the Italian lakes, but I don’t suppose she knows.”

The temptation was great, but the little widow was no fool in some ways. She saw her way to make something of an impression on her worldly admirer.

“No, Colonel Ormonde,” she said, shaking her head, while she permitted the “suspicious moisture” to gather in her eyes. “It would indeed be a treat to a poor little recluse like

me, but though there is not a bit of harm in it, or you would not ask me, I am sure, I must not offend my mother-in-law; and though Heaven knows I am not straight-laced, I never will tell stories or act deceitfully if I can help it; that is my only strong point, which has to make up for a thousand weak ones."

Colonel Ormonde looked at her with amazement; her greatest charm to men such as he was her dolliness, and this was a new departure.

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“Well,” he said, in his most insinuating tones, “I thought you might have granted so much to an old friend and faithful admirer like myself. There is no great harm in my little plan.”

“Certainly not, but you see I must hold on to my mother-in-law: she is my only real stay. While pleasant and friendly as you are, my dear Colonel”—with a pretty little toss of her head—“you will go off shooting, or hunting, or Heaven knows what, and it is quite possible I may never see your face again.”

“Oh, by George! you will not get rid of me so easily,” cried Ormonde, a good deal taken back.

“I shall be very glad to see you if you do turn up again,” said Mrs. Liddell, graciously. “So as this will probably be the last time I shall see you for some months, pray tell me some amusing gossip.”

But gossip did not seem to come readily to Colonel Ormonde; nevertheless they made a tour of the gardens in desultory conversation, till Mrs. Liddell stopped decidedly, and bade him adieu.

“At last,” said the cautious ex-dragoon, “you will write and tell me how you get on with this amiable old relative of yours.”

“I shall be very pleased to report progress, if you care to write and ask me, and tell me your whereabouts.”

“Then I suppose it is to be good-by?” said Ormonde, almost sentimentally. “You are treating me devilishly ill.”

“I do not see that.” Here the boys came running up, at a signal from their mother.

“Well, my fine fellow,” said Ormonde, laying his hand on Cecil’s shoulder, “so you went to see your old uncle. Did he try to eat you?”

“No; but he is a nasty cross old man. He wouldn’t speak a word to mammy, but took his stick and hobbled away.”

“Yes, he is a wicked man, and I am afraid he will hurt auntie,” put in Charlie.

Colonel Ormonde laughed rather more than the mother liked. “I think you may trust ‘auntie’ to take care of herself.—So you forced the old boy to retreat? What awful stories your sister-in-law must have told of you!” to Mrs. Liddell.

She was greatly annoyed, but, urged by all-powerful self-interest, she maintained a smooth face, and answered, “Oh yes, when Katherine kept worrying about our disturbing her uncle, the poor old man got up and left the room.”

“Well, you must turn her flank, and be sure to let me know how matters progress. I suppose you will be here all the autumn?”

“I should think so; small chance of my going out of town,” she returned, bitterly, and the words had scarce left her lips before she felt she had made a mistake. Men hate to be bothered with the discomforts of others.

The result was that Colonel Ormonde cut short his adieux, and parted from her with less regret than he felt five minutes before.

The young widow walked smartly back, holding her eldest boy’s hand, and administered a sharp rebuke to him for talking too much. To which Cecil replied that he had only answered when he was spoken to. This elicited a scolding for his impertinence, and produced further tart answers from the fluent young gentleman, which ended by his being dismissed in a fury to Jane, *vice* Charles, promoted to walk beside mamma.

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As may be supposed, Mrs. Liddell lost no time about answering her daughter's note in person. In truth, toward the end of a week's separation she generally began to hunger painfully for a sight of her Katie's face, to feel the clasp of her soft arms, and to this was added in the present instance serious uneasiness respecting the strain to which her sense of responsibility as nurse as well as housekeeper must subject so inexperienced a creature.

It was rather late in the afternoon when Mrs. Liddell reached Legrave Crescent, and the servant showed her into the front parlor at once. Katherine almost feared to draw her uncle's attention to the visitor. He had had all the papers read to him, and even asked for some articles to be read a second time; now after his dinner he seemed to doze. If he had not noticed Mrs. Liddell's entry she had perhaps better take her away upstairs at once, but while she thought she sprang to her and locked her in a close, silent embrace.

Turning from her, he saw that Mr. Liddell's eyes were open and fixed upon them, and she said, softly: "I am sorry you have been disturbed. I shall take my mother to my room; perhaps if you want anything you will ring for me."

"I will," he returned; and Mrs. Liddell thought his tone a little less harsh than usual. "I said you might come and see your daughter when you like," he added, "and I repeat it. You have brought her up more usefully than I expected." Having spoken, he leaned his head back wearily and closed his eyes.

"I am pleased to hear you say so," returned Mrs. Liddell, quietly, and immediately followed her daughter out of the room.

"Oh, darling mother, I am so delighted to have you here all to myself! It is even better than going home," cried Kate, when they were safe in her own special chamber. "But you are looking pale and worn and thin—*so* much thinner!"

"That is an improvement, Katherine," returned Mrs. Liddell; "I shall look all the younger."

"Ah! but your face looks older, dear. What has been worrying you? Has Ada—"

"Ada has never worried me, as you know, Katie," interrupted Mrs. Liddell. "She is not exactly the companion I should choose for every day of my life, but she has always been kind and nice with me."

"Oh, she is not bad, and she would be clever if she managed to make *you* quarrel. I am quite different. Now I must get you some tea. Pray look round while I am gone, and see how comfortable it is;" and Katherine hurried away.

She soon returned, followed by Mrs. Knapp, who was glad to carry up the tea-tray to the pleasant, sensible lady who had engaged her for what proved to be not an uncomfortable situation. When, after a few civil words, she retired, with what delight

and tender care Katie waited on her mother, putting a cushion at her back and a footstool under her feet, remembering her taste in sugar, her little weakness for cream!

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“It was very warm in the omnibus, I suppose, for you are looking better already.”

“I *am* better; but, Katherine, your uncle is curiously changed. It is not so much that he looks ill, but by comparison so alarmingly amiable.”

“Well, he is less appalling than he was, and I have grown wonderfully accustomed to him. But for the monotony, it is not so bad as I expected, and it will be better now, as Mr. Newton is to give me the weekly money. I think my uncle is trying to live.”

“Poor man! he has little to live for,” said Mrs. Liddell.

“He wishes to outlive some other old man, because then he will get a good deal of money, according to some curious system—called a ‘Tontine.’”

“Is it possible? The ruling passion, then, in his instance is strong against death.”

“What a poverty-stricken life his has been, after all!” exclaimed Katherine. “Did Ada tell you how vexed he was at her visit?”

“She was greatly offended, but I should like your version of it.”

Katherine told her, and repeated Mr. Newton’s inquiry about Mrs. Fred Liddell’s family name.

“Mr. Newton is very kind. He is very formal and precise, and very guarded in all he says, yet I feel that he likes me—us—and would like my uncle to do something for us.”

“I never hoped he would do as much as he has. If he would remember those poor little boys in his will it would be a great help. You and I could always manage together, Katie.”

“I wish that we were together by our own selves once more,” returned Kate, nestling up to her mother on the big old-fashioned sofa, and resting her head on her shoulder.

“I wish to God we were! I miss you so awfully, my darling!”

There was a short silence while the two clung lovingly together. Then Katherine said, in a low tone, “Mr. Newton evidently thinks he—my uncle—has made a very unjust will, and fears he will never change it.”

“Most probably he will not; but he ought not to cut off his natural heirs.”

“Would Cecil and Charlie be his natural heirs?”

“I suppose so, and something would come to you too; but I do not understand these matters. It is dreadful how mean and mercenary this terrible need for money makes one.”

“You want it very much, mother? There is trouble in your voice; tell me what it is.”

“There is no special pressure, dear, just now; but unless I am more successful with my pen I greatly fear I shall get into debt before I can liberate myself from that house. Yet if I do, what will become of Ada and the boys?” She paused to cough.

Katherine was silent; the tone of her mother’s voice told more than her words. “But,” resumed Mrs. Liddell, “all is not black. The *Dalston Weekly* has taken my short story, and given me ten pounds for it. However, you must take the bad with the good; my poor three-decker has come back on my hands.”

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Katherine uttered a low exclamation. “I did hope they would have taken it! and what miserable pay for that bright, pretty story! Mother, I cannot believe that the novel will fail. *Do, do* try Santley & Son! I have always heard they were such nice people. Try—-promise me you will.”

“Dear Katie, I will do whatever you ask me; but—but I confess I feel as if Hope, who has always befriended me, had turned her back at last. I am so dreadfully tired! I feel as if I was never to rest. Oh for a couple of years of peace before I go hence, and a certainty that *you* would not want!”

“Do not fear for me,” cried Katherine, pressing her mother to her and covering her pale cheeks with kisses. “For myself I fear nothing, but for *you*, I greatly fear you are unwell; you breathe shortly; your hands are feverish. Do not let hope go. A few weeks and my uncle will be stronger, or he may be invigorated by feeling he has killed out the other old man, and then I will go back to you and help you, whatever happens. I won’t stay here to act compound interest. My own darling mother, keep up your heart.”

“I am ashamed of myself,” said Mrs. Liddell, in an unsteady voice. “I ought not to have grieved your young heart with my depression, for I *have* been depressed.”

“Why not? What is the good of youth and strength if it is not to uphold those who have already had more than their share of life’s burdens?”

“I assure you this outpouring has relieved me greatly; I shall return like a giant refreshed,” said Mrs. Liddell, rallying gallantly; “and you may depend on my trying the fortune of my poor novel once more, with Santley & Son. Now tell me how your domestic management prospers.”

A long confidential discussion ensued, and at last Mrs. Liddell was obliged to leave.

Katherine went to tell her uncle she was going to set her mother on her way, and to see his cup of beef tea served to him. His remark almost startled her. “Very well,” he said. “Come back soon.”

This interview agitated Katherine more than Mrs. Liddell knew. Her worn look, her cough, her unwonted depression, thrilled her daughter’s warm heart with a passion of tender longing to be with her, to help her, to give her the rest she so sorely needed; and in the solitude of her large dreary room she sobbed herself to sleep, her lips still quivering with the loving epithets she had murmured to herself.

CHAPTER VIII.

“THE LONG TASK IS DONE.”

The facility with which human nature assimilates new conditions is among its most remarkable attributes. A week had scarcely elapsed since John Liddell's sudden indisposition and subsidence into an invalid condition, yet it seemed to Katherine that he had been breakfasting in bed for ages, and might continue to do so for another cycle without change. Her inexperience took no warning from the rapidly developing signs of decadence and failing force which Mr. Newton perceived; and, on the whole, she found her task of housekeeper and caretaker less ungrateful since weakness had subdued her uncle, and the friendly lawyer had been appointed paymaster.

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The days sped with the swiftness monotony lends to time. Mrs. Liddell always visited her daughter once a week. Occasionally Katherine got leave of absence, and spent an hour or two at home, where she enjoyed a game of play with her little nephews. Otherwise home was less homelike than formerly. Ada was sulky and dissatisfied; she dared not intrude on Mr. Liddell in his present condition; and she was dreadfully annoyed at not being able to give Colonel Ormonde any encouraging news on this head. Her influence on the family circle, therefore, was not cheerful. Besides this, though Mrs. Liddell kept a brave front, and did not again allow herself the luxury of confidence in her daughter, there were unmistakable signs of care and trouble in her face, her voice. She was unfailing in her kind forbearance to the woman her son had loved, and whatever good existed in Mrs. Fred's rubbishy little heart responded to the genial, broad humanity of her mother-in-law. But Katherine perceived, or thought she perceived, that Mrs. Liddell was wearing herself down in the effort to make her inmates comfortable, and so to beat out her scanty store of sovereigns as to make them stretch to the margin of her necessities. It was a very shadowy and narrow pass through which her road of life led Katherine at this period, nor was there much prospect beyond. Moreover, as her mother had anticipated, the invisible cords which bound her to the moribund old miser were tightening their hold more and more, she often looked back and wondered at the sort of numbness which stole over her spirit during this time of trial.

September was now in its first week; the weather was wet and cold; and Katherine was thankful when Mr. Newton's weekly visit was due. It was particularly stormy that day, and he was a little later than usual.

When she had left solicitor and client together for some time, she descended, as was her custom, to make a cup of tea for the former, and give her uncle his beef tea or jelly.

Mr. Newton rose, shook hands with her, and then resumed his conversation with Mr. Liddell.

"I do not for a moment mean to say that he is a reckless bettor or a mere gambling horse-racer; and, after all, to enter a horse or two for the local races, or even Newmarket, is perfectly allowable in a man of his fortune—it will neither make him nor mar him."

"It *will* mar him," returned Mr. Liddell, in more energetic tones than Katherine had heard him utter since he was laid up. "A man who believes he is rich enough to throw away money is on the brink of ruin. He appears to me in a totally different light. I thought he was steady, thoughtful, alive to the responsibility of his position. Ah, who is to be trusted? Who?"

There seemed no reply to this, for Mr. Newton started a new and absorbing topic.

“Mr. Fergusson is keeping wonderfully well,” he remarked. “His sister was calling on my wife yesterday, and says that since he took this new food—’Revalenta Arabica,’ I think it is called—he is quite a new man.”

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“What food is that?” asked Mr. Liddell. While Newton explained, Katherine reflected with some wonder on the fact that there was a Mrs. Newton; it had never come to her knowledge before. She tried to imagine the precise lawyer in love. How did he propose? Surely on paper, in the most strictly legal terms! Could he ever have felt the divine joy and exultation which loving and being loved must create? Had he little children? and oh! did he, could he, ever dance them on his knee? He was a good man, she was sure, but goodness so starched and ironed was a little appalling.

These fancies lasted till the description of Revalenta Arabica was ended; then Mr. Liddell said, “Tell my niece where to get it.” Never had he called her niece before; even Mr. Newton looked surprised. “I will send you the address,” he said. “And here, Miss Liddell, is the check for next week.”

“I have still some money from the last,” said Katherine, blushing. “I had better give it to you, and then the check need not be interfered with.” She hated to speak of money before her uncle.

“As you like. You are a good manager, Miss Liddell.”

“Give it to me,” cried the invalid from his easy-chair; “I will put it in my bureau. I have a few coins there, and they can go together.”

“Very well; but had not my uncle better write an acknowledgment? We shall be puzzled about the money when we come to reckon up at the end of the month, if he does not.”

Katherine had been taught by severe experience the necessity of saving herself harmless when handling Mr. Liddell’s money.

“An acknowledgment,” repeated the old man, with a slight, sobbing, inward laugh. “That is well thought. Yes, by all means write it out, Mr. Newton, and I will sign. Oh yes; I will sign!”

Newton turned to the writing-table and traced a few lines, bringing it on the blotting-pad for his client’s signature.

“I can sign steadily enough still,” said Mr. Liddell, slowly, “and my name is good for a few thousands. Hey?”

“That it certainly is, Mr. Liddell.”

“Do you think old Fergusson could sign as steadily as that?” asked Mr. Liddell, with a slight, exulting smile.

“I should say not. What writing of his I have seen was a terrible scrawl.”

“Hum! he wasn’t a gentleman, you know. He drank too; not to be intoxicated, but too much—too much! For he will find the temperance man too many for him. *I’ll* win the race, the waiting race;” and he laughed again in a distressing, hysterical fashion, that quite exhausted him.

Katherine flew to fetch cold water, while the old man leaning back panting and breathless, and Mr. Newton, much alarmed, fanned him with a folded newspaper.

He gradually recovered, but complained much of the beating of his heart. Mr. Newton wished to send for the doctor, but Mr. Liddell would not hear of it. Then he urged his allowing the servant at least to sleep on the sofa in the front parlor, leaving the door into Mr. Liddell’s room open. To this the object of his solicitude was also opposed, so Mr. Newton bade him farewell. Katherine, however, waylaid him in the hall, and they held a short conference.

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“He really ought not to be left alone at night.”

“No, he must not,” said Katherine. “I will make our servant spend the night in the parlor. She can easily open the door after the lights are out, without his being vexed by knowing she is there. I could not sleep if I thought he was alone. I will come very early in the morning to relieve her.”

“Do, my dear young lady. I will call on the doctor and beg him to come round early.”

“Do you think my uncle so ill, then?”

“He is greatly changed, and his weakness makes me uneasy. I trust in God he may be spared a little longer.”

Katherine looked and felt surprised at the fervor of his tone. Little did she dream the real source of the friendly lawyer’s anxiety to prolong a very profitless existence.

After a few more remarks and a promise to come at any time if he were needed, Mr. Newton departed; and Katherine got through the dreary evening as best she could.

How she longed to summon her mother! but she feared to irritate her uncle, who was evidently unequal to bear the slightest agitation.

Next day was unusually cold, and though Mr. Liddell had passed a tranquil night, he seemed averse to leave his bed. He lay there very quietly, and listened to the papers being read, and it was late in the afternoon before he would get up and dress. From this time forward he rarely rose till dusk, and it grew more and more an effort to him. He was always pleased to see Mr. Newton, and to converse a little with him. He even spoke with tolerable civility to Mrs. Liddell when she came to see her daughter.

As the weather grew colder—and autumn that year was very wintry—he objected more and more to leave his bed, and at last came to sitting up only for a couple of hours in the chair by his bedroom fire. It was during one of these intervals that Katherine, who had been racking her brains for something to talk of that would interest him, bethought her of a transaction in old newspapers which Mrs. Knapp had brought to a satisfactory conclusion. She therefore took out “certain moneys” from her purse.

“We have sold the newspapers at last, uncle,” she said. “I kept back some for our own use, so all I could get was a shilling and three half-pence.” She placed the coins on a little table which stood by his arm-chair, adding, “I suppose you know the Scotch saying, ’Many mickles make a muckle’; even a few pence are better than a pile of useless papers.”

“I know,” said Liddell, with feeble eagerness, clutching the money and transferring it to his little old purse. “It is a good saving—a wise saying. I did not think you knew it; but—but why did you keep back any?”

“Because one always needs waste paper in a house, to light fires and cover things from dust. I shall collect more next time,” she added, seeing the old man was pleased with the idea.

He made no reply, but sat gazing at the red coals, his lips moving slightly, and the purse still in his hand. Again he opened it, and took out the coins she had given him, holding them to the fire-light in the hollow of his thin hand.

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“Do you know the value of money?” he said at length, looking piercingly at her. “Do you know the wonderful life it has—a life of its own?”

“If the want of can teach its value I ought to know,” she returned.

“You are wrong! Poverty never teaches its worth. You never hold it and study it when, the moment you touch it, you have to exchange it for commodities. No! it is when you can spare some for a precious seed, and watch its growth, and see—see its power of self-multiplication if it is let alone—just let alone,” he repeated, with a touch of pathos in his voice. “Now these few pence, thirteen and a half in all—a boy with an accumulative nature and youth, early youth, on his side, might build a fortune on these. Yes, he might, if he had not a grovelling love of food and comfort.”

“Do you think he really could?” asked Kate, interested in spite of herself in the theories of the old miser.

“Would you care to know?” said her uncle, fixing his keen dark eyes upon her.

“I should indeed.” Her voice proved she was in earnest.

“Then I will tell you, step by step, but not to-night. I am too weary. You are different from the others—your father and your brother. You are—yes, you are—more like *me*.”

“God forbid!” was Katherine’s mental ejaculation.

Mr. Liddell slowly put the thirteenpence half penny back in his purse, drew forth his bunch of keys, looked at them, and restored them to his pocket; then, resting his head wearily against the chair, he said, “Give me something to take and I will go to bed.”

Katherine hastened to obey, and summoned the servant to assist him, as usual.

The next morning was cold and wet, with showers of sleet, and Mr. Liddell declared he had taken a chill, and refused to get up. He was indisposed to eat, and did not show any interest in the newspaper. About noon the doctor called. Mr. Liddell answered his questions civilly enough, but did not respond to his attempts at conversation.

“Your uncle is in a very low condition,” said the doctor, when he came into the next room, where Katherine awaited him. “You must do your best to make him take nourishment, and keep him as warm as possible. I suppose Mr. Newton is always in town?”

“I think so; at least I never knew him to be absent since I came here. I rather expect him to-day or to-morrow. Do you think my uncle seriously ill?”

“He is not really ill, but he has an incurable complaint—old age. He ought not to be so weak as he is; still, he may last some time, with your good care.”

Katherine took her needle-work and settled herself to keep watch by the old man. The doctor’s inquiry for Mr. Newton had startled her, but his subsequent words allayed her fears. “He may last for some time,” conveyed to her mind the notion of an indefinite lease of life.

Mr. Liddell seemed to be slumbering peacefully, when, after a long silence, during which Katherine’s thoughts had traversed many a league of land and sea, he said suddenly, in stronger tones than usual, “Are you there?” He scarcely ever called her by her name.

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“I am,” said Katherine, coming to the bedside.

“Here, take these keys”—he drew them from under his pillows; “this one unlocks that bureau”—pointing to a large old-fashioned piece of furniture, dark and polished, which stood on one side of the fireplace; “open it, and in the top drawer left you will find a long, folded paper. Bring it to me.”

Katherine did as he directed, and could not help seeing the words, “Will of John Wilmot Liddell,” and a date some seven or eight years back, inscribed upon it. She handed it to her uncle, arranging his pillows so that he might sit up more comfortably, while she rather wondered at the commonplace aspect of so potent an instrument. A will, she imagined, was something huge, of parchment, with big seals attached.

John Liddell slowly put on his spectacles, and unfolding the paper, read for some time in silence.

“This will not do,” he said at last, clearly and firmly. “I was mistaken in him. The care for and of money must be born in you; it cannot be taught. No, I can make a better disposition. Could *you* take care of money, girl?” he asked sternly.

“I should try,” returned Katherine, quietly.

There was a pause. The old man lay thinking, his lean, brown hand lying on the open paper. “Write,” he said at length, so suddenly and sharply that he startled his niece; get paper and write to Newton. Katherine brought the writing materials, and placed herself at the small table.

“Dear sir,” he dictated—“Be so good as to come to me as soon as convenient. I wish to make a will more in accordance with my present knowledge than any executed by me formerly. I am, yours faithfully.”

Katherine brought over pen and paper, and the old man affixed his signature clearly.

“Now fold it up and send it to post. No—take it yourself; then it will be safe, and so much the better for you.”

Katherine called the good-natured Mrs. Knapp to take her place, and sallied forth. She was a good deal excited. Was she in a crisis of her fate? Would her grim old uncle leave her wherewithal to give the dear mother rest and peace for the remainder of her days? It would not take much; would he—oh, would he remember the poor little boys? She never dreamed of more than a substantial legacy; the bulk of his fortune he might leave to whom he liked. How dreadful it was that money should be such a grim necessity!

She felt oppressed, and made a small circuit returning, to enjoy as much fresh air as she could, and called at some of the shops where she was accustomed to deal, to save sending the servant later. She was growing a little nervous, and disliked being left alone in the house.

When she returned, her uncle was very much in the same attitude; but he had folded up his will and placed his hand under his head.

“You have been very long,” he said, querulously.

Katherine said she had been at one or two shops.

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“Read to me,” he said, “I am tired thinking; but first lock the bureau and give me the keys; you left them hanging in the lock. I have never taken my eyes from them. Now I have them,” he added, putting them under his pillow, “I can rest. Here, take this”—-handing her the will: “put it in the drawer of my writing-table; we may want it to morrow; and I do not wish that bureau opened again; everything is there.”

Having placed the will as he desired, Katherine began to read, and the rest of the day passed as usual.

She could not, however, prevent herself from listening for Mr. Newton’s knock. She felt sure he would hasten to his client as soon as he had read his note. He would be but too glad to draw up another and a juster will.

Without a word, without the slightest profession of friendship, Newton had managed to impress Katherine with the idea that he was anxious to induce Mr. Liddell to do what was right to his brother’s widow and daughter.

But night closed in, and no Mr. Newton came. Mr. Liddell was unusually wakeful and restless, and seemed on the watch himself, his last words that night being, “I am sure Newton will be here in good time to-morrow.”

Instead, the morrow brought a dapper and extremely modern young man, the head of the firm in right of succession, his late father having founded the house of Stephens & Newton.

Mr. Liddell had just been made comfortable in his great invalid’s chair by the fire, having risen earlier than usual in expectation of Mr. Newton’s visit. When this gentleman presented himself, Katherine observed that her uncle was in a state of tremulous impatience, and the moment she saw the stranger she felt that some unlucky accident had prevented Newton from obeying his client’s behest.

“Who—what?” gasped Mr. Liddell, when a card was handed to him. “Read it,” to Katherine.

“Mr. Stephens, of Stephens & Newton, Red Lion Square,” she returned.

“I will not see him, I do not want him,” cried her uncle, angrily. “Where is Newton? Go ask him?”

With an oppressive sense of embarrassment, Katherine went out into the hall, and confronted a short, slight young man with exceedingly tight trousers, a colored cambric tie, and a general air of being on the turf. He held a white hat in one hand, and on the other, which was ungloved, he wore a large seal ring. Katherine did not know how to say that her uncle would not see him, but the stranger took the initiative.

“Aw—I have done myself the honor of coming in person to take Mr. Liddell’s instructions, as Mr. Newton was called out of town by very particular business yesterday morning. I rather hoped he might return last night, but a communication this morning informs us he will be detained till this afternoon, not reaching town till 9.30 P.M. I am prepared to execute any directions in my partner’s stead.”

He spoke with an air of condescension, as if he did Mr. Liddell a high honor, and made a step forward. Katherine did not know what to say. It was terrible to keep this consequential little man in the hall, and there was literally nowhere else to take him.

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“I am so sorry, but my uncle is very unwell and nervous. I do not think he could see any one but Mr. Newton, who is an old friend, you know,” she added, deprecatingly.

“I am his legal adviser too,” returned the young man, with a slightly offended air. “I am the senior partner and head of the house, and the worse Mr. Liddell is, the greater the necessity for his giving instructions respecting his will.”

“I will tell him Mr. Newton is away,” said Katherine, courteously; “and—would you mind sitting down here? I am quite distressed not to have any better place to offer you, but I cannot help it.”

“It is of no consequence,” returned the young lawyer, struck by her sweet tones and simple good-breeding, yet looking round him at the worn oil-cloth and shabby stair-carpeting with manifest amazement.

“Mr. Newton is out of town, and does not return till late this evening,” said Katherine, returning to the irate old man. “This gentleman says he is the head of the firm, and will do your bidding in Mr. Newton’s stead.”

“Tell him he shall do nothing of the kind,” returned Mr. Liddell, in a weak, hoarse, impatient voice. “I saw him once, and I know him; he is an ignorant, addle-pated jackanapes. He shall not muddle my affairs; send him away; I can wait for Newton. I don’t suppose I am going to die to-night.”

And Katherine, blushing “celestial rosy red,” hied back to the smart young man, who was reposing himself on the only seat the entrance boasted, and conjecturing that if this fine, fair, soft-spoken girl was to be the old miser’s heir, she would be almost deserving of his own matrimonial intentions.

“My uncle begs me to apologize to you, Mr. Stephens, but he is so much accustomed to Mr. Newton, and in such a nervous state, that he would prefer waiting till that gentleman can come.”

“Oh, very well; only I wish I had known before—I came up here at some inconvenience; and also wish Mr. Liddell could be persuaded that delays are dangerous.”

“The delay is not for very long. I am sorry you had this fruitless trouble. Mr. Liddell is very weak.”

“I am sure if anything could restore him, it would be the care of such a nurse as you must be,” with a bow and a grin.

“Thank you; good-morning,” said Katherine, with such an air of decided dismissal that the young senior partner at once departed.

Mr. Liddell fretted and fumed for an hour or two before he had exhausted himself sufficiently to sit still and listen to Katherine's reading; and after he had apparently sunk into a doze, he suddenly started up and exclaimed: "That idiot, young Stephens, will never think of sending to his house. Write—write to Newton's private residence."

"I think Mr. Stephens will, uncle. He seemed anxious to meet your wishes."

"Don't be a fool—do as I bid you! Get the paper and pen. Are you ready?"

"I am."

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“Dear sir, Let nothing prevent your coming to me to-morrow,” he dictated; “I want to make my will. It is important that affairs be not left in confusion. Yours truly. Give me the pen,” he went on, in the same breath. “I can sign as well as ever. Now go you yourself and put this in the post. I do not trust that woman—they all stop and gossip, and I want this to go by the next despatch.”

Katherine, always thankful to be in the air, went readily enough. She was distressed to find how the nervous uneasiness of yesterday was growing on her. The perpetual companionship of the grim old skeleton, her uncle, was making her morbid, she thought; she must ask leave to go and spend a day at home to see how her mother was getting on, to refresh herself by a game of romps with the children. Why, she felt absolutely growing old!

When she re-entered the house she found, much to her satisfaction, that the doctor was with Mr. Liddell; and after laying aside her out-door dress, she went to the parlor.

“I have been advising Mr. Liddell to try the effect of a few glasses of champagne,” said the former, who was looking rather grave, Katherine thought. “But as there is none in his cellar, he objects. Now you must help me to persuade him. I am going on to a patient in Regent’s Park, and shall pass a very respectable wine-merchant’s on my way; so I shall just take the law into my own hands and order a couple of bottles for you. Consider it medicine. It is wonderful how much more generally champagne is used than when you and I were young, my dear sir!” *etc*., *etc*., he went on, with professional cheerfulness. But Mr. Liddell did not heed him much.

“He is very weak. The action of the heart is extremely feeble,” said the doctor, when Katherine followed him to the door. “Try and make him take the champagne.”

Another day dragged through; then Katherine, rather worn with the constant involuntary sense of watching which had strained her nerves all day, slept soundly and dreamlessly. She woke early next morning, and was soon dressed. Mrs. Knapp reported Mr. Liddell to be still slumbering.

“But law, miss, he have had a bad night—the worst yet, I think. He was dreaming and tossing from side to side, and then he would scream out words I couldn’t understand. I made him take some wine between two and three, but I do not think he knew me a bit. I have had a dreadful night of it.”

Katherine expressed her sympathy, and did what she could to lighten the good woman’s labors.

Mr. Liddell, however, though he looked ghastly, seemed rather stronger than usual. He insisted on getting up, and came into the sitting-room about eleven.

It was a cold morning, with a thick, drizzling rain. Katherine made up the fire to a cheerful glow, and by her uncle's directions placed pen, ink and paper on the small table he always had beside him. Then he uttered the accustomed commanding "Read," and Katherine read.

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Suddenly he interrupted her by exclaiming, “Give me the deaths first.”

It had been a whim of his latterly to have this lugubrious list read to him every day.

Katherine had hardly commenced when she descried Mr. Newton’s well-known figure advancing from the garden gate.

“Ah, here is Mr. Newton!” she exclaimed.

“Ha! that is well,” cried her uncle, with shrill exultation. “Now—now all will go right.”

The next moment the lawyer was shown in, and having greeted them, proceeded to apologize for his unavoidable absence. “Here I am, however, sir,” he concluded, “at your service.”

“Go—leave us,” said Liddell, abruptly yet not unkindly, to Katherine; then, as she left the room, “Finish the deaths for me, will you, before we go to business. She had just read the first two. Read—make haste!”

Somewhat surprised, Mr. Newton took up the paper and continued: “On the 30th September, at Wimbledon, universally regretted, the Rev. James Johnson, formerly minister of “Little Bethel, Bermondsey.” On October 1st, at her residence, Upper Clapton, Esther, relict of Captain Doubleday, late of the E. I. C. Service. On the 2nd instant, at Bournemouth, Peter Fergusson, of Upper Baker Street, in the seventy-fifth year of his age.”

“Fergusson dead! and he is three years my junior! Now it is all mine—all!—all! I shall be able to settle it as I like. I haven’t eaten and drunk in vain. I’m strong, quite strong. All the papers are there, in my bureau. I’ll show them to you. Aha! I thought I’d outlive him! I was determined to outlive him!”

With an uncanny laugh he struggled to his feet, and attempted to walk to his bedroom, his stick in one hand and the keys he had taken from his pocket in the other. For a few steps he walked with a degree of strength that astonished Newton; then he gave a deep groan, staggered, and fell to the ground with a crash.

Newton rushed to raise him, which he did with some difficulty. The noise brought the servant to his assistance.

“Go! fetch Dr. Bilhane,” said Mr. Newton, as soon as they had laid the helpless body on the bed. “Though I doubt if he can do anything. The old man is gone.”

CHAPTER IX.

“TEMPTATION.”

To Katherine, who was in her own room, the sound beneath came with a subdued force, and knowing Mr. Newton was with him, she thought it better to stay where she was, for it never struck her that Mr. Liddell had fallen.

When, therefore, Mrs. Knapp, with that eagerness to spread evil tidings peculiar to her class, rushed upstairs to announce breathlessly that she was going for the doctor, but that the poor old gentleman was quite dead, Katherine could not believe her.

She quickly descended to the parlor, where she found Mr. Newton standing by the fire, looking pale and anxious.

“Oh, Mr. Newton, he cannot be dead!” cried Katherine. “He seemed stronger this morning, and he has fainted more than once. Let me bathe his temples.” She took a bottle of eau-de-Cologne from the sideboard as she spoke.

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“My dear young lady, both your servant and I have done what we could to revive him, and I fear—I believe he has passed away. The start and the triumph of finding himself the last survivor of the Tontine association were too much for his weak heart. I would not go in if I were you: death is appalling to the young.”

Katherine stopped, half frightened, yet ashamed of her fear. “Oh yes; I must satisfy myself that I can do nothing more for him. Can it be possible that he will never speak again—never search for news of that other poor old man?” She went softly into the next room, followed by Newton, and approaching the bed, laid her hand gently on his brow. “How awfully cold!” she whispered, shrinking back in spite of herself at the unutterable chill of death. “But he looks so peaceful, so different from what he did in life!” She stood gazing at him, silent, awe-struck.

“Come away,” said Newton, kindly. “The doctor will be here, I trust, in a few minutes, and will be able to give a certificate which will save the worry of an inquest.”

Katherine obeyed his gesture of entreaty, and went slowly into the front room, where she sat down, leaning her elbows on the table and covering her face with her hands, while Mr. Newton closed the door.

It was all over, then, her hopes and fears; the poor wasted life, as much wasted and useless as if spent in the wildest and most extravagant follies, was finished. What had it left behind? Nothing of good to any human being; no blessing of loving-kindness, of help and sympathy, to any suffering brother wayfarer on life’s high-road; nothing but hard, naked gold—gold which, from what she had heard, would go to one already abundantly provided. Ah, she must not think of that gold so sorely needed, or bad, unseemly ideas would master her!

But Mr. Newton was speaking. “It is fortunate I was here to be some stay to you,” he said; “the shock must be very great, and—” He interrupted himself hastily to exclaim, “Here is the doctor! I shall go with him into our poor friend’s room; let me find you here when I come back.” Katherine bent her head, and remained in the same attitude, thinking, thinking.

How long it was before the kind lawyer returned she did not know; but he came and stood by her, the doctor behind him.

“It is as I supposed,” said Newton, in a low tone. “Life is quite extinct.” Katherine rose and confronted them, looking very white.

“Yes,” added the doctor; “death must have been instantaneous. Your uncle was in a condition which made him liable to succumb under the slightest shock. Can you give me paper and ink? I will write a certificate at once. Then, Miss Liddell, I shall look to you.”

Katherine placed the writing materials before him silently, and watched him trace the lines; then he handed the paper to Mr. Newton, saying, “You will see to what is necessary I presume,” and rising he took Katherine’s hand and felt her pulse. “Very unsteady indeed; I would recommend a glass of wine now, and at night a composing draught, which I will send. If I can do nothing more I must go on my rounds. I shall be at home again about six, should you require my services in any way.”

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He went out, followed by Mr. Newton, and they spoke together for a few moments before the doctor entered his carriage and drove off.

“Now, my dear,” said Mr. Newton, when he returned—the startling event of the morning seemed to have taken off the sharp edge of his precision—“what shall you do? I suppose you would like to go home. It would be rather trying for you to stay here.”

“To go home!” returned Katherine, slowly. “Yes, I should, oh, very much! but I will not go. My uncle never was unkind to me, and I will stay in his house until he is laid in his last resting place. Yet I do not like to stay alone. May I have my mother with me?”

“Yes, by all means. I tell you what, I will drive over and break the news to her myself; then she can come to you at once. I have a very particular appointment in the city this afternoon, but I shall arrange to spend to-morrow forenoon here, and examine the contents of that bureau. I have thought it well to take possession of your uncle’s keys.”

“Yes, of course,” said Katherine; “you ought to have them. And you will go and send my mother to me! I shall feel quite well and strong if she is near. How good of you to think of it!” and she raised her dark tearful eyes so gratefully to his that the worthy lawyer’s heart kindled within him.

“My dear young lady, I have rarely, if ever, regretted anything so much as my unfortunate absence yesterday, though had I been able to answer my late client’s first summons, I doubt if time would have permitted the completion of a new will. Now my best hope, though it is a very faint one, is that he may have destroyed his last will, and so died intestate.”

“Why?” asked Katherine, indifferently. She felt very hopeless.

“It would be better for you. You would, I rather think, be the natural heir.” Katherine only shook her head. “Of course it is not likely. Still, I have known him destroy one will before he made another. He has made four or five, to my knowledge. So it is wiser not to hope for anything. I shall always do what I can for you. Now you are quite cold and shivering. I would advise your going to your room, and keeping there out of the way. You can do no more for your uncle, and I will send your mother to you as soon as I can. I suppose you have the keys of the house?”

Katherine bowed her head. She seemed tongue-tied. Only when Mr. Newton took her hand to say good-by she burst out, “You will send my mother to me soon—soon!”

Then she went away to her own room. Locking the door, she sat down and buried her face in the cushions of the sofa. She felt her thoughts in the wildest confusion, as if some separate exterior self was exerting a strange power over her. It had said to her, “Be silent,” when Mr. Newton spoke of the possibility of *not* finding the will, and she had

obeyed without the smallest intention to do good or evil. Some force she could not resist—or

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rather she did not dream of resisting—imposed silence on her. To what had this silence committed her? To nothing. When Mr. Newton came and examined the bureau he would no doubt open the drawer of the writing-table also. She had locked it, and put the key in the little basket where the keys of her scantily supplied store closet and of the cellaret lay: there it stood on the round table near the window, with her ink-bottle and blotting-book. She sat up and looked at it fixedly. That little key was all that intervened between her and rest, freedom, enjoyment. The more she recalled her uncle's words and manner on the day he had dictated his first note to Mr. Newton, the more convinced she felt that he had intended to provide for her, and now his intentions would be frustrated, and the will the old man wished to suppress would be the instrument by which his possessions would be distributed.

It was too bad. She did not know how closely the hope of her mother's emancipation from the long hard struggle with poverty and its attendant evils by means of Uncle Liddell's possible bequest had twined itself round her heart. Now she could not give it up. It seemed to her that her mental grasp refused to relax.

She rose and began to make some little arrangement for her mother's comfort, and presently the servant came to ask if she would take some tea.

"I'm sure, miss, you must be faint for want of food, and we are just going to have some —the woman and me."

"What woman?"

"A very respectable person as Dr. Bilham sent in to—to attend to the poor old gentleman, miss."

"Ah! thank you. I could not take anything now. I expect my mother soon; then I shall be glad of some tea.

"Well, miss, you'll ring if you want me. And dear me! you ought to have a bit of fire. I'll light one up in a minnit."

"Not till you have had your tea. I am not cold."

"You look awful bad, miss!" With this comforting assurance Mrs. Knapp departed, leaving the door partially open.

A muffled sound, as if people were moving softly and cautiously, was wafted to Katherine as she sat and listened: then a door closed gently; voices murmuring in a subdued tone reached her ear, retreating as if the speakers had gone downstairs.

Katherine went to the window. It was a wretchedly dark, drizzling afternoon—cold too, with gusts of wind. She hoped Mr. Newton would make her mother take a cab. It was no weather for her to stand about waiting for an omnibus. Would the time ever come when they need not think of pennies?

Suddenly she turned, took a key from her basket, and walked composedly downstairs, unlocked the drawer of the writing-table, and took out her uncle's last will and testament. Then she closed the drawer, leaving the key in the lock, as it had always been, and returned to her room.

Having fastened her door, she applied herself to read the document. It was short and simple, and with the exception of a small legacy to Mr. Newton, left all the testator possessed to a man whose name was utterly unknown to her. Mr. Newton was the sole executor, and the will was dated nearly seven years back.

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Katherine read it through a second time, and then very deliberately folded it up. “It shall not stand in my way,” she murmured, her lips closing firmly, and she sat for a few minutes holding it tight in her hand, as she thought steadily what she should do. “Had my uncle lived a few hours more, this would have been destroyed or nullified. I will carry out his intentions. I wonder what is the legal penalty for the crime or felony I am going to commit? At all events I shall risk it. The only punishment I fear is my mother’s condemnation. She must never know. It is a huge theft, whether the man I rob is rich or poor. I hope he is very rich. I know I am doing a great wrong; that if others acted as I am acting there would be small security for property—perhaps for life—but I’ll do it. Shall I ever be able to hold up my head and look honest folk in the face! I will try. If I commit this robbery I must not falter nor repent. I must be consistently, boldly false, and I must get done with it before my dearest mother comes. How grieved and disappointed she would be if she knew! She believes so firmly in my truthfulness. Well, I have been true, and I *will* be, save in this. Here I will lie by silence. Where shall I hide it? for I will not destroy it—not yet at least. No elaborate concealment is necessary.”

She rose up and took some thin brown paper—such as is used in shops to wrap up lace and ribbons—and folded the will in it neatly, tying it up with twine, and writing on it, “old MSS., to be destroyed.” Then she laid it in the bottom of her box. “If my mother sees it, the idea of old MS. will certainly deter her from looking at it.” She put back the things she had taken out and closed the box; then she stood for a moment of thought. What would the result be? Who could tell? Some other unknown Liddells might start up to share the inheritance. Well, she would not mind that much; so long as she could secure some years of modest competence to her mother, some help for her little nephews, she would be content.

Now that she had accomplished what an hour ago was a scarcely entertained idea, she felt wonderfully calm, but curious as to how things would turn out, with the sort of curiosity she might have felt with regard to the action of another.

She did not want to be still any more, however; she went to and fro in her room, dusting it and putting it in order; she rearranged her own hair and dress, and then she went to the window to watch for her mother. Time had gone swiftly while her thoughts had been so intensely occupied, and to her great delight she soon saw a cab drive up, from which Mrs. Liddell descended.

Katherine flew to receive her, and in the joy of feeling her mother once more by her side she temporarily forgot the sense of a desperate deed which had oppressed her.

Mrs. Liddell had been much shocked by the sudden death of her brother-in-law, but her chief anxiety was to fly to Katie, to shorten the terrible hours of loneliness in the house of mourning.

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She too honestly confessed her regret that the old man had been cut off before he could fulfil his intention of making a new will, “though,” she said to her daughter as they talked together, “we cannot be sure that he would have remembered us—or rather you. But there is no use in thinking of what is past out of the range of possibilities. Let us only hope whoever is heir will not insist on immediate repayment of that loan. It is strange that you should have managed to make the poor old man’s acquaintance, and to a certain degree succeed with him, only in his last days.”

“Try and talk of something else, mother dear. It is all so ghastly and oppressive! Tell me about Ada and the boys.”

“Ada was out when Mr. Newton came. I left a little note telling her of your uncle’s awfully sudden death, and of my intention of remaining with you until after the funeral. What a state of excitement she will be in! I have no doubt she will be here to-morrow.”

“Very likely,” said Katherine, who was pouring out tea.

“Did Mr. Newton mention to you that your uncle had written to him to come and draw up a new will?”

“Why, I wrote the note, which my uncle signed.”

“Yes, of course; I had forgotten. But did Mr. Newton say that he had a faint hope that he might have destroyed the other will?”

“He did; but it is not probable.”

“It would make an immense difference to us if he had.”

“Would it?” asked Kate, to extract an answer from her mother.

“Mr. Newton believes that if he died intestate you would inherit everything.”

“What! would not the little boys share?”

“I am not sure. But to get away from the subject, which somehow always draws me back to it, I have one bit of good news for you, my darling. I had a letter from Santley this morning. He will take my novel, and will give me a hundred and fifty pounds for it.”

“Really? Oh, this is glorious news! I am so delighted! Then you will get more for the next; you will become known and appreciated.”

“Do not be too sure; it may be a failure. And at present I do not feel as if I should ever have any ideas again. My brain seems so weary.”

“Perhaps,” whispered Katherine, “you *may* be able to rest. You are looking very tired and ill.”

Somewhat to her own surprise, Katherine slept profoundly that night. The delicious sense of comfort and security which her mother’s presence brought soothed her ineffably. It seemed as if no harm could touch her while she felt the clasp of those dear arms.

The early forenoon brought Mr. Newton, and after a little preliminary talk respecting the arrangements he had made for the funeral, he proposed to look for the will which he had drawn up some years before, and which, to the best of his recollection, Mr. Liddell had taken charge of himself.

“Might you not wait until the poor old man is laid in his last home? asked Mrs. Liddell.

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“Perhaps it would be more seemly,” said the lawyer; “but it is almost necessary to know who is the heir and who is the executor. Besides, it is quite possible that since he signed the will I drew up for him in ’59, and to which I was executor, he may have made another, of which I know nothing, and I may have to communicate with some other executor. I will therefore begin the search at once. Would you and your daughter like to be present?”

“Thank you, no,” returned Mrs. Liddell.

“I would rather not,” said Katherine.

Mr. Newton proceeded on his search alone, while Mrs. Liddell and her daughter went to the latter’s room, anxious to keep from meddling with what did not concern them.

Scarcely had the former settled herself to write a letter to an old friend in Florence with whom she kept up a steady though not a frequent correspondence, when she was interrupted by a tap at the door. Before she could say “Come in,” it was opened to admit Mrs. Frederic Liddell, who came in briskly. She had taken out a black dress with crape on it, and retouched a mourning bonnet, so that she presented an appearance perfectly suited to the occasion.

“Oh dear!” she cried, “I have been in such a state ever since I had your note! I thought I should never get away this morning. The stupidity of those servants is beyond description. Now do tell all about everything.” She sat down suddenly, then jumped up, kissed her mother-in-law on the brow, and shook hands with Katherine.

“There is very little more to tell beyond what I said in my note,” returned Mrs. Liddell. “The poor old man never spoke or showed any symptom of life after he fell. Mr Newton, of course, will make all arrangements. The funeral will be on Friday, and Katherine and I will remain here till it is over.”

“And the will?” whispered Mrs. Frederic, eagerly. “Have you found out anything about that?”

Mrs. Liddell shook her head. “I have not even asked, so sure am I that it will not affect us in any way. Mr. Newton is now examining the bureau where my brother-in-law appears to have kept all his papers, hoping to find the will.”

“Is it not cruel to think of all this wealth passing away from us?” cried the little woman, in a tearful tone.

“I do not suppose that John Liddell was wealthy,” said Mrs. Liddell. “He was very careful of what he had, but it does not follow that he had a great deal.”

“Oh, nonsense! My dear Mrs. Liddell, you only say that to keep us quiet. Misers always have heaps of money. What do you say, Katherine?”

“That from all I saw I should say he was not rich. He never mentioned large sums of money, or—”

“I do not mind you,” interrupted the young widow. “You always affect to despise money.”

“Indeed I do not, Ada. I am only afraid of thinking too much of it.” Katherine perceived that her mother had wisely abstained from telling the whole circumstances to this most impulsive young person.

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“And do you mean to say,” pursued Mrs. Frederic, who could hardly keep still, so great was her excitement, “that the horrid lawyer is rummaging through the old man’s papers all alone? You ought to be present, Mrs. Liddell. You don’t know what tricks he may play. He may put a will in his own favor in some drawer. It is very weak not to have insisted on being present, and shows such indifference to our interests!”

“I am not afraid of Mr. Newton forging a will,” said Mrs. Liddell, smiling; “and I greatly fear that whoever may profit by the old man’s last testament, we will not. But I assure you Mr. Newton did ask me to assist in the search, and I declined. Indeed I asked him not to search while the poor remains were unburied.”

“Why, my goodness! you do not mean to say you are pretending to be *sorry* for this rude —miser!” cried Mrs. Frederic, with uplifted hand and eyes.

“Personally I did not care about him, but, Ada, death demands respect.”

“Oh yes, of course. Then there is absolutely nothing to do or to hear.”

“Nothing,” said Katherine, rather shortly.

“Could I go out and buy anything for you? Surely the executors, whoever they may be, will give you some money for mourning?”

“I do not think it at all likely. I will tell you what you can do, Ada: go to my large cupboard and bring me,” *etc*., *etc*.—sundry directions followed. “Katherine and I can quite well do all that is necessary ourselves to make a proper appearance on Friday.”

“Very well; and I will come to the funeral too, and bring the boys. A little crape on their caps and sleeves will be quite enough. They will produce a great effect. I dare say if I speak to Mrs. Burnett’s friend, that newspaper man, he will put an account into the *Morning News*, with all our names. Whatever comes, it would have a good effect.”

“Of course you can come if you like, Ada, but I would not bring the boys. Children are out of place except at a parent’s grave.”

“Well, I do not agree with you, and I do not think you need grudge my poor children that much recognition.”

“Poor darlings! Do you believe we could grudge them anything that was good for them?” cried Katherine.

“Oh, there is no knowing! Pray is there any plate in the house, Katherine, or diamonds? You know the nephew’s wife *ought* to have the diamonds!”

“Do not make me laugh, Ada, while the poor man is lying dead!” exclaimed Katherine, smiling. “The idea of plate or diamonds in *this* house is too funny!”

“Then are the spoons and forks only Sheffield ware?” asked her sister-in-law. “How mean!”

After a good deal more cross-examination Mrs. Fred rose to depart, her pretty childish face clouded, not to say very cross.

“I might have saved myself the trouble of coming here,” she said.

“We are very glad to see you, and it will be a great help if you can send or bring the things I want.”

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“Perhaps, if I wait a little longer, this admirable Mr. Newton may find something,” resumed Mrs. Fred, pausing, and reluctant to move.

“If he does I will let you know immediately,” said Katherine; “but there are numbers of little drawers in the bureau; it will take him a long time to look through them all.”

“Have you seen the inside of it?” asked Mrs. Fred, greedily.

“I have seen my uncle writing at it,” returned Katherine; “but I never had an opportunity of examining it.”

“Well, I suppose I had better go. I am evidently not wanted here!” exclaimed Mrs. Frederic, longing to quarrel with some one, being in that condition of mind aptly described as “not knowing what to be at.” Finding no help from her auditors, she went reluctantly away.

“I wish poor Ada would not allow her imagination to run away with her. It will be such a disappointment when she finds it is all much ado about nothing,” said Mrs. Liddell, as she returned to her letter. “I am afraid, Katie dear, you have had a great shock; you do not look a bit like yourself.”

“I feel dazed and stupid, but I dare say I shall be all right to-morrow.” She took a book and pretended to read, while her mother’s pen scratched lightly and quickly over the paper.

The light was beginning to change, when a message from Mr. Newton summoned both mother and daughter to the sitting-room, where they found him awaiting them.

“I have looked most carefully through the bureau, and can find no sign of the will. There are various papers and account-books, a very clear statement of his affairs, and about a hundred and fifteen pounds of ready money, but no will. I have also looked in his writing-table drawer, his wardrobe, and every possible and impossible place. It may be at my office, though I am under the impression he took charge of it himself. There is a possibility he may have deposited it at his banker’s or his stock-broker’s, though that is not probable.”

“It is curious,” remarked Mrs. Liddell, feeling she must say something.

“Pray,” resumed Newton, addressing Katherine, “have you ever seen him tearing up or burning papers?”

She thought for a moment, and then said quietly, “No, I never have.”

“I can do no more here, at least to-day,” Newton went on. “I must bid you a good-afternoon. You may be sure I will leave nothing undone to discover the missing will, and I can only say I earnestly hope I may not be successful.”

CHAPTER X.

“FRUITION.”

The funeral over, Mrs. Liddell and her daughter went back to their modest home, feeling as though they had passed through some strange dream, which had vanished, leaving “not a wrack behind.”

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To Katherine it was like fresh life to return to the natural cheerful routine of her daily cares and employments, to struggle good-humoredly with indifferent servants, to do battle with her little nephews over their lessons, to walk with them and tell them stories. At times she almost forgot that the diligently sought will lay in its innocent-looking cover among her clothes, or that any results would flow from her daring and criminal act; then again the consciousness of having weighted her life with a secret she must never reveal would press painfully upon her, and make her greedy for the moment when Mr. Newton would relinquish the search, and she should reap the harvest she expected.

She never believed that her uncle was as rich as Ada supposed, but she did hope for a small fortune which might secure comfort and ease.

Mrs. Frederic Liddell was a real affliction during this period. The idea of inheriting John Liddell's supposed wealth was never absent from her thoughts, and seldom from her lips. Even the boys were infected by her gorgeous anticipations.

"I shall have a pony like that, and a groom to ride beside me," Cecil would cry when his attention was caught by any young equestrian. "And I will give you a ride, auntie. Shall you have a carriage too, or will you drive with mammy?"

"And I shall have a beautiful dog, like Mrs. Burnett's, and a garden away in the country," was Charlie's scheme. "You shall come and dig in it, auntie."

"Do not think of such things, my dears," was auntie's usual reply. "I am afraid we shall never be any richer than we are; so you must be diligent boys, and work hard to make fortunes for yourselves."

"Where did Uncle Liddell keep all his money?" was one of Cecil's questions in reply. "Did he keep it in big bags downstairs? He hadn't a nice house; it was quite a nasty one."

"Had he a big place in a cave, with trees that grow rubies and diamonds and beautiful things?" added Charlie.

"Why doesn't mamma buy us some ponies now?" continued Cis; "we should be some time learning to ride."

"I will not listen to you any more if you talk so foolishly. Try and think of something else —of the Christmas pantomime. You know grannie says you shall go if you do your lessons well," returned Katherine.

"It isn't silly!" exclaimed Cecil. "Mammy tells us we must take care of her when we are rich men, and that we shall be able to hold up our heads as high as any one. *I* can hold up my head *now*."

Such conversations were of frequent occurrence, and kept Katherine in a state of mental irritation.

Toward the end of October Mrs. Burnett brought relief in the shape of an invitation to Mrs. Frederic.

The Burnett family were spending the “dark days before Christmas” at Brighton, and thither hied the lively young widow in great glee. Things generally went smoother in her absence; the boys were more obedient, the meals more punctual.

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Nevertheless Katherine observed that her mother did not settle to her writing as usual. Occasionally she shut herself up in the study, but when Katherine came in unexpectedly she generally found her resting her elbow on the table and her head on her hand, gazing at the blank sheet before her, or leaning back in her chair, evidently lost in thought.

“You do not seem to take much to your writing, mother dear,” said Katherine one morning as she entered and sat down on a stool beside her.

“In truth I cannot, Katie. I do not know how it is, but no plots will come. I have generally been able to devise something on which to hang my characters and events; but my invention, such as it is—or rather was—seems dried up and withered. What shall I do if my slight vein is exhausted? Heaven knows I produced nothing very original or remarkable, but my lucubrations were saleable, and I do not see how we can do without this source of income.”

“You only want rest,” returned Katherine, taking her hand and laying her cheek against it. “Your fancy wants a quiet sleep, and then it will wake up fresh and bright. Take a holiday; put away pen, ink, and paper; and you will be able to write a lovely story long before the money we expect for your novel is expended.”

“I hope so.” She paused, and then resumed, with a sigh: “I ought to have more sense and self-control at my age, but I confess that the uncertainty about John Liddell’s will absorbs me. Suppose, Katie, that his money were to come to you. Imagine you and I rich enough not to be afraid of the week after next! Why, our lives would be too blissful.”

“They would,” murmured Katherine. “When do you think we shall know?”

“I cannot tell. All possible search must be made before the law can be satisfied. My own impression is that your uncle *did* destroy his will, intending to make a different distribution of his money, and to provide for you.”

“Yes, I believe he did,” said Katherine, quietly. “I wish—oh, I *do* wish my uncle had had time to divide his property between us all; then there would be no ill feeling. But I suppose Cis and Charlie will get some, even if no will is found?”

“I have no idea. If poor Fred had lived, I suppose he would take a share.”

They sat silent for some minutes. Then Kate rose and very deliberately shut up her mother’s writing-book, collected her papers and rough note-book, and locked them away in her drawer. “Now, dearest mother,” she said, “promise me not to open that drawer for ten days at least, unless a very strong inspiration comes to you. By that time we may know something certain about the will, and at any rate you will have had change of occupation. Then put on your bonnet and let us go to see our friend Mrs.

Wray. Perhaps she may let us see her husband's studio, and if he is there we are sure to have some interesting talk. We both sorely need a change of ideas."

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Mrs. Frederic Liddell returned from Brighton in a very thoughtful mood. She said she had had a "heavenly visit." Such nice weather—such a contrast to dirty, dreary, depressing London! She had met several old acquaintances, they had had company every night, and had she only had a third evening dress her bliss would have been complete. As it was, a slight sense of inferiority had taken the keen edge off her joy. "At any rate, the men didn't seem to think there was much amiss with me. Sir Ralph Brereton and Colonel Ormonde were really quite troublesome. I do not much like Sir Ralph. I never know if he is laughing at me or not, though I am sure I do not think there is anything to laugh at in me. Colonel Ormonde is so kind and sensible! Do you know, Mrs. Liddell, he says *I* ought to see Mr. Newton myself, to look after the interests of my darling boys, and—and try to ascertain the true state of affairs. That is what Colonel Ormonde says, and I suppose you wouldn't mind, Mrs. Liddell?" she ended, in a rather supplicating tone; for she was just a little in awe of her mother-in-law, kind and indulgent though she was.

"Go and see Mr. Newton by all means, Ada, if you feel it would be any satisfaction to you; but until the right time comes it will be very useless to make any inquiries. We leave it all to Mr. Newton."

"Oh, you and Katherine are so cold and immovable; you are not a bit like me. I am all sensitiveness and impulse. Well, if it is not raining cats and dogs I *will* go into that awful City and see Mr. Newton to-morrow."

"Would it not be well to make an appointment?"

"Oh dear no! I will take my chance; I would not write. Katie dear, I have torn all the flounce off my black and white dinner dress; you are so much more clever with your needle than I am, would you sew it on for me to-morrow?"

"No, I cannot, Ada—not to-morrow at least. I am busy altering mother's winter cloak, and she has nothing warm to put on until it is finished. I will show you how to arrange the flounce, and you will soon do it yourself if you try."

"Very well"—rather sulkily. "I am sure I was intended to be a rich man's wife, I am *so* helpless."

"And I am sure I was born under 'a three-half-penny constellation,' as L. E. L. said, for I rather like helping myself," returned Katherine, laughing. "Only I should like to have a little exterior help besides."

"Do you know, Katherine, I am afraid you are very proud. I believe you think yourself the cleverest girl in the world."

“I should be much happier if I did,” said Katherine, good-humoredly. “Don’t be a goose, Ada; let my disposition alone. I am afraid it is too decidedly formed to be altered.”

“Colonel Ormonde was asking for you,” resumed Mrs. Frederic, fearing she had allowed her temper too much play. “He is quite an admirer of yours.”

“I am much obliged to him. Would you like to come to the theatre to-night? Mr. and Mrs. Wray have a box at the Adelphi, and have offered us two places. My mother thought you might like to go.”

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“With the Wrays? No, thank you. I never seem to get on with them; and if Colonel Ormonde happens to be there (and he might, for he is in town to-day), I should not care to be seen with them; they are not at all in society, you know.”

“True,” said Katherine, with perfect equanimity. “Then, dear mother, do come. Nothing takes you out of yourself so much as a good play. I shall enjoy it more if you are with us.”

After a little discussion Mrs. Liddell agreed to go, and Mrs. Frederic retired to unpack, and to see what repairs were necessary, in a somewhat sulky mood.

The following morning Mrs. Liddell’s head was aching so severely that her daughter would not allow her to get up. She therefore gave her sister-in-law an early luncheon, and saw her set forth on her visit to Mr. Newton. She was a little nervous about it; she wished Katherine to go with her, and yet she did not wish it.

She attired herself completely in black, and managed to give a mournful “distressed widow” aspect to her toilette: the little woman was an artist in her way, so long as her subject was self and its advantages. Then Katherine devoted herself to her mother, who had taken a chill. It grieved her to see how the slightest indisposition preyed upon her strength.

The period of waiting was terribly long and wearing. Had she, after all, committed herself to an ever-gnawing loss of self-respect to enrich another? Katherine asked herself this question more than once.

She had refrained from troubling Mr. Newton with fruitless questions or impatient expressions, and her mother admired her forbearance. But in truth Catherine hated to approach the subject of her possible inheritance, though she never faltered in her purpose of keeping the existence of her uncle’s will a profound secret.

Mrs. Frederic Liddell returned from her visit to the friendly lawyer rather sooner than Katherine expected.

The moment she entered the drawing-room, where the latter was dusting the few china and other ornaments, her countenance evinced unusual disturbance.

“I am sure,” she began, in a very high key, “if I had known what I was going to encounter, I should have stayed at home. There’s no justice in this world for the widow and the fatherless.”

“I cannot believe that Mr. Newton could be rude or unkind!” exclaimed Katherine, much startled.

“I do not say he was,” returned Mrs. Fred, snappishly. “But either he is a stupid old idiot, or he has been telling me abominable stories. I don’t—I can’t believe them! Do you know he says he, they, all the old rogues together, believe that wretched miser had destroyed his will and died intestate, and that every penny will be yours; not a sou comes to the widow and children of the nephew. It is preposterous. It is the most monstrous injustice. If it is law, an act of Parliament ought to be passed to—to do away with it. Fancy your having everything, and me, my boys and myself, dependent on *you*!”—scornful emphasis on “you.”

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“Is this possible?” exclaimed Katherine, dropping her duster in dismay. “I thought that the property would be divided between the boys and myself.”

“Why, that is only common-sense! If you *do* get everything you will be well rewarded for your three months’ penal servitude. You knew what you were about, though you *do* despise rank and riches.”

“But, Ada, I suppose my uncle would have destroyed his will whether I had been there or not.”

“No. Mr. Newton’s idea is that he intended to make a new will, probably leaving you a large sum, and so destroyed the old one. Mr. Newton thinks he grew to like you. Oh! you played your cards well! But it is too hard to think you cut out my dar-arling boys,” she ended, with a sob.

Katherine grew very white; this outburst of fury roused her conscience. She pulled herself together in an instant of quick thought, however. “This is folly. What I have done will benefit the boys more than myself,” she reflected.

“I do not wonder at your being vexed, Ada,” she said, gently. “But fortunately one is not compelled to act according to law. If the whole of the fortune, whatever it may be, becomes mine, do you think I would keep it all to myself?”

“I am sure I don’t know” said Mrs. Frederic, who had now subsided into the sulks. “When people get hold of money they seldom like to part with it; and I know you do not like *me*?”

“Why should you think so, Ada? We may not agree in our tastes, but that is no reason for dislike; and you know how glad I am to be of use to you, both for your own sake and poor Fred’s.”

“Well, I would rather not be dependent on you or any one. But there! I do not believe what that stupid old man says—I do not believe such a horrible law exists. I shall write and consult Colonel Ormonde, and find out if I could not dispute the will—no, not the will—the property. I should not like to give up my rights.”

“Please, Ada, do not speak so loudly. My mother had just fallen asleep before you came in; and she had such a bad night!”

“Loud? I am not talking loudly. You mean to insinuate I am in a passion? I am nothing of the kind. I am perfectly cool, but determined—determined to have justice, and my fair share of this man’s wealth!”

“It may not be wealth; it may be only competence, and it is not ours to share yet.”

“Not yours, you mean; that is what you *thought*, Katherine. And as to wealth, I believe that cruel old miser was *enor*mously rich! Where are the boys?”

“Out walking with Lottie. I am *so* glad they were not in to hear all this! Do not talk to them of being rich, dear Ada; it puts unhealthy ideas into their minds, and—”

“Upon my word! I like to hear *you*, a mere girl, not quite nineteen yet, advising me, a mother, a married woman, about my own children. You need not presume on your expected riches. *I’ll* never play the part of a poor relation, and submit to be lectured by *you*.”

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Her sister-in-law's stings and passing fits of ill-humor never irritated Katherine unless they worried her mother, nor did this most unwonted outburst of irrepressible indignation, but it distressed her. "Come, Ada, don't be cross," she said. "It was perhaps want of tact in me to suggest anything, though my idea is right enough. It is quite natural that you should be awfully vexed. Perhaps Mr. Newton *is* wrong; at all events, if the law is unjust, *I* need not act unjustly, and believe me, I *will* not."

"I hope not," returned the young widow, a little mollified. "I always believe you haven't a bad heart, Katherine, though you have a disagreeble sullen temper. Now *I* am too open; you see the worst of me at once; but I do not remember unkindness; and if you do what is right in this, I—I shall always speak of you as you deserve. Do get me something to eat; I am awfully hungry, and though I hate beer, I will take some; it is better than nothing. How *you* go on on water I cannot imagine; it will ruin your digestion."

So they went amicably enough into the dining-room together, one to be ministered to, the other to minister.

Here the boys joined them; but for a wonder their mother was silent respecting her visit to the lawyer, and soon went away to write to Colonel Ormonde, on whom she had conferred, unasked, the office of prime counsellor and referee. This opened up a splendid field for letters full of flattering appeals to his wisdom and judgment, and touching little confessions of her own weakness, folly, and need for guidance.

"DEAR MISS LIDDELL,—I should be glad if you could call on Tuesday next about one o'clock. I have various documents to show you, or I should not give you the trouble to come here. If Mrs. Liddell is disengaged and could come also it would be well. I am yours faithfully,

A. NEWTON."

Such was the letter which the first post brought to Katherine about six weeks after the death of John Liddell.

Katherine, who always rose and dressed first, found it on the table when she went down to give the boys their breakfast, to coax the fire to burn brightly if it was inclined to be sulky, and to make the coffee for her mother and Mrs. Fred.

As soon as she had seen the two little men at work on their bread and milk she flew back to her mother.

"Do read this! Do you think that Mr. Newton wants me because I am to have my uncle's money at last?"

“Yes, I do. There can be no other reason for his wishing to see you, dearest child. What a wonderful change it will make if this is the case! I can then cease, to mourn the failure of my poor powers, and let the publishers go free. My love, I did not think anything could affect you so much. You are white and trembling.”

“I have been more anxious than you knew,” returned Katherine, who felt strangely overcome, curiously terrified, at the near approach of success—the success she had ventured on so daring an act to secure. “I greatly feared some other claimant—some other will, I mean—might be found.”

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“Yes, I feared too. Yet there could be no claimant, apart from another will. Poor George, your uncle’s only son, was killed, I remember. Take a little water, dear, and sit down. No, I did not fear another claimant when I thought, but I feared to hope too much.”

“I feel all right now, mother. Such a prospect does not kill. Suppose we say nothing to Ada—she will worry our lives out—not at least till we know our fate certainly?”

“Perhaps it will be better not.”

“And whatever I get we will share with the dear children, and give Ada some too. Oh, darling mother, think of our being alone together again, and tolerably at ease!”

It would be wearisome to the reader were the details of the interview with Mr. Newton minutely recorded.

He was evidently relieved and delighted to announce that all attempts to find the will had failed, and explained at some length to his very attentive listeners the steps to be taken and the particulars of the property bequeathed; how it devolved on Katherine to take out letters of administration; how at her age she had the power of choosing her own guardian for the two years which must elapse before she was of age; and finally that the large amount of which she had become mistress was so judiciously invested that he (Mr. Newton) could advise no change save the transference of stock to her name.

As it dawned upon Katherine that the sum she inherited amounted to something over eighty thousand pounds, she felt dizzy with surprise and fear. She had no idea she had been playing for such stakes. The sense of sudden responsibility pressed upon her; her hands trembled and her cheek paled.

“My dear young lady, you look as if you had met a loss instead of gaining a fortune,” said Mr. Newton, looking kindly at her. “I have no doubt you will make a good use of your money, and I trust will enjoy many happy days.”

“But my nephews, my sister-in-law, do they get nothing?”

“Not a penny. Of course you can, when of age, settle some portion upon them.”

“I certainly will; but in the mean time—”

“In the mean time I will take care that you have a proper allowance.”

“Thank you, dear Mr. Newton. Do get me something big enough to make us all comfortable, and I can share with Ada—with Mrs. Frederic. I do so want to take my

mother abroad, and I could not leave Ada and the boys unless they were well provided for."

"Make your mind easy; the court will allow you a handsome income. So you must cheer up, in spite of the infliction of a large fortune," added Mr. Newton, with unwonted jocularity.

"Both Katherine and myself are warmly grateful for your kind sympathy," said Mrs. Liddell, softly. Then, after a short pause, she asked, "Do you know what became of Mr. Liddell's unfortunate wife?"

"She died eleven or twelve years ago. The family of—of the man she lived with had the audacity to apply for money, on account of her funeral, I think, and so I came to know she was dead. It was a sad business. The poor woman had a wretched life, but I don't think she was in any want."

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“I only asked, because if she was in poverty—”

“Oh,” interrupted the lawyer, “if she were alive, she would have her share of the estate, as her marriage was never dissolved.”

A short pause ensued, and then Newton asked if Miss Liddell would like some money, as he would be happy to draw a check for any sum she required. Then, indeed, Katherine felt that her days of difficulty were over.

Mrs. Liddell and her daughter were in no hurry to leave their humble home. In truth Katherine was more frightened than elated at the amount of property she had inherited, and would have felt a little less guilty had she only succeeded in obtaining a moderate competence.

A curious stunned feeling made her incapable of her usual activity for the first few days, and averse even to plan for the future.

She kept her sister-in-law quiet by a handsome present of money wherewith to buy a fresh outfit for herself and her boys. Finally she roused up sufficiently to persuade Mrs. Liddell to see an eminent physician, for she did not seem to gather strength as rapidly as her daughter expected.

The great man, after a careful examination, said there was nothing very wrong; the nervous system seemed to be a good deal exhausted, and the bronchial attack of the previous year had left the lungs delicate, but that with care she might live to old age.

He directed, however, that Mrs. Liddell should go as soon as possible to a southern climate. He recommended Cannes or San Remo—indeed it would be advisable that several winters in future should be spent in a more genial atmosphere than that of England.

This advice exactly suited the wishes both of Katherine and her mother.

How easy it was to make arrangements in their altered circumstances! How magical are the effects of money! How quickly Katherine grew accustomed to the unwonted ease of her present lot! *If*—oh, if—she were ever found out, how should she bear it? How could she endure the pinch of poverty, added to the poison of shame? But the idea that all this wealth was really *hers* gained on her, while her fears were lulled to sleep by a pleasant sense of comfort and security.

Mrs. Frederic Liddell was a good deal disturbed on hearing that her mother-in-law was ordered abroad.

“Pray what is to become of *me*?” was her first question when Katherine announced the doctor’s verdict. They were sitting over the fire in the drawing-room, after the boys had said good-night.

“Would you prefer staying in England?” asked Mrs. Liddell.

“For some reasons I should, but you know I *must* have something to live on.”

“I know that,” returned Katherine. “As I cannot execute any any deed of gift for two years, I think I had better give you an allowance for yourself and the boys, and let you do as you like. I have talked with Mr. Newton about it.”

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“Well, dear, I think it *would* be the best plan,” said Mrs. Frederic, amiably. “I have not the least scruple in taking the money, because you know it ought really to be ours.”

“Exactly,” returned Katherine, with a slight smile, and she named so liberal a sum that even Mrs. Fred was satisfied.

“Well, I am sure that is very nice, dear,” she said; “and when you are of age will you settle it on my precious boys?”

“I will,” replied Katherine, deliberately; “and I hope always to see a great deal of them.”

“Of course you will, but you will not long be Katherine Liddell. When Mr. Wright comes, my boys will get leave to stay with their mother as much as they like.”

“I do not think I shall easily forget them, even if Mr. Wright appears,” said Katherine, good-humoredly.

“What a strange girl Katie is!” pursued her sister-in-law. “Was she never in love, Mrs. Liddell? Had she never any admirers?”

“Not that I know of, Ada.”

“Oh! I have been in love many times!” cried Katherine, laughing. “Don’t you remember, mother, the Russian prince I used to dance with at Madame du Lac’s juvenile parties? —I made quite a romance about him; and that young Austrian—I forget his name—-whom we met at Stuttgart, Baron Holdenberg’s nephew; he was charming, to say nothing of Lohengrin and Tannhauser. I have quite a long list of loves, Ada. Oh, I *should* like to dance again! To float round to the music of a delightful Austrian band would be charming.”

“My dear Katherine, that is all nonsense, as you will find out one day.” Then, after some moments of evidently severe reflection, her brows knit, and her soft baby-like lips pressed together she said: “I think I should like to move nearer town, and get a nice nursery governess for Cis and Charlie, and—Don’t you think it would be a good plan?”

“The governess, yes, as they will lose their present one when Katherine goes. But why not stay on here till next autumn, when the lease or agreement expires? You will have it all to yourself in about ten days, and it will be quite large enough,” said Mrs. Liddell.

“Stay on here!” began her daughter-in-law, in a high key, and with a look of great disgust. She stopped herself suddenly, however, smoothed her brow, and added, “Well, I will think about it,” after which, with unusual self-control, she changed the subject, and talked gravely about governesses, their salaries and qualifications, till it was time to go to bed.

A few days after this conversation the house was invaded by a host of applicants for the post of instructress to the two little boys. Every shade of complexion, all possible accomplishments, the most varied and splendid testimonials, were presented to the bewildered little widow, in consequence of her application to a governesses' institution. She was fain to ask Katherine to help her in choosing, much to the latter's satisfaction, as she did not like to offer assistance, though she wished to influence the choice of a preceptress. Together they fixed on a quiet, kindly looking young woman, to whom both took rather a fancy, and Katherine felt very much relieved to know that this important point was settled.

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But Mrs. Frederic did not seem at ease; there was a restlessness about her, a disinclination to leave the house, that attracted Katherine's notice, although she was much occupied with preparations for their departure. At last the mystery was solved.

One afternoon Mrs. Liddell and Katherine had been a good deal later than usual in returning home, having determined to finish their shopping and take a few days' complete rest before starting on their travels.

Mrs. Frederic met them with a heightened color and a curious embarrassed look. The drawing room was lit by a splendid fire, and sweet with the perfume of abundant hot-house flowers; there was something vaguely prophetic in the air.

"Do come to the fire, dear Mrs. Liddell; you must be so cold! I have been quite uneasy about you," she exclaimed, effusively.

"Have you had a visitor, Ada?" asked Katherine, whose suspicions were aroused.

"I have, and I want to tell you all about it. I am far too candid to keep anything from those I love. My visitor was Colonel Ormonde. He asked me to marry him, and—and, dear Mrs. Liddell—Katherine—I hope you will not be offended, but I—I said I would," burst forth Mrs. Frederic; and then she burst into tears.

There was a minute's silence. Katherine flushed crimson, and did not speak, but Mrs. Liddell said, kindly: "My dear Ada, if you think Colonel Ormonde will make you happy and be kind to the boys, you are quite right. I never expected a young creature like you to live alone for the rest of your existence, and I believe Colonel Ormonde is a man of character and position."

"He is indeed," cried Ada, falling on her mother-in-law's neck. "You are the wisest, kindest woman in the world. And you, Katherine?"

"I *do* hope you will be *very, very* happy," responded Katherine; "but I must say I think he is rather too old for you. That, however, is your affair."

"Yes, of course it is"—leaving Mrs. Liddell to hug Katherine. "I am quite fond of him; that is, I esteem and like him. Of course I shall never love any one as I did my dear darling Fred; but I do want some one to help me with the boys, and Marmaduke (that's his name) is quite fond of them. So now, dear Mrs. Liddell, I will stay on here till—till I am married, if you don't mind."

"It is the best thing you can do, Ada. I wish we could stay and be present at your marriage."

"But that is impossible," cried Katherine.

“And not at all necessary,” added Mrs. Frederic, hastily. “My friend Mrs. Burnett will help me in every way, and I have been trouble enough already.”

“I do not think so,” said Mrs. Liddell, quietly. “But I am very weary. I will go to my room. Katie dear, bring me some tea presently.”

And the widow escaped to rest, perhaps to weep over the bright boy so dear to her, so soon forgotten by the wife of his bosom.

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Not many days after, Katherine and her mother set forth upon their travels, leaving nothing they regretted save the two little boys, respecting whose fate Katherine felt anything but satisfied. Of this she said nothing to her mother. And so, with temporary forgetfulness of the deed which was destined to color her whole life, she saw the curtain fall on the first act of her story.

CHAPTER XI.

"A NEW PHASE."

"An interval of three weeks—six months—ten years," as the case may be—"is supposed to have elapsed since the last act." This is a very commonly used expression in play-bills, and there seems no just cause or impediment why a story-teller should not avail himself of the same device to waft the patient reader over an uneventful period, during which the hero or heroine has been granted a "breathing space" between the ebb and flow of harrowing adventures and moving incidents.

It was, then, more than two years since the last chapter, and a still cold day at the end of February—still and somewhat damp—in one of the midland shires—say Clayshire. The dank hedges and sodden fields had a melancholy aspect, which seemed to affect a couple of horsemen who were walking their jaded, much-splashed horses along a narrow road, or rather lane, which led between a stretch of pasture-land on one side and a ploughed field on the other. The red coats and top-boots of both were liberally besprinkled with mud; even their hats had not quite escaped. Their steeds hung their heads and moved languidly; both horses and riders had evidently had a hard day's work. Presently the road sloped somewhat steeply to a hollow sheltered at one side by a steep bank overgrown with brushwood and large trees. The country behind the huntsmen was rather flat and very open, but from this point it became broken and wooded, sloping gradually up toward a distant range of low blue hills.

"Ha, you blundering idiot!" exclaimed the elder of the two men, pulling up his horse, a powerful roan, as he stumbled at the beginning of the descent. He was a big, heavy man with a red face, thick gray mustache, and small, angry-looking eyes. "He'll break my neck some day."

"Don't take away his character," returned his companion, laughing. "Remember he has had a hard run, and you are not a feather-weight." The speaker was tall (judging from the length of the well-shaped leg which lay close against his horse's side), large-framed, and bony; his plain strong face was tanned to swarthiness by exposure to wind and weather; moreover, a pair of deep-set dark eyes and long, nearly black mustache showed that he had been no fair, ruddy youth to begin with.

“No, by Jove!” exclaimed the first speaker. “I don’t understand how it is that I grow so infernally stout. I am sure I take exercise enough, and live most temperately.”

“Exercise! Yes, for five or six months; the rest of the twelve you do nothing. And as to living temperately, what with a solid breakfast, a heavy luncheon, and a serious dinner, you manage to consume a great deal in the twenty-four hours.”

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“Come, De Burgh! Hang it, I rarely eat lunch.”

“Only when you can get it. Say two hundred and ninety times out of the three hundred and sixty-five days of the year.”

“I admit nothing of the sort. The fact is, what I eat goes into a good skin. Now you might *cram* the year round and be a bag of bones at the end of it.”

“Thank God for all his mercies,” replied De Burgh. “The fact is, you are a spoiled favorite of fortune, and in addition to all the good things you have inherited you pick up a charming wife who spoils you and coddles you in a way to make the mouth of an unfortunate devil like myself water with envy.”

“None of that nonsense, De Burgh,” complacently. “The heart of a benedict knoweth its own bitterness, though I can’t complain much. If you hadn’t been the reckless *roue* you are, you might have been as well off as myself.”

De Burgh laughed. “You see, I never cared for domestic bliss. I hate fetters of every description, and I lay the ruin of my morals to the score of that immortal old relative of mine who persists in keeping me out of my heritage. The conviction that you are always sure of an estate, and possibly thirty thousand a year, has a terrible effect on one’s character.”

“If you had stuck to the Service you’d have been high up by this time, with the reputation you made in the Mutiny time, for you were little more than a boy then.”

“Ay, or low down! Not that I should have much to regret if I were. I have had a lot of enjoyment out of life, however, but at present I am coming to the end of my tether. I am afraid I’ll have to sell the few acres that are left to me, and if that gets to the Baron’s ears, good-by to my chance of his bequeathing me the fortune he has managed to scrape together between windfalls and lucky investments. The late Baroness had a pot of money, you know.”

“I know there’s not much property to go with the title.”

“A beggarly five thousand a year. I say, Ormonde, are you disposed for a good thing? Lend me three thousand on good security? Six per cent., old man!”

“I am not so disposed, my dear fellow! I have a wife and my boy to think of now.”

“Exactly,” returned the other, with a sneer. “You have a new edition of Colonel Ormonde’s precious self.”

“Oh, your sneers don’t touch me! You always had your humors; still I am willing to help a kinsman, and I will give you a chance if you like. What do you say to a rich young wife —none of your crooked sticks?”

“It’s an awful remedy for one’s financial disease, to mortgage one’s self instead of one’s property; still I suppose I’ll have to come to it. Who is the proposed mortgagee?”

“My wife’s sister.”

“Oh!”

The tone of this “Oh!” was in some unaccountable way offensive to Colonel Ormonde. “Miss Liddell comes of a very good old county family I can tell you,” he said, quickly; “a branch of the Somerset Liddells; and when I saw her last she was the making of an uncommon fine woman.”

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“But your wife was a Mrs. Liddell, was she not?”

“Yes. This girl is her sister-in-law, really, but Mrs. Ormonde looks on her as a sister.”

“Hum! She *has* the cash? I suppose you know all about it?”

“Well, yes, you may be sure of sixty or seventy thousand, which would keep you going till Lord de Burgh joins the majority.”

“Yes, that might do; so ‘trot her out.’”

“She is coming to stay with us in a week or two, before the hunting is quite over, so you will be down here still.”

“I suspect I shall. The lease of the lodge won’t be out till next September, and I may as well stay there as anywhere.”

“Katherine Liddell is quite unencumbered; she has neither father nor mother, nor near relation of any kind; in fact Mrs. Ormonde and myself are her next friends, and in a few weeks she will be of age.”

“All very favorable for her,” said De Burgh, in his careless, commanding way. His tones were deep and harsh, and though unmistakably one of the “upper ten,” there was a degree of roughness in his style, which, however, did not prevent him from being rather a favorite with women, who always seemed to find his attentions peculiarly flattering.

“Come,” cried Ormonde, “let us push on. I am getting chilled to the bone, and we are late enough already.”

He touched his horse with the spur, and both riders urged their steeds to a trot. Turning a bend of the road, they came suddenly upon a young lady accompanied by two little boys, in smart velvet suits. They were walking in the direction of Castleford—walking so smartly that the smaller of the two boys went at a trot. “Hullo!” cried Colonel Ormonde, pulling up for an instant. “What are you doing here? I hope the baby has not been out so late?”

“Baby has gone to drive with mother,” chorussed the boys eagerly, as if a little awed.

“All right! Time you were home too,” and he spurred after De Burgh.

“Mrs. Ormonde’s boys?” asked the latter.

“Yes; have you never seen them?”

“I knew they existed, but I cannot say I ever beheld them before.”

“Oh, Mrs. Ormonde never bores people with her brats.”

“After they are out of infancy,” returned the other, dryly.

A remark which helped to “rile” Colonel Ormonde, and he said little more till they reached their destination, and both retired to enjoy the luxury of a bath before dressing for dinner.

John de Burgh was a distant relation of Ormonde’s, but having been thrown together a good deal, they seemed nearer of kin than they really were. De Burgh was somewhat overbearing, and dominated Colonel Ormonde considerably. He was also somewhat lawless by nature, hating restraint and intent upon his own pleasure. The discipline of military life, light as it is to an officer, became intolerable to him when the excitement and danger of real warfare were past, and he resigned his commission to follow his own sweet will.

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Ultimately he became renowned as a crack rider, and one of the best steeple-chase jockeys on the turf in all competitions between gentlemen.

Mrs. Ormonde considered him quite an important personage, heir to an old title, and first or second cousin to a host of peers. It took many a day to accustom her to think of her husband's connections without a sense of pride and exultation, at which Ormonde laughed heartily whenever he perceived it. On his side De Burgh thought her a very pretty little toy, quite amusing with her small airs and graces and assumption of fine-ladyism, and he showed her a good deal of indolent attention, at which her husband was rather flattered.

The rector of the parish and one or two officers of Colonel Ormonde's old regiment, which happened to be quartered at a manufacturing town a few miles distant, made up the party at dinner that evening, and afterward they dropped off one by one to the billiard-room, till Mrs. Ormonde and De Burgh found themselves *tete-a-tete*.

"Do you wear black every night because it suits you down to the ground?" he asked, after very deliberately examining her from head to foot, when he had thrown down a newspaper he had been scanning.

"No; I am in mourning. Don't you see I have only black lace and jet, and a little crape?"

"Ah! and that constitutes mourning, eh? Well, there is very little mourning in your laughing eyes. Who is dead?"

"My mother-in-law."

"Your mother-in-law! I didn't know Ormonde——"

"I mean Mrs. Liddell; and I am quite sorry for her; she was wonderfully fond of me, and very kind."

"Why, what an angel you must be to fascinate a *belle-mere*! Then the dear departed must be the mother of that Miss Liddell whom Ormonde was recommending to me this afternoon?"

"Who—my husband? How silly! She would not suit you a bit."

"Well, Ormonde thought her fortune might."

"Oh, her fortune! that is another thing. But she will not be so very rich if she fulfils her promise to settle part of her fortune on my boys. You see, if their poor father had lived, he would have shared their uncle's money with his sister. Now it is too hideously unjust that my poor dear boys should have nothing, and Katherine is very properly going to make it up to them."

“A young woman with a very high sense of justice. A good deal under the influence of her charming sister-in-law, I presume.”

“Well, rather,” returned Mrs. Ormonde, with an air of superiority. “Katherine is a mere enthusiastic school-girl, easily imposed upon. Both Colonel Ormonde and myself feel bound to look after her.”

“Will she let you?” asked De Burgh, dryly.

“Of course she will. She knows nothing of the world, or at least very little, for she did not go much into society while they were abroad.”

“Has she been abroad?”

“Yes; Mrs. Liddell was out of health when Katherine came into this money, and they have been away in Italy and Germany and Paris for quite two years. They were on their way home when Mrs. Liddell was taken ill. She died in Paris, of typhoid fever, just before Christmas.”

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“Two years in Italy, Germany, and Paris,” repeated De Burgh; “she can’t be quite a novice, then.”

“Oh, she thinks she knows a great deal; and she *is* a nice girl, though curious and fanciful. I like her very much indeed, but I do not fancy *you* would. She is certainly obstinate. Instead of coming direct to us, and making her home here, as we were quite willing she should, she has gone to Miss Payne, a woman who, I believe, exists by acting chaperon to rich girls with no relations. Fancy, she has absolutely agreed to live with this Miss Payne for a year before consulting us, or asking our consent—or—or anything!”

“Is she not a minor?”

“She will be of age in a week or two, and it makes me quite nervous to think that other influences may prevent her keeping her promise to my boys. It is a mercy she did not marry some greedy foreigner while she was under age. Fortunately, men never seemed to take a fancy to Katherine.”

“They will be pretty sure to take a fancy to her money.”

“I think she lived so quietly people did not suspect her of having any. She is awfully cut up about the death of her mother, and does not go anywhere. I hope she will come down here next week. The only person I am afraid of is a horrid stiff old lawyer who seems to be her right hand man. He went over to Paris when Mrs. Liddell died, and did everything, instead of sending for Colonel Ormonde! I felt quite hurt about it.”

“Ha! a shrewd old lawyer is bad to beat,” said De Burgh, looking at his lively informant with half-closed eyes and an amused expression. “I wouldn’t be too sure of your sister if I were you. Under such guidance the young lady may alter her generous intentions.”

“Pray do not say such horrible things, Mr. De Burgh!” cried Mrs. Ormonde, growing very grave, even pathetic, and looking inclined to cry. “What would become of me—I mean us—if she changed her mind? ’Duke would be furious; he would never forgive me.”

“Pooh! nonsense! a man would forgive a woman like you anything.”

“A woman, perhaps, but not his wife,” she returned, shaking her head. “But I won’t think of anything so dreadful. I am quite sure Katie will never break her word; she is awfully true.”

“That is rather an alarming character. You make me quite curious. What is she like—-anything like you?”

“Not a bit. You know, she is only my sister-in-law. She is tall and large, and much more decided”—looking up in his face with a caressing smile.

“I understand. Not a delicate little darling, made for laughter and kisses, and sugar, and spice, and all that’s nice, like *you*.” This with an insolent, admiring look. “Not a woman to fall in love with, but useful as a wife to keep one’s household up to the collar.”

“Really, Mr. De Burgh, you are very shocking! You must not say such things to me.”

“Mustn’t I? How shall you prevent me? I am a relative, you know. You can’t treat me as a stranger.”

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“You are quite too audacious—” she was beginning, when a slim young cornet came back from the billiard-room.

“The Colonel wants you, Mrs. Ormonde,” he said; “and you too, De Burgh. We are not enough for pool, and you play a capital game, Mrs. Ormonde.”

“What are the stakes?” asked De Burgh, rising readily enough.

“Oh, I can’t play well at all,” said Mrs. Ormonde, following him with evident reluctance. “Certainly not when Colonel Ormonde is looking on.”

“Oh, never mind him. I’ll screen you from his hypercritical eyes,” returned De Burgh, as he held the door open for her to pass out.

So it was, after a spell of heavenly tranquility, as Katherine and her mother were on their way to England, intending to make a home in or near London, Mrs. Liddell had been struck down with fever, and Katherine was left unspeakably desolate. Then she turned to her old friend Mr. Newton, and found him of infinite use and comfort.

A short space of numb inaction followed, during which she fully realized the loneliness of her position, and from which she roused herself to plan her future.

At the time Mrs. Liddell was first attacked with fever they had just renewed their acquaintance with a Miss Payne, whom they had met in Rome and at Berlin. She was not unknown in society, for she came of a good old county family, and was half-sister of the Bertie whose name has already appeared in these pages.

Their father, with an old man’s pride in a handsome only son, had left the bulk of his fortune to Bertie, while Hannah, who had ministered to his comfort and borne his ill-humor, inherited only a paltry couple of hundred a year, with a fairly well furnished house in Wilton Street, Hyde Park. Her brother would have willingly added to this pittance, but she sternly refused to accept what did not of right belong to her. Bertie went with his regiment to India, whence he returned a wiser, a poorer, and a physically weaker man.

His sister, whose business instincts were much too strong to permit her wrapping up such a “talent” as a freehold house in the napkin of unfruitful occupation, looked round to see how she could best turn it to account. Accident threw in her way a girl of large fortune with no relations, whose guardians, thankful to find a respectable home for her, readily agreed to pay Miss Payne handsomely for taking charge of the orphan. Her first *protegee* married well, under her auspices, and from henceforth her house was rarely empty. Sometimes she accepted a roving commission and travelled with her charge, meanwhile letting her house in town, so making a double profit. It was on one of these expeditions that she was introduced to Mrs. and Miss Liddell. There was an air of

sincerity and common-sense about the composed elderly gentlewoman which rather attracted the former, and, when they met again in Paris, Miss Payne came to Katie in her trouble and proved a brave and capable nurse; nor was she unsympathetic, though far from effusive. So, finding that Miss Payne's last young lady had left her, Katherine, with the approval of Mr. Newton, proposed to become her inmate for a year—an arrangement entirely in accordance with Miss Payne's wishes.

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“I did not know you were acquainted with Miss Liddell,” she said one evening when she was sitting with her brother, Katherine having retired early, as she often did. “It is quite a surprise to me.”

“I can hardly say I am acquainted with her; I happened to be of some slight use to her once, and I met her after by accident, when we spoke; that is all.”

“I wonder she did not mention it to me.”

“I imagine she hardly knew my name.” Miss Payne uttered an inarticulate sound between a h’m and a groan, by which she generally expressed indefinite dissent and disapprobation. Then she rose and walked to the dwarf bookcase at the end of the room to fetch her tatting. She was tall and slight. Following her, you might imagine her young, for her figure was good and her step brisk. Meeting her face to face, her pale, slightly puckered cheeks, closely compressed lips, keen light eyes, and crisp pepper-and-salt hair—Cayenne pepper, for it had once been red—suggested at least twenty or twenty-five additional years as compared with the back view.

Returning to her seat, she began to tat, slowing drawing each knot home with a reflective air.

“That woman is hunting her up,” she exclaimed suddenly, after a few minutes’ silence, during which Bertie looked thoughtfully at the fire—his quiet face, with its look of unutterable peace, the strongest possible contrast to his sister’s hard, shrewd aspect.

“What woman?” asked, as if recalled from a dream.

“Mrs. Ormonde. There was a telegram from her this afternoon. She has been worrying Miss Liddell to go to them ever since she set foot in England; and as that won’t do, she is coming up to-morrow to see what personal persuasion will do.”

“I dare say Mrs. Ormonde is fond of her sister-in-law. She is too well off to have any mercenary designs.”

“Is that all your experience has taught you?” (contemptuously). “If there is any truth in hand-writing, that Mrs. Ormonde is a fool. Her letter after Mrs. Liddell’s death, which Katherine showed me because it touched her, was the production of an effusive idiot. I don’t trust sentimentalists; they seldom have much honesty or justice. Katherine Liddell is a little soft too, but she is by no means so asinine as the others I have had. Wait, however—wait till some man takes her fancy; that is the divining-rod to show where the springs of folly lie.”

“Miss Liddell is a good deal changed,” returned Bertie, slowly. “She looks considerably older. No, that is not the right expression: I mean she seems more mature than when I

saw her before. What she says is said deliberately; what she does is with the full consciousness of what she is doing; but she looks as if she had suffered."

"She has," said Miss Payne, with an air of conviction. "Her grief for her mother was, is, deep and real. I don't believe in floods of tears—they are a relief."

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“Yes; and though she looks so pale and sad, she is not a whit less beautiful than she was.”

“Beautiful!” repeated Miss Payne. “I rather admire her myself, but I don’t think any one could call her beautiful.”

“Perhaps not. There is so much expression in her face, such feeling in her eyes, that not many really beautiful women would stand comparison with her.”

Miss Payne sniffed, and then she smiled. “She is not a commonplace young woman, though I fear she is easily imposed upon. I am afraid she may be snapped up by some plausible fortune-hunter.”

Bertie frowned slightly. “I trust she may be guided to happiness with some good, God-fearing man,” he said, and then, he bid his sister good-night somewhat abruptly.

Meantime, Katherine sat plunged in thought beside the fire in her bedroom. She was not given to weeping, but she was profoundly sad. To find herself again in London without her mother seemed to renew the intense grief which had indeed lost but little of its keenness. Never had a mother been more terribly missed. They had been such sympathetic friends, such close companions; they had had such a hearty respect for and appreciation of each other’s qualities, such a pleasant comprehension of each other’s different tastes, that it would be hard to fill the place of the dear, lost comrade with whom she had hitherto walked hand in hand. It soothed her to think of the delightful tranquility Mrs. Liddell had enjoyed for the last two years, of the untroubled sweetness of their intercourse, of her mother’s last contented words: “I am quite happy, dear. Your future is secure, and you have never given me a moment’s pain. We have had such delightful days together!”

How could she have borne to have seen a pained, anxious look—such a look as was once familiar to them—in those dear eyes, as they closed forever on this mortal scene! Oh, thank God for the heavenly security of those last days whatever the price she had paid for them!

Motherless, she was utterly desolate. It would be long, long before she could find any one to fill her mother’s place, if she ever did. For the present she was satisfied to stay with Miss Payne, but she did not think she could ever love her. The idea of residing with Colonel Ormonde and his wife was distasteful. The most attractive scheme was to beg her little nephews from their mother, and take them to live with her. She was almost of age, and *felt* old enough to set up for herself. As she pondered on these things she felt bitterly that, rich or poor, a homeless woman is a wretched creature.

At last she went to bed, and lay for a while watching the fire-light as it cast flickering shadows, thinking of the tender, watchful love which had dropped away out of her life; and with the murmured words, “Dear, dear mother!” on her lips she fell asleep.

The next day broke bright and clear, though cold, and having kept Katherine at home all day, Mrs. Ormonde made her appearance in time for afternoon tea.

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“My dear, dearest Katherine!” cried the little woman, fluttering in, all fur and feathers, in the richest and most becoming morning toilette, looking prettier and younger than ever, “I am *so* delighted to see you once more! Why have you staid in town, instead of coming straight to us?” and she embraced her tall sister-in-law effusively.

Katherine returned her embrace. For a moment or two she could not command her voice; the sight of the known childish face, the sound of the shrill familiar voice, brought a flood of sudden sorrow over her heart; but Mrs. Ormonde was not the sort of woman to whom she could express it.

“And *I* am very glad to see *you*, Ada! How well you are looking—even younger and fairer than you used!”

“Yes, I am uncommonly well; and you, dear, you are looking pale and ill and older! You will forgive me, but I am quite distressed. You must come down to Castleford at once.”

“Thank you. Where are the boys? I hoped you would bring them.”

“Oh, Colonel Ormonde thought they would be too troublesome for me in a hotel, so I left them behind. They were awfully disappointed, poor dears; but it is better *you* should come down and see them. Cecil is going to school after Easter, and I believe Charlie must go soon.”

“I long to see them,” said Katherine, assisting her visitor to take off her cloak.

“And *I* long to show you my new little boy,” cried Mrs. Ormonde, drawing a chair to the fire, and putting her small, daintily shod feet on the fender. “He is a splendid child, amazingly forward for six months.”

“I am glad you are so happy, Ada; I shall be pleased to make the acquaintance of my new nephew. I suppose I may consider him a sort of nephew?”

“My dear, of *course*! Colonel Ormonde, as well as myself, is proud to consider you his aunt. Yes, I am very happy—though Ormonde *is* rather provoking sometimes; still, he is not half bad, and I know how to manage him. You are *such* a favorite with my husband, Katie. He admires you so much, I sometimes threaten to be jealous—why, what is the matter, dear?”

Katherine had suddenly covered her face with her handkerchief and burst into tears.

“Do not mind me, Ada!” she said, when she could speak. “It was just that name; no one has called me Katie except my mother and you, and the idea that I should never hear her speak again overpowered me for a moment.”

Mrs. Ormonde was puzzled. Not knowing what to do in face of a great grief, she took out her own pocket-handkerchief politely.

“Of course, dear,” she said; “it is quite natural. I was awfully cut up when I heard of your sad loss—and mine too, for I am sure Mrs. Liddell loved me like her own child; it was quite wonderful for a mother-in-law. I was afraid to speak to you about her, but I am sure she would like you to live with us; it is your natural home. And—and she would, I am sure, be pleased if she can know what is going on here below, to see that you fulfilled your kind intentions to her poor little grandsons.” These last words with some hesitation.

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Katherine kept silence, and still held her handkerchief to her eyes. So Mrs. Ormonde resumed: "A good, religious girl like you, Katherine, must feel that it is right to submit to the will of—"

"Yes, yes; I know all about that," interrupted Katherine, who was rather irritated than soothed by her sister-in-law's attempt at preaching; and recovering herself, she added: "I will not worry you with my tears. Tell me how the boys get on with Colonel Ormonde."

"Very well indeed, especially Cecil. 'Duke is very kind. They have a pony, and quite enjoy the country; but now that we have a boy of our own, we feel doubly anxious that Cis and Charlie should be permanently provided for; so do, dear, come back with me, and talk it all over with my husband. He is *such* a good man of business."

Katherine smiled faintly; she had not seen the drift of Mrs. Ormonde's remarks at first; there was no mistaking them now. A slightly mischievous sense of power kept her from setting her sister-in-law's mind at rest immediately.

"I do not think it necessary to consult with Colonel Ormonde, Ada, for I have quite made up my mind what to do. I think you may trust your boys to me. I must see Mr. Newton and arrange many matters, so I do not think I can go to you just yet. Then, I do not like to be in the way, and I could *not* mix in society just yet. Oh, I am not morbid or sentimental, but some months of seclusion I *must* have."

Mrs. Ormonde played with the tassel of the screen with which she sheltered her face from the fire while she thought: "What can she really mean to do? I wonder if she is engaged to any one, and waiting for him here? Once she is married, good-by to a settlement. She is awfully deep!" Then she said aloud, coaxingly, "Oh, we are very quiet home-staying people. We have a few men to stay now and again, but we never give big dinners. Tell me the truth, dear, are you not engaged? It would be but natural. A charming girl like you, with a large fortune, could not escape a multitude of lovers."

"You are wrong, Ada. I am not engaged, and I have no lovers. Of course a prince or two and a German graf did me the honor of proposing to annex my property, taking myself with it. Any well-dowered girl may expect such offers in Continental society; but they did not affect me."

"No, no; certainly not! It will be an Englishman. Quite right. And 'Duke must find out all about him. You know, dear, you would marry ever so much better from *my* house than you possibly could *here*, with a person who, after all, merely keeps a *pension*."

"If Miss Payne could hear you!" said Katherine.

"Oh, I should never say it to her. But, Katherine, now is your time, when you are of age, and before you marry—now is the time to settle whatever you intend to settle on my

poor little boys. I am sure you will excuse me for mentioning it, won't you? Between you and me, I don't think 'Duke would have married if he had not believed you would provide for Cis and Charlie. I don't know what would become of us if they were thrown on his hands."

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“You need not fear,” cried Katherine, quickly. “My nephews shall never cost Colonel Ormonde a sou.”

“No, I was sure you wouldn’t, dear, you are such a kind, generous creature, so unselfish. I do hate selfishness, and though the allowance you now give is very handsome—”

“I am to make it a little larger,” put in Katherine, good-humoredly, as Mrs. Ormonde paused, not knowing how to finish her sentence. “Be content, Ada; you shall have due notice when I have made all my plans. I have a good deal to do, for I ought to make my will too.”

“Your will! Oh yes, to be sure. I never thought of that. But if you marry it will be of no use.”

“Until I *am* married it will be of use.”

“And when do you intend to come to us?”

“Oh, some time next month.”

“I hope so. I want to come up for a while after Easter, and am trying to get the Colonel to take a house; *that* depends on you a good deal. If you would join me in taking a house for three months he would agree at once.”

“But I have just agreed to stay with Miss Payne for a year.”

“How foolish! how short-sighted!” cried Mrs. Ormonde. “You will be just lost in a second-rate place like this.”

“It will suit me perfectly. I only want rest and peace at present. I dare say it will not be so always.”

“Well, I know there is no use in talking to you. You will go your own way. Only, as I am in town, *do* come to my dressmaker’s. Though you had your mourning in Paris, do you know, you look quite dowdy. You’ll not mind my saying so?”

“I dare say I do. Miss Payne got everything for me.”

“Oh, are you going to give yourself into her hands blindfold? I am afraid she is a designing woman. You really must get some stylish dresses. You must do yourself justice.”

“I have as many as I want, and there is no need of wasting money, even if you have a good deal. How many poor souls need food and clothes!”

“Oh, Katherine, if you begin to talk in that way, you will be robbed and plundered to no end.”

“I hope not. Here is tea, and Miss Payne. I will come and see you to-morrow early, and bring some little presents for the boys.”

CHAPTER XII.

“I WAS A STRANGER AND YE TOOK ME IN.”

Mrs. Ormonde lingered as long as she could. Bond Street was paradise to her, Regent Street an Elysian Field. While she staid she gave her sister-in-law little peace, and until she had departed Katherine did not attempt to go into business matters with Mr. Newton. She was half amused, half disgusted, at Mrs. Ormonde’s perpetual reminders, hints, and innuendoes touching the settlement on her boys. Ada was the same as ever, yet Katherine liked her for the sake of the memories she evoked and shared.

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It was quite a relief when she left town, and Katherine felt once more her own mistress. Her heart yearned for her little nephews, but she felt it was wiser to wait and see them at home rather than send for them at present. She greatly feared that the new baby, the son of a living, prosperous father, was pushing the sons of the first husband—who had taken his unlucky self out of the world, where he had been anything but a success—-from their place in her affections.

Meantime she held frequent consultations with Mr. Newton, who was very devoted to her service, and anxious to do his best for her. He remonstrated earnestly with her on her over-generosity to her nephews. "Provide for them if you will, my dear young lady, but believe me you are by no means called upon to *divide* your property with them. Do not make them too independent of you; hold something in your hand. Besides, you do not know what considerations may arise to make you regret too great liberality."

"I have very little use for money now," said Katherine, sadly.

"You have always been remarkably moderate in your expenditure," returned the lawyer, who had the entire management of her affairs. "But now you will probably like to establish yourself in London, say, for headquarters."

"Not for the present. I shall stay where I am until some plan of life suggests itself."

"Perhaps you are right, and certainly you are a very prudent young lady."

This conversation took place in Mr. Newton's office, and after some further discussion Katherine was persuaded to settle a third instead of the half of her property on her nephews, out of which a jointure was to be paid to Mrs. Ormonde.

"I wish I could have the boys with me," said Katherine, as she rose to leave Mr. Newton.

"My dear Miss Liddell, take care how you saddle yourself with the difficult task of standing *in loco parentis*; leave the very serious responsibilities of bringing up boys to the mother whose they are. At your age, and with the almost certainty of forming new ties, such a step would be very imprudent."

"At all events I shall see how they all get on at Castleford before I commit myself to anything. You will lose no time, dear Mr. Newton, in getting this deed ready for my signature. I do not want to say anything about it till it is 'signed, sealed, and delivered.'"

"It shall be put in hand at once. When shall you be going out of town?"

"Not for ten days or a fortnight."

"The sooner the better. I do not like to see you look so pale and sad. Excuse me if I presume in saying so. Well, I don't think your uncle ever did a wiser act than in

destroying that will of his before he made another. The extraordinary instinct he had about money must have warned him that his precious fortune would be best bestowed on so prudent yet so generous a young lady as yourself."

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“Don’t praise me, Mr. Newton,” said Katherine, sharply. “Could you see me as I see myself, you would know how little I deserve it.”

“I am sure I should know nothing of the kind,” returned the old lawyer, smiling. Katherine was a prime favorite with him—quite his ideal of a charming and admirable woman. All he hoped was that when the sharp edge of her grief had worn off she would mix in society and marry some highly placed man worthy of her, a Q.C., if one young enough could be found, who was on the direct road to the woolsack.

The evening of this day Bertie Payne came in, as he often did after dinner. Katherine was always pleased to see him. He brought a breath of genial life into the rather glacial atmosphere of Miss Payne’s drawing-room. Yet there was something soothing to Katherine in the orderly quiet of the house, in the conviction, springing from she knew not what, that Miss Payne liked her heartily in her steady, undemonstrative fashion. She never interfered with Katherine in any way; she was ready to go with her when asked, or to let her young guest go on her own business alone and unquestioned, while she saw to her comfort, and proved much more companionable than Katherine expected.

On this particular evening which marked a new mental epoch for Katherine Liddell, the two companions were sitting by the fire in Miss Payne’s comfortable though rather old-fashioned drawing-room, the curtains drawn, the hearth aglow, Miss Payne engaged on a large piece of patchwork which she had been employed upon for years, while Katherine read aloud to her. This was a favorite mode of passing the evening; it saved the trouble of inventing conversation—for Miss Payne was not loquacious—and it was more sympathetic than reading to one’s self. Miss Payne, it need scarcely be said, had no patience with novels; biography and travels were her favorite studies; nor did she disdain history, though given to be sceptical concerning accounts of what had happened long ago. She had never been so happy and comfortable with any of her *protegees* as with Katherine, though, as she observed to her brother, she did not expect it to last. “Stay till she is a little known, and the mothers of marriageable sons get about her; then it will be the old thing over again—dress, drive, dance, hurry-scurry from morning till night. However, I’ll make the most of the present.”

Miss Payne, then, and her “favored guest” were cozily settled for the evening when Bertie entered.

“May I present myself in a frock coat?” he asked, as he shook hands with Katherine. “I have had rather a busy day, and found myself in your neighborhood just now, so could not resist looking in.”

“At your usual work, I suppose,” said Miss Payne, severely. “Pray have you had anything to eat?”

“Yes, I assure you. I dined quite luxuriously at Bethnal Green about an hour and a half ago.”

“Ha! at a coffee-stall, I suppose; a cup of coffee and a ha’p’orth of bread. I must insist on your having some proper food.” Miss Payne put forth her hand toward the bell as she spoke.

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“Do not give yourself the trouble; I really do not want anything, nor will I take anything beyond a cup of tea.” Bertie drew a chair beside Katherine, asked what she was reading, and talked a little about the news of the day. Then he fell into silence, his eyes fixed on the fire, a very grave expression stilling his face.

“What are you thinking of?” asked his sister. “What misery have you been steeping yourself in to-day?”

“Misery indeed,” he echoed. Then, meeting Katherine’s eyes fixed upon him, he smiled. “Of course I see misery every day,” he continued, “but I don’t like to trouble you with too much of it. To-day I met with an unusually hard case, and I am going to ask you for some help toward righting it.”

“Tell me what you want,” said Katherine.

“Are you sure the story is genuine?” asked Miss Payne.

“I am quite sure. I went into Bow Street Police Court to-day, intending to speak to the sitting magistrate about some children respecting whom he had asked for information, when I was attracted by the face of a woman who was being examined; she was poorly clad, but evidently respectable—like a better class of needle-woman. I never saw a face express such despair. It seemed she had been caught in the act of stealing two loaves from the shop of a baker. The poor creature did not deny it. Her story was that she had been for some years a widow; that she had supported herself and two children by needle-work and machine-work. Illness had impoverished her and diminished her connection, other workers having been taken on in her absence. In short she had been caught in that terrible maelstrom of misfortune from which *no* one can escape without a helping hand. Her sewing machine was seized for rent; one article after another of furniture and clothes went for food; at last nothing was left. She roamed the city, reduced to beg at last, and striving to make up her mind to go to the workhouse, the cry of the hungry children she had left in her ears. At several bakers’ shops she had petitioned for food and had been refused. At last, entering one while the shop-girl’s back was turned, she snatched a couple of small loaves and rushed out into the arms of a policeman, who had seen the theft through the window.”

“And would the magistrate punish her for this?” asked Katherine, eagerly.

“He must. Theft is theft, whatever the circumstances that seem to extenuate it. Nothing, no need, gives a right to take what does not belong to you. But, for all that, I am certain the poor creature has been honest hitherto, and deserves help. She is committed to prison for stealing, and I promised her I would look to her children; so I have been to see them, and took them to the Children’s Refuge that you were kind enough to subscribe to, Miss Liddell. To-morrow we must do what we can for the mother. I imagine it is worse than death to her to be put in prison.”

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“I do not wonder at it,” ejaculated Miss Payne. “And in spite of what you say, Bertie, I should not like to give any materials to be made up by a woman who deliberately stole in broad daylight.”

“I do not see that the light made any difference,” returned Bertie; and they plunged into a warm discussion. Katherine soon lost the sense of what they were saying. Her heart was throbbing as if a sudden stunning blow had been dealt her, and the words, “Theft is theft, whatever the circumstances that seem to extenuate it,” beat as if with a sledge-hammer on her brain.

If for a theft, value perhaps sixpence, this poor woman, who had been driven to it by the direst necessity, was exposed to trial, to the gaze of careless lookers-on, to loss of character, to the exposure of her sore want, to the degradation of imprisonment, what should be awarded to her, Katherine Liddell, an educated gentlewoman, for stealing a large fortune from its rightful owner, and that, too, under no pressure of immediate distress? True, she firmly believed that had her uncle not been struck down by death he would have left her a large portion of it; that she had a better right to it than a stranger. Still that did not alter the fact that she was a thief. If every one thus dared to infringe the rights of others, what law, what security would remain?

These ideas had never quite left her since the day she had written “Manuscript to be destroyed” on the fatal little parcel, which had been ever with her during her various journeyings since. More than once she had made up her mind to destroy it, but some influence—some terror of destroying this expression of what her uncle once wished—had stayed her hand; her courage stopped there. Perhaps a faint foreshadowing of some future act of restitution caused this reluctance, unknown to herself, but certainly at present no such possibility dawned upon her. She felt that she held her property chiefly in trust for others, especially her nephews. Often she had forgotten her secret during her mother’s lifetime, but the consciousness of it always returned with a sense of being out of moral harmony, which made her somewhat fitful in her conduct, particularly as regarded her expenditure, being sometimes tempted to costly purchases, and anon shrinking from outlay as though not entitled to spend the money which was nominally hers. Nathan’s parable did not strike more humiliating conviction to Israel’s erring king than Bertie Payne’s “ower true tale.” At length she mastered these painful thoughts, and sought relief from them in speech.

“What do you think of doing for this poor woman?” she asked, taking a screen to shelter her face from the fire and observation.

“I have not settled details in my own mind yet,” he said; “but as soon as she is released I must get her into a new neighborhood and redeem her sewing-machine. Then, if we can get her work and help her till she begins to earn a little, she may get on.”

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“Pray let me help in this,” said Katherine, earnestly. “I live quite a selfish life, and I should be thankful if you will let me furnish what money you require.”

“That I shall with great thankfulness. But, Miss Liddell, if you are anxious to find interesting work, why not come and see our Children’s Refuge and the schools connected with it? Then there is an association for advancing small sums to workmen in time of sickness, or to redeem their tools, which is affiliated to a ladies’ visiting club, the members of which make themselves acquainted personally with the men and their families.”

“I shall be most delighted to go with you to both, but I do not think I could do any good myself. I am so reluctant to preach to poor people, who have so much more experience, so much more real knowledge of life, than I have, merely because they *are* poor.”

“I do not want you to do so, but I think personal contact with the people you relieve is good both for those benefited and their benefactor.”

“I suppose it is; and those poor old people who cannot read or are blind, I am quite willing to read to them if they like it.”

“I can find plenty for you to do, Miss Liddell,” Bertie was beginning when his sister broke in with:

“This is quite too bad, Bertie. You know I will not have you dragging my young friends to catch all sorts of disorders in the slums. You must be content with Miss Liddell’s money.”

“Miss Payne, I really do wish to see something of the work on which your brother is engaged, and—forgive me if I seem obstinate—I am resolved to help him if I can.”

The result of the conversation was that the greater portion of the contents of Miss Liddell’s purse was transferred to Bertie’s, and he left them in high spirits, having arranged to call for Katherine the next day in order to escort her to the Children’s Refuge and some other institutions in which he took an interest.

From this time for several weeks Katherine was greatly occupied in the benevolent undertakings of her new friend. The endless need, the degradations of extreme poverty, the hopeless condition of such masses of her fellow-creatures, depressed her beyond description. She would gladly have given to her uttermost farthing, but it would be a mere drop in the ocean of misery around.

“Even if we could supply their every want, and give each family a decent home,” she said to Bertie one evening as she walked back with him, “they would not know how to keep it or to enjoy it. If the men, and the women too, have not the tremendous

necessity to labor that they may live, they relax and become mere brutes. We must, above all things, educate them."

"Yes, education is certainly necessary; but the most ignorant being who has laid hold on the Rock of Ages, who has received the spirit of adoption whereby he can cry, 'Abba, Father!' has a means of elevation and refinement beyond all that books and art can teach," cried Bertie, with more warmth than he usually allowed himself to show.

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“You believe that? I cannot say I do. We need other means of moral and intellectual life besides spiritualism. At least I have tried to be religious, but I always get weary.”

“That is only because you have not found the straight and true road,” said Bertie, earnestly. “Pray, my dear Miss Liddell—pray, and light will be given you.”

“Thank you—you are very good,” murmured Katherine “At all events, though we can do but little, it is a comfort to help some of these poor creatures, especially the children and old people.”

“It is,” he returned. “And if it be consolatory to minister to their physical wants, how much more to feed their immortal souls!”

Katherine was silent for a few minutes, and then said: “It is impossible they can think much about their souls when they suffer so keenly in their bodies. Poverty and privation which destroy self-respect cannot allow of spiritual aspiration. Is it to be always like this—one class steeped in luxury, the other grovelling in cruel want?”

“Our Lord says, ‘Ye have the poor always with you,’” returned Bertie. “Nor can we hope to see the curse of original sin lifted from life here below until the great manifestation; in short, till Shiloh come.”

“Do you think so? I do not like to think that Satan is too strong for God,” said Katherine, thoughtfully.

Bertie replied by exhorting her earnestly not to trust to mere human reason, to accept the infallible word of God, “and so find safety and rest.” Katherine did not reply.

“I think you could help me in a difficult case,” said Bertie, a few days after this conversation.

“Indeed!” said Katherine, looking up from the book she was reading by the fire after dinner. “What help can I possibly give?”

“Hear my story, and you will see.”

“I shall be most happy if I can help you. Pray go on.”

“You know Dodd, the porter and factotum at the Children’s Refuge? Well, Dodd has a mother, a very respectable old dame, who keeps a very mild sweety shop, and also sells newspapers, *etc*. Mrs. Dodd, besides these sources of wealth, lets lodgings, and seems to get on pretty well. Now Dodd came to me in some distress, and said, ’Would you be so good, sir, as to see mother? she wants a word with you bad, very bad.’ I of course said I was very ready to hear what she had to say. So I called at the little shop, which I often pass. I found the old lady in great trouble about a young woman who had

been lodging with her for some time. She, Mrs. Dodd, did not know that her lodger was absolutely ill, but she scarcely eats anything, she never went out, she sometimes sat up half the night. Hitherto she had paid her rent regularly, but on last rent-day she had said she could only pay two weeks more, after which she supposed she had better go to the workhouse. When first she came she used to go out looking for work, but that ceased, and she seemed in a half-conscious

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state. As I was a charitable gentleman, would I go and speak to her? Well, rather reluctantly, I did. I went upstairs to a dreary back room, and found a decidedly lady-like young woman, neatly dressed enough, but ghastly white with dull eyes. She seemed to be dusting some books, but looked too weary to do much. She was not surprised or moved in any way at seeing me. When I apologized for intruding upon her, she murmured that I was very good. Then I asked if I could help her in any way. She thanked me, but suggested nothing. When I pressed her to express her needs, she said that life was not worth working for, but that she supposed they would give her something to do in the workhouse, and she would do it. As for seeking work, she could not, that she was a failure, and only cared not to trouble others. I was quite baffled. She was so quiet and gentle, and spoke with such refinement, that I was deeply interested. I called again this morning, and she would hardly answer me. As she is young (not a great deal older than yourself), perhaps a lady—a woman—might win her confidence. She seems to have been a dressmaker. Could you not offer her some employment, and draw her from the extraordinary lethargy which seems to dull her faculties? No mind can hold out against it; she will die or become insane."

"It is very strange. I should be very glad to help her, but I feel afraid to attempt anything. I shall be so awkward. What can I say to begin with?"

"Your offering her work would make an opening. Do try. I am sure her case needs a woman's delicate touch."

"I will do my best," said Katherine. "It all sounds terribly interesting. Shall I go to-morrow?"

"Yes, by all means. I am so very much obliged to you. I feel you will succeed."

"Don't be too sure."

The next day, a drizzling damp morning, Katherine, feeling unusually nervous, was quite ready when Bertie called for her. The drive to Camden Town seemed very long, but it came to an end at last, all the sooner because Bertie stopped the cab some little way way from the sweety shop.

"I have brought a young lady to see your invalid," said Bertie, introducing Katherine to Mrs. Dodd, a short broad old lady, with a shawl neatly pinned over her shoulders, a snowy white cap with black ribbons, and a huge pair of spectacles, over which she seemed always trying to look.

"I'm sure it's that kind of you, sir. And I *am* glad you have come. The poor thing has been offering me a nice black dress this morning to let her stay on. It's the last decent

thing she has. I expect she has been just living on her clothes. I'll go and tell her. Maybe miss will come after me, so as not to give her time to say no?"

Katherine cast a troubled look at Bertie. "Don't wait for me," she said; "your time is always so precious. I dare say I can get a cab for myself." And she followed Mrs. Dodd up a steep narrow dark stair.

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“Here is a nice lady come to see you,” said Mrs. Dodd, in a soothing tone suited to an infant or a lunatic.

“No, no; I don’t want any lady; I would rather not see any lady,” cried a voice naturally sweet-toned, but now touched with shrill terror. Curiously enough, this token of fear gave Katherine courage. Here was some poor soul wanting comfort sorely.

“Do not forbid me to come in,” she said, walking boldly into the room, and addressing the inmate with a kind bright smile. “I very much want some needle-work done, and I shall be glad if you will undertake it.” While she spoke, Mrs. Dodd retired and softly closed the door. Katherine found herself face to face with a ladylike-looking young woman, small and slight—slight even to extreme thinness—fair-skinned, with large blue eyes, delicate features, a quantity of fair hair carelessly coiled up, and with white cheeks. The strange pallor of her trembling lips, the despair in her eyes, the shrinking, hunted look of face and figure, almost frightened her visitor. “I hope you are not vexed with me for coming in,” faltered Katherine, deferentially; “but they said you wanted employment, and I should like to give you some. You must be ill, you look so pale. Can I not be of some use to you?”

The girl’s pale cheek flushed as, partially recovering herself, she stood up holding the back of her chair, her eyes fixed on the floor; she seemed endeavoring to speak, but the words did not come. At last, in a low, hesitating voice: “You are too good. I have tried to find work vainly; now I do not think I have the force to do any.” The color faded away from the poor sunken cheeks, and the eyes hid themselves persistently under the downcast lids.

“I am sure you are very weak,” returned Katherine, tenderly, for there was something inexpressibly touching in the hopelessness of the stranger’s aspect. “But some good food and the prospect of employment will set you up, When you are a little stronger and know me better you will perhaps tell me how Mr. Payne and I can best help you. We all want each other’s help at times; and life must not be thrown away, you know. I do not wish to intrude upon you, but you see we are nearly of an age, and we ought to understand and help each other. It is my turn now; it may be yours by-and-by.”

“Mine!” with unspeakable bitterness.

“Do sit down,” said Katherine, who felt her tears very near her eyes, “and I will sit by you for a little while. Why, you are unfit to stand, and you are so cold!” She pulled off her gloves, and taking one of the poor girl’s hands in both her own soft warm ones, chafed it gently. No doubt practically charitable people would smile indulgently at Katherine’s enthusiastic sympathy; but she was new to such work, and felt that she had to deal with no common subject. Whether it was the tender tone or the kindly touch, but the hard desperate look softened, and big tears began to roll down, and soon she was weeping

freely, quietly, while she left her hand in Katherine's, who held it in silence, feeling how the whole slight frame shook with the effort to control herself.

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At length Katherine rose and went downstairs to take counsel with Mrs. Dodd. "She seems quite unable to recover herself. Ought she not to have a little wine or something?"

"Yes, miss; it's just *that* she wants. She is nigh starved to death."

"Have you any wine?"

"Well, no, miss; but there's a tavern round the corner where you can get very good port from the wood. I'll send the girl for a pint."

"Pray do, and quickly, and some biscuits or something; here is some money. What is her name?"

"Trant—Miss Trant," returned Mrs. Dodd, knowing who her interrogator meant. "Leastways we always called her miss, for she is quite the lady."

Katherine hurried back, and found Miss Trant lying back in her chair greatly exhausted. With instinctive tact Katherine assumed an air of authority, and insisted on her patient eating some biscuits soaked in wine.

Presently Miss Trant sat up, and, as if with an effort raised her eyes to Katherine's. "I am not worth so much trouble," she said. "You deserve that I should obey you. It is all I can do to show gratitude. If, then, you will be content with very slow work, I will thankfully do what you wish; but I must have time."

"So you shall," cried Katherine, delightedly. "You shall have plenty of time to make me a dress; that will be more amusing than plain work. I will bring you the material to-morrow, and if you fit me well, you know, it may lead to a great business;" and she smiled pleasantly.

"What is your name?" asked the patient, feebly. Katherine told her. "You are so good, you make me resigned to live."

"Do you care to read?"

"I used to love it; but I have no books, nor could I attend to the sense of a page if I had."

"If you sit here without book or work, I do not wonder at your being half dead."

"Not nearly half dead yet; dying by inches is a terribly long process. I am dreadfully strong."

"I will not listen to you if you talk like that. Well, I will bring you some books—indeed, I will send you some at once if you will promise to read and divert your thoughts. To-

morrow afternoon I will come, you shall take my measure (I like to be made to look nice), and you shall begin again."

"Begin again! Me! That would be a miracle."

"Now try and get a little sleep," said Katherine, "your eyes look so weary. You want to stop thinking, and only sleep can still thought. When you wake you shall find some of the new magazines, and you must try and attend to them."

"I will, for your sake."

"Good-by, then, till to-morrow;" and having pressed her hand kindly, Katherine departed.

It was quite a triumph for Katherine to report her success to Bertie that evening. Miss Payne rather shook her head over the whole affair.

"I must say it puts me on edge altogether to hear you two rejoicing over this young woman's condescension in accepting the work you lay at her feet, while such crowds of starving wretches are begging and praying for something to do; and here is a mysterious young woman with lady-like manners and remarkable eyes, taken up all at once because she won't eat and refuses to speak. It isn't just. I suspect there is something in her past she does not like to tell."

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“Your *resume* of the facts makes Mr. Payne and me seem rather foolish,” said Katherine. “Yet I am convinced she is worth helping, and that no common methods will do to restore to her any relish for life. She interests me. I may be throwing away my time and money, but I will risk it.”

“It is hard to say, of course, whether she is a deserving object or not,” added Bertie, thoughtfully; “and I have been taken in more than once.”

“More than once?” echoed his sister in a peculiar tone.

“Still, I feel with Miss Liddell that this girl’s, Rachel Trant’s, is not a common case,” continued Bertie.

“Her very name is suggestive of grief,” said Katherine, “and she, too, refuses to be comforted. I am sure she will tell me her story later. Her landlady says she never receives or sends a letter, and does not seem to have a creature belonging to her. Such desolation is appalling.”

“And shows there is something radically wrong,” added Miss Payne.

“I acknowledge that it has a dubious appearance,” said Bertie, and turned the conversation.

Katherine was completely taken out of herself by the interest and curiosity excited by her meeting with Rachel Trant. She visited her daily, and saw that she was slowly reviving. She took a wonderful interest in the dress which Katherine had given her to make, and, moreover, succeeded in fitting her admirably. She was evidently weak and unequal to exertion, yet she worked with surprising diligence. Her manner was very grave and collected—respectful, yet always ready to respond to Katherine’s effort to draw her out.

The subject on which she spoke most readily was the books Katherine lent her. Her taste was decidedly intelligent and rather solid. To the surprise of her young benefactress, she expressed a distaste for novels—stories, as she called them. “I used to care for nothing else,” she said; “but they pain me now.” She expressed herself like an educated, even refined, woman; and though she said very little about gratitude, it showed in every glance, in the very tone of her voice, and in her ready obedience to whatever wish Katherine expressed. The greatest sacrifice was evidently compliance with her new friend’s suggestion that she should take exercise and breathe fresh air.

Miss Payne, after critically examining Katherine’s new garment, declared it really well made, inquired the cost, and finally decided that she would have an every-day dress for herself, and that “Miss Trant” should make it up. Then Katherine presented the elegant

young woman who waited on her with a gown, promising to pay for the making if she employed her protegee.

“Miss Trant” could not conceal her reluctance to come so far from the wilds of Camden Town; but she came, closely muffled in a thick gauze veil, doubtless to guard against cold in the chill March evening. Katherine was immensely pleased to find that both gowns gave satisfaction, though the “elegant young woman’s” praise was cautious and qualified.

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CHAPTER XIII.

RECOGNITION.

“After all, life is inexhaustible,” said Katherine.

She was speaking to Rachel Trant, who had laid aside her work to speak with the good friend who had come, as she often did, to see how she was going on and to cheer her.

“Life is very cruel,” she returned. “Neither sorrow nor repentance can alter its pitiless law.

“Still, there are compensations.” Katherine did not exactly think what she was saying; her mind was filled with the desire of knowing her interlocutor’s story.

“Compensations!” echoed Rachel. “Not for those who deserve to suffer, nor, indeed, often for the innocent. I don’t think we often find vice punished and virtue rewarded in history and lives—true stories, I mean—as we do in novels.”

Katherine did not reply at once; she thought for a moment, and then, looking full into Rachel’s eyes, said: “I wonder how you came to be a dressmaker? You have read a great deal for a girl who must have had her hands full all day. I am not asking this from idle curiosity, but from real interest.”

“I may well believe you. I should like to tell you much; but—” She paused and grew very white for a second, her lips trembling, and a troubled look coming into her eyes. “I always loved reading,” she resumed; “it has been almost my only pleasure, though I was apprenticed to a milliner and dressmaker when little more than sixteen. Then I went to work with another, a very great person in her way, and I like the work. Still I used to think I was a sort of lady; my poor mother certainly was.”

“I am sure of it,” cried Katherine, impulsively. “I quite feel that *you* are.”

“Thank you,” said Rachel, in a very low voice, the color rising to her pale cheek. “My mother was so sweet and pretty,” she continued, “but so sad! I was an orphan at ten years old, and then a very stiff, severe-looking woman, the sister of my father, had charge of me. I was sent to a school, a kind of institution, not exactly a charity school, for I know something was paid for me. It was a very cold sort of place, but I was not unhappy there. I had playfellows—some kind, some spiteful. One of the governesses was very good to me, and used to give me books to read. Had she remained, things might have been very different; but she left long before I did. The rare holidays when I was permitted to visit my father’s sister were terrible days to me. She could not bear to see me. I felt it. She seemed to think my very existence was an offence. I was ashamed of living in *her* presence. Of my father I have a very faint recollection. He

died abroad, and I remember being on board ship for a long time with my mother. When I was sixteen my father's sister sent for me, and told me that the money my mother left was nearly exhausted, and what remained ought to provide me with some trade or calling by

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which I could earn my own bread; that she did not think I was clever enough to be a governess, so she advised my to apprentice myself to a dressmaker. I had seen enough of teaching in school, so I took her advice. At the same time she gave me some papers my mother had left for me. *They* fully explained why my existence was an offence—why I belonged to nobody. It was a bitter hour when I read my dear mother's miserable story. I felt old from that day. Well, I thanked my father's sister—mind you, she was not my aunt—for what she had done, and promised she should never more be troubled with me. I have kept my word."

Katherine, infinitely touched by the picture of sorrow and loneliness this brief story conjured up, took and pressed the thin quivering hand that played nervously with a thimble. Rachel glanced at her quickly, compressed her lips for an instant, and went on:

"I will try and tell you all. You ought to know. As far as work went, I did very well. I loved to handle and drape beautiful stuffs—I enjoy color—and it pleased me to fit the pretty girls and fine ladies who came to our show-rooms. It was even a satisfaction to make the plain ones look better. I should have made friends more easily with my companions but for the knowledge of what I was. Even this I might have got over—I am not naturally morbid—but I could not share their chatter and jests, or care for their love affairs. They were not bad, poor things! but simply ordinary girls of a class to which it would have been, perhaps, better for me to belong. With my employers I did fairly well. They were sometimes just, sometimes very unjust; but when I was out of my time, and receiving a salary, I found I was a valued *employee*. Then it came into my mind that I should like to found a business—a great business. It seemed rather a 'vaulting ambition' for so humble a waif as myself. But I began to save even shillings and sixpences. I tried to kill my heart with these duller, lower aims, it ached so always for what it could not find. I began to think I was growing so useful to madame that she might make me a partner; for even in millinery mental training is of use." She stopped, and clasping her hands, she rested them on her knee for a few moments of silence, while her brow contracted as if with pain. "It is dreadfully hard to go on!" she exclaimed at length, and her voice sounded as if her mouth were parched.

"Then do not mind now; some other time," said Katherine, softly.

"No," cried Rachel, with almost fierce energy; "I *must* finish. I cannot leave *you* ignorant of my true story." She paused again, and then went on quickly, in a low tone: "I don't think I was exactly popular—certainly not with the men employed in the same house. I was thought cold and hard, and to me they were all utterly uninteresting. One or two of the girls I liked, and they were fond of me." Another pause. Then she pushed

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on again: “One evening I went out with another girl and her brother—at least she said he was her brother—to see the illuminations for the Queen’s birthday. In Pall Mall we got into a crowd caused by a quarrel between two drunken men. I was separated from my companions, and one of the crowd, also tipsy, reeled against me. I should have been knocked down but for a gentleman who caught me; he had just come down the steps from one of the clubs. I thanked him. He kindly helped me to find my companions. He came on with us almost to the door of Madame Celine’s house. He talked frankly and pleasantly. Two days after I was going to the City on madame’s business. He met me. He said he had watched for me. There! I cannot go into details. We met repeatedly. For the first time in my life I was sought, and, as I believed, warmly loved. I knew the unspeakable gulf that opened for me, but I loved him. At last there was light and color in my poverty-stricken existence.” She stopped, and a glow came into her sad eyes. “I was bewildered, distracted, between the passion of my heart and the resistance of my reason. I ceased to be the efficient assistant I had been. I was rebuked, and looked upon coldly. Six months after I had met *him* first, I gave madame warning. I said I was going into the country. So I was, but not alone. No one asked me any questions; no one had a right. I belonged to no one, was responsible to no one, could wound no one. I was quite alone, and, oh, so hungry for a little love and joy!” She paused, and then resumed rapidly, “I was that man’s unwedded wife for nearly two years.” She rested her arm on the table, and hid her face with her hand.

Katherine listened with unspeakable emotion. The eloquent blood flushed cheek and throat with a keen sense of shame. She had read and heard of such painful stories, but to be face to face with a creature who had crossed the Rubicon, overpassed the great gulf, which separates the sheep from the goats was something so unexpected, so terrible, that she could not restrain a passionate burst of tears. “Ah,” she murmured at last, “you were cruelly deceived, no doubt. You are too hard upon yourself. You——”

“No, Miss Liddell; I am trying to tell you the whole truth. The man I loved never deceived me—never held put any hope that we could marry. He was not rich; there were impediments—what, I never knew. But I thought such love as he professed, and at the time felt for me, would last; and so long as he was mine, I wanted nothing more. Have you patience to hear more, or have I fallen too low to retain your interest?”

“Ah, no! tell me everything.”

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“I was very happy—oh, intensely happy for a while. Then a tiny cloud of indifference, thin and shifting like morning mist, rose between us. It darkened and lowered. He was a hasty, masterful man, but he was never rough to me. Gradually I came to see that time had changed me from a joy to a burden. How was it I lived? How was it I shut my eyes and hoped? At last he told me he was obliged to go abroad, but that he could not take me with him; and then proposed to establish me in some such undertaking as my late employer’s. When he said *that,* I knew all was over; that nothing I could do or say would avail; that I had been but a toy; that he could not conceive what my nature was, nor the agony of shame, the torture of rejected love, he was inflicting. I contrived to keep silent and composed. I knew I had no right to complain: I had risked all and lost. I managed to say we might arrange things later, and he praised me for being a sensible, capital girl. I had seen this coming, or I don’t suppose I could have so controlled myself. But I could not accept his terms. I had a little money and some jewels; I thought I might take these. So I wrote a few lines, saying that I needed nothing, that he should hear of me no more, and I went away out into the dark. If I could only have died then! I was too great a coward to put an end to my life. Why do I try to speak of what cannot be put into words? Despair is a grim thing, and all life had turned to dust and ashes for me. I could not even love him, though I pined for the creature I *had* loved, who once understood me, but from whose heart and mind I had vanished when time dulled his first impression, and to whom I became even as other women were. But as I could not die, I was obliged to work, and there was but one way. I dreaded to be found starving and unable to give an account of myself, so I applied to one of those large general shops where they neither give nor expect references. There I staid for some months, so silent, so steeled against everything, that no one cared to speak to me. I dare not even think of that time. I do not understand how I managed to do anything. At last I grew dazed, made blunders, and was dismissed. I wandered here. I failed to find employment, and felt I could do no more. Still death would *not* come, I think my mind was giving way when *you* came. Now am I worth helping, now that you know all?”

“Yes. I will do my best for you. Suffering such as yours must be expiation enough,” cried Katherine, her eyes still wet. “Put the past behind you, and hope for the better days which *will* come if you strive for them. But, oh! tell me, did *he* never try to find you?”

“Yes. I saw advertisements in the paper which were meant for me; but after a while they ceased, and no doubt I was forgotten. I reaped what I had sown. Few men, I imagine, can understand that there are hearts as true, as strong, as tenacious, among women such as I am as among the irreproachable, the really good. I have no real right to complain; only it is *so* hard to live on without hope or—” She stopped abruptly.

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“Hope will come,” said Katherine, gently; “and time will restore your self-respect. I should be so glad to see you build up a new and better life on the ruins of the past! I am sure there is independence and repose before you, if you will but fold down this terrible page of your life and never open it again.”

“And can you endure to touch me—to be to me as you have been?” asked Rachel, her voice broken and trembling.

Katherine’s answer was to stretch out her hand and take that of her *protegee*, which she held tenderly. “Let us never speak of this again,” she said. “Bury your dead out of sight. All you have told me is sacred; none shall ever know anything from me. Let us begin anew. I am certain you are good and true; and how can one who has never known temptation judge you?”

Rachel bent her head to kiss the fair firm hand which held hers; then she wept silently, quietly, and said, softly, in an altered voice, “I will do *whatever* you bid me; and while you are so wonderfully good to me I will not despair.”

There was an expressive silence of a few moments. Then Katherine began to draw on her gloves, and trying to steady her voice and speak in her ordinary tone, said:

“Mr. Payne is going to make you known to a lady who may be of great use to you in obtaining customers. I have not met her myself, but should you receive a note from Mrs. Needham, pray go to her at once. There is no reason why you should not make a great business yet. I should be quite proud of it. Now I must leave you. Promise me to resist unhappy thoughts. Try to regain strength, both mental and physical. Should you see Mrs. Needham before I come again, pray ask quite two-thirds more for making a dress than I paid, for both your work and your fit are excellent.”

With these practical words Katherine rose to depart. Rachel followed her to the door, and timidly took her hand. “Do you understand,” she said, “all you have done for me? You have given me back my human heart, instead of the iron vise that was pressing my soul to death. I will live to be worthy of you, of your infinite pity.”

Katherine had hardly recovered composure when she reached home. The sad and shameful story to which she had listened had not arrested the flow of her sympathy to Rachel. There was something striking in the strength that enabled her to tell such a tale with stern justice toward herself, without any whining self-exculpation. What a long agony she must have endured! Katherine’s tears were ready to flow afresh at the picture her warm imagination conjured up. Weak and guilty as Rachel was to yield to such a temptation, what was her wrong-doing to that of the man who, knowing what would be the end thereof, tempted her?

Castleford was an ordinary comfortable country house, standing in not very extensive grounds. The scenery immediately around it was flat and uninteresting, but a few miles to the south it became undulating, and broken with pretty wooded hollows, but north of it was a rich level district, and as a hunting country second only to Leicestershire.

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Colonel Ormonde was a keen sportsman, and when he had reached his present grade had gladly taken up his abode in the old place, which had been let at a high rent during his term of military service. Castleford was an old place, though the house was comparatively new. It had been bought by Ormonde's grandfather, a rich manufacturer, who had built the house and made many improvements, and his representative of the third generation was considered quite one of the country gentry.

Colonel Ormonde was fairly popular. He was not obtrusively hard about money matters, but he never neglected his own interests. Then he appreciated a good glass of wine, and above all he rode straight. Mrs. Ormonde was adored by the men and liked by the women of Clayshire society, Colonel Ormonde being considered a lucky man to have picked up a charming woman whose children were provided for.

That fortunate individual was sitting at breakfast *tete-a-tete* with his wife one dull foggy morning about a month after Katherine Liddell had returned to England. "Another cup, please," he said, handing his in. Mrs. Ormonde was deep in her letters. "What an infernal nuisance it is!" he continued, looking out of the window nearest him. "The off days are always soft and the 'meet' days hard and frosty. The scent would be breast-high to-day." Mrs. Ormonde made no reply. "Your correspondence seems uncommonly interesting!" he exclaimed, surprised at her silence.

"It is indeed," she cried, looking up with a joyful and exultant expression of countenance. "Katherine writes that she has signed a deed settling twenty thousand on Cis and Charlie, the income of which is to be paid to me until they attain the age of twenty-one, for their maintenance, education, and so forth; after which any sum necessary for their establishment in life can be raised or taken from their capital, the whole coming into their own hands at the age of twenty-five. Dear me! I hope they will make me a handsome allowance when they are twenty-five. I really think Katherine might have remembered *me*." She handed the letter to her husband.

"Well, little woman, you have your innings now, and you must save a pot of money," he returned, in high glee. "What a trump that girl is! and, by Jove! what lucky little beggars your boys are! I can tell you I was desperately uneasy for fear she might marry some fellow before she fulfilled her promise to you. Then you might have whistled for any provision for your boys; no man would agree to give up such a slice of his wife's fortune as this. I know I would not. Women never have any real sense of the value of money; they are either stingy or extravagant. I am deuced glad I haven't to pay all *your* milliner's bills, my dear. I am exceedingly glad Katherine has been so generous, but I'll be hanged if it is the act of a sensible woman."

"Never mind; there is quite a load off my heart. I think I'll have a new habit from Woolmerhausen now."

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“Why, I gave you one only two years ago.”

“Two years ago! Why, that is an age. And *you* need not pay for this one.”

“I see she says she will pay us a visit if convenient. Of course it is convenient. I’ll run up to town on Sunday, and escort her down next day. The meet is for Tuesday. And mind you make things pleasant and comfortable for her, Ada. She would be an important addition to our family. A handsome, spirited girl with a good fortune to dispose of would be a feather in one’s cap, I can tell you.”

“You’ll find her awfully fallen off, Ormonde, and her spirits seem quite gone. Still I shall be very glad to have her here. But I do not see why you should go fetch her. You know Lady Alice Mordaunt is coming on Saturday.”

“What does that matter? I shall only be away one evening; and between you and me, though Lady Alice is everything that is nice and correct, she is enough to put the liveliest fellow on earth to sleep in half an hour.”

“How strange men are!” exclaimed Mrs. Ormonde, gathering up her letters and putting them into the pocket of her dainty lace and muslin apron. “Nice, gentle, good women never attract you; you only care for bold——”

“Vivacious, coquettish, attractive little widows, like one I once knew,” said the Colonel, laughing, as he carefully wiped his gray moustache.

“You are really too absurd!” she exclaimed, sharply. “Do you mean to say I was ever bold?”

“No; I only mean to say you are an angel, and a deuced lucky angel in every sense into the bargain! Now, have you any commissions? I am going to Monckton this morning, and I fancy the dog-cart will be at the door. Where’s the boy? I’ll take him and nurse down to the gate with me if they’ll wrap up. The little fellow is so fond of a drive.”

“My dear ’Duke!—such a morning as this! Do you think I would let the precious child out?”

“Nonsense! Do not make a molly-coddle of him. He is as strong as a horse. Send for him anyway. I haven’t seen him this morning. And be sure you write a proper letter to Katherine Liddell; you had better let me see it before it goes.”

“Indeed I shall do nothing of the kind. Do you think I never wrote a letter in my life before I knew you?”

“Oh, go your own way,” retorted the Colonel, beating a retreat to save a total rout.

In due course Katherine received an effusive letter of thanks, and a pressing invitation to come down to Castleford on the following Monday, and saying that as the hunting season was almost over, they would be very quiet till after Easter, when Mrs. Ormonde was going to town for a couple of months, ending with an assurance that the dear boys were dying to see her, and that Colonel Ormonde was going to London for the express purpose of escorting her on her journey.

“It is certainly not necessary,” observed Katherine, with a smile, “considering how accustomed I am to take care of myself. Still it is kindly meant, and I shall accept the offer.” This to Miss Payne, as they rose from luncheon where Katherine had told her the contents of her letter.

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“Ahem! No doubt they are anxious to show you every attention. Would you like to take Turner with you? I could spare her very well.” Turner was the maid expressly engaged to wait upon Miss Liddell.

“Oh no, thank you, I want so little waiting on. Lady Alice Mordaunt will be with Mrs. Ormonde, and will be sure to have a maid, so another might be inconvenient.”

“My dear Miss Liddell, if you will excuse me for thrusting advice upon you, I would say that ‘considering’ people is the very best way to prevent their showing you consideration.”

“Do you really think so? Well, it is really no great matter.”

“Then you shall not want Turner? Then I shall give her a holiday. Her mother or her brother is ill, and she wants to go home. Servants’ relations always seem to be ill. It must cost them a good deal.”

“No doubt. Will you come out with me? I have some shopping to do, and your advice is always valuable.”

“I shall be very pleased, and I will say I shall miss you when you leave—miss you very much.”

“Thank you,” said Katherine, gently. “I believe you will as you say so.”

Without fully believing Ada’s rather exaggerated expressions of gratitude and affection, Katherine was soothed and pleased by them. She was so truthful herself that she was disposed to trust others, and the hearty welcome offered her took off from the sense of loneliness which had long oppressed her. Hers was too healthy a nature to encourage morbid grief. To the last day of her life she remembered her mother with tender, loving-regret; but the consolation of knowing that her later days had been so happy, that she had passed away so peacefully, did much toward healing the wounds which were still bleeding.

On the appointed Monday Colonel Ormonde made his appearance in the early afternoon, and found Katherine quite ready to start. He was stouter, louder, bluffer, than ever. When Miss Payne was introduced to him he honored her with an almost imperceptible bow and a very perceptible stare. Turning at once to Katherine, he exclaimed:

“What! in complete marching order already? I protest I never knew a woman punctual before. But I always saw you were a sensible girl. No nonsense about you. Why, my wife told me you were looking ill. I don’t see it. At any rate Castleford air will soon bring back your roses.”

“I am feeling and looking better than when I came over, and Miss Payne has taken such good care of me,” said Katherine, who did not like to see the lady of the house so completely over-looked.

“Ah! that’s well. You know you are too precious a piece of goods to be tampered with. I believe Bertie Payne is a nephew of yours,” he added, addressing Miss Payne—“a young fellow who was in my regiment three or four years ago, the Twenty-first Dragoon Guards?”

“He is my brother,” returned Miss Payne, stiffly.

“Ah! Hope he is all right. Have scarcely seen him since he has gone, not to the dogs, but to the saints, which is much the same thing. Ha! ha! ha!”

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“Indeed it is not, Colonel Ormonde!” cried Katherine. “If every one was as good as Mr. Payne, the world would be a different and a better place.”

“Hey! Have you constituted yourself his champion? Lucky dog! Come, my dear girl, we must be going. Are you well wrapped up? It is deuced cold, and we have nearly three miles to drive from the station.”

He himself looked liked a mountain in a huge fur-lined coat.

“Good-by, then, dear Miss Payne. I suppose I shall not see you again for a fortnight or three weeks.”

“By George! we sha’n’t let you off with so short a visit as that! Say three years. Come, march; we haven’t too much time.” Throwing a brief “good-morning” at the “old maid” of uncertain position, the Colonel walked heavily downstairs in the wake of his admired young guest.

Monckton was scarcely four hours from London, but when the drive to Castleford was accomplished there was not too much time left to dress for dinner.

Mrs. Ormonde was awaiting Katherine in the hall, which was bright with lamps and fire-light; behind her were her two boys.

When Katherine had been duly welcomed. Mrs. Ormonde stood aside, and the children hesitated a moment. Cecil was so much grown, Katherine hardly knew him. He came forward with his natural assurance, and said, confidently: “How d’ye do, auntie? You have been a long time coming.”

Charlie was more like what he had been, and less grown. He hesitated a moment, then darted to Katherine, and throwing his arms round her neck, clung to her lovingly. She was infinitely touched and delighted. How vividly the past came back to her!—the little dusty house at Bayswater, the homely establishment kept afloat by her dear mother’s industry, the small study, and the dear weary face associated with it. How ardently she held the child to her heart! How thankfully she recognized that here was something to cherish and to live for!

“They may come with me to my room?” she said to her hostess.

“Oh, certainly!—only if you begin that sort of thing you will never be able to get rid of them.”

“I will risk it,” said Katherine, as she followed Mrs. Ormonde upstairs to a very comfortable room, where a cheerful fire blazed on the hearth.

“I am afraid you find it rather small, but I was obliged to give the best bedroom to Lady Alice—*noblesse oblige*, you know. I am sure you will like her, she is so gentle; I think her father was very glad to let her come, as she can see more of her *fiance*. They are not to be married till the autumn, so—Oh dear! there is the second bell. Cis, run away and tell Madeline to come and help your auntie to dress; and you too, Charlie; you had better go too.”

“He may stay and help me to unpack.”

“Why did you not bring your maid, dear? It is just like you to leave her behind; but we could have put her up; and you will miss her dreadfully.”

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“I do not think either of us has been so accustomed to the attentions of a maid as not to be able to do without one,” returned Katherine, smiling.

“You know *I* always had a maid in India,” said Mrs. Ormonde, with an air of superiority. “Don’t be long over your toilet; Ormonde’s cardinal virtue is punctuality.”

In spite of the hindrance of her nephew’s help, Katherine managed to reach the drawing-room before Lady Alice or the master of the house. Mrs. Ormonde was talking to an elderly gentleman in clerical attire beside the fireplace, and at some distance a tall, dignified-looking man was reading a newspaper. Mrs. Ormonde was most becomingly dressed in black satin, richly trimmed with lace and jet—a brilliant contrast to Katherine, in thick dull silk and crape, her snowy neck looking all the more softly white for its dark setting: the only relief to her general blackness was the glinting light on her glossy, wavy, chestnut brown hair.

“You have been very quick, dear,” said the hostess. “I am going to send you in to dinner,” she added, in a low tone, “with Mr. Errington, our neighbor. He is the head of the great house of Errington in Calcutta, and the *fiance*, of Lady Alice; but Colonel Ormonde must take her in. Mr. Errington!” raising her voice. The gentleman thus summoned laid down his paper and came forward. “Let me introduce you to my sister, Miss Liddell.” Mr. Errington bowed, rather a stately bow, as he gazed with surprised interest at the large soft eyes suddenly raised to his, then quickly averted, the swift blush which swept over the speaking face turned toward him, the indescribable shrinking of the graceful figure, as if this stranger dreaded and would fain avoid him. It was but for a moment; then she was herself again, and the door opening to admit Lady Alice, Errington hastened to greet her with chivalrous respect, and remained beside her chair until Colonel Ormonde entered with the butler, who announced that dinner was ready.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE TOILS.

The drawing and dining rooms at Castleford were at opposite sides of a large square hall, and even in the short transit between them Errington felt instinctively that Miss Liddell shrank from him. The tips merely of her black-gloved fingers rested on his arm, while she kept as far from him as the length of her own permitted. At table her host was on her right, and Lady Alice opposite, next to the rector, who was the only invited guest; Errington was always expected, and had returned from a distant canvassing expedition, for the present member for West Clayshire was believed to be on the point of retiring on account of ill health, and Mr. Errington of Garston Hall, intended to offer himself for election to the free and independent.

He had had a fatiguing day, but scarcely admitted to himself how much more restful a solitary dinner would have been, with a cigar and some keen-edged article or luminous pamphlet in his own comfortable library afterward, than making conversation at Colonel Ormonde's table. However, to slight the lady who had promised to be his wife was impossible, so he exerted himself to be agreeable.

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The rector discussed some parish difficulties with his hostess, while Colonel Ormonde, though profoundly occupied with his dinner, managed to throw an observation from time to time to his young neighbors.

“Rode round by Brinkworth Heath in two hours and a half,” he was saying to Lady Alice, when Katherine listened. “That was fair going. I did not think you would have got Mrs. Ormonde to start without an escort.”

“We had an escort. Lord Francis Carew and Mr. De Burgh came over to luncheon, and they rode with us.”

“Ha, Errington! you see the result of leaving this fair lady’s side all unguarded! These fellows come and usurp your duties.”

“Do you think I should wish Lady Alice to forego any amusement because I am so unlucky as to be prevented from joining her?” returned Errington, in a deep mellow voice.

Katherine looked across the table to see how Lady Alice took the remark, but she was rearranging some geraniums and a spray of fern in her waistband, and did not seem to hear. She was a slight colorless girl of nineteen, with regular features, an unformed though rather graceful figure, and a distinguished air.

Errington caught the expression of his neighbor’s face as she glanced at his *fiancee*, a sympathetic smile parting her lips. It was rarely that a countenance had struck him so much, which was probably due to his odd but strong impression that his new acquaintance, was both startled and displeased at being introduced to him—an impression very strange to Errington, as he was generally welcomed by all sorts and conditions of men, and especially of women.

The silence of Lady Alice did not seem to disturb her lover; he turned to Katherine and asked, “Were you of the riding party to-day!”

“No,” she replied, meeting his eyes fully for an instant, and then averting her own, while the color came and went on her cheek; “I only arrived in time for dinner.”

“Have I ever met this young lady before?” thought Errington, much puzzled. “Have I ever unconsciously offended or annoyed her? I don’t think so; yet her face is not quite strange to me.” And he applied himself to his dinner.

“I fancy you have had rather a dull time of it in town?” said Colonel Ormonde, leaning back, while the servants removed the dishes.

“No, I was not dull,” replied Katherine, glad to turn to him. “I was very comfortable, and of course not in a mood to see many strangers or to go anywhere. Then I was interested in Mr. Payne’s undertakings; they are quite as amusing as amusements.”

“Bertie Payne! to be sure; the nephew or brother of your doughty chaperon. He is always up to some benevolent games. Queer fellow.”

“He is very, *very* good,” said Katherine, warmly, “and he *does* so much good; only the amount of evil is overpowering.”

“Yes,” said Errington; “I am afraid such efforts as Payne’s are mere scratching of the surface, and will never touch the root of the evil.”

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“I suspect he is a prey to impostors of every description,” said Colonel Ormonde, with a fat laugh. “He is always worrying for subscriptions and God knows what. But I turn a deaf ear to him.”

“I cannot say I do always,” remarked Errington. “While we devise schemes of more scientific amelioration, hundreds die of sharp starvation or misery long drawn out. Payne is a good fellow, and enthusiasts have their uses.”

“You are so liberal yourself, Mr. Errington,” cried Mrs. Ormonde, “I dare say you are often imposed upon in spite of your wisdom.”

“My wisdom!” repeated Errington, laughing. “What an original idea, Mrs. Ormonde! Did you ever know I was accused of wisdom?” he added, addressing Lady Alice.

“Papa says you are very sensible,” she returned, seriously.

“Of course,” cried Mrs. Ormonde. “Why, he has written a pamphlet on ’Our Colonies,’ and something wonderful about the state of Europe—didn’t he, Mr. Heywood?”

“Yes,” returned the rector. “I suspect our future member will be a cabinet minister before the world is many years older.”

Lady Alice looked up with more of pleasure and animation than she had yet shown. Errington bent his head.

“Many thanks for your prophecy;” and he immediately turned the conversation to the ever-genial topics of hunting and horses. Then Mrs. Ormonde gave the signal of retreat to the drawing-room.

Here Katherine looked in vain for her nephews.

“I suppose the boys have gone to bed, Ada?”

“To bed! oh yes, of course. Why, it is more than half past eight; it would never do to keep them up so late. Would you like to see baby boy asleep? he looks quite beautiful.”

“Yes, I should, very much,” returned Katherine, anxious to gratify the mother.

“Come, then,” cried Mrs. Ormonde, starting up with alacrity. As the invitation was general, Lady Alice said, in her gentle way.

“Thank you; I saw the baby yesterday.”

“She has really very little feeling,” observed Mrs. Ormonde, as she went upstairs with her sister-in-law. “She never notices baby.”

“I am afraid I should not notice children much if they did not belong to me.”

“My dear Katherine, you are quite different. Of course Lady Alice is sweet and elegant, but not clever. Indeed, I cannot see the use of cleverness to women. There is a fine aristocratic air about her. After all, there is nothing like high birth. I assure you it is a high compliment her being allowed to stay here. Her aunt, Lady Mary Vincent, is a very fine lady indeed, and chaperons Lady Alice. But her father, Lord Melford, is a curious, reckless sort of man, always wandering about—yachting and that kind of thing; he is rather in difficulties too. They are glad enough to send her down here to see something of Errington. You know Errington is a very good match; he has bought a great deal of the Melford property, and when old Errington dies he will be immensely rich. The poor old man is in miserable health; he has not been down here all the winter. I believe the wedding is to take place in June; we will be invited, of course; you see Colonel Ormonde is so highly connected that I am in a very different position from what I was accustomed to. And you, dear, you *must* marry some person of rank; there is nothing like it.”

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“Yes,” said Katherine, with a sigh, “everything is changed.”

“Fortunately!” cried the exultant Mrs. Ormonde, opening the door of a luxuriously appointed nursery.

“Here, nurse, I have brought Miss Liddell to see Master Ormonde.”

A middle-aged woman, well dressed, and of authoritative aspect, rose from where she sat at needle-work, and came forward.

“I have only just got him to sleep, ma’am,” she said, almost in a whisper, “and if he is awoke now, I’ll not get him off again before midnight.”

“We’ll be very careful, nurse. Is he not a fine little fellow, Katherine?” and she softly turned back the bedclothes from the sturdy, chubby child, who had a somewhat bull dog style of countenance and a beautifully fair skin.

“How ridiculously like Colonel Ormonde he is!” whispered Katherine. “I do not see any trace of you.”

“No; he is quite an Ormonde. He is twice as big as either Cis or Charlie was at his age.”

After a few civil comments Katherine suggested their visiting the other children.

“Perhaps it would be wiser not to go,” said the mother; “they will not be so sound asleep as baby, and——”

“You must indulge me this once, Ada. I long to look at them.”

“Oh! of course, dear; ring for Eliza, nurse; she will show Miss Liddell the way. I must go back; it would never do to leave Lady Alice so long alone.”

“Do not apologize,” said Katherine, with a curious jealous pang, as she noted Mrs. Ormonde’s indifference to the children of her first poor love-match.

A demure, flat-faced girl answered the bell, and led Katherine down passages and up a crooked stair to another part of the house.

Here she was shown into a room sparsely supplied with old furniture. There was a good fire, and a shaded lamp stood on a large table, where a girl sat writing.

“Here is a lady to see the young gentlemen,” said the nurse-maid. The young scribe started up, looking confused.

“If it would not disturb them,” said Katherine, gently, “I should like to see my nephews in their sleep.”

“Oh, Miss Liddell!” exclaimed the governess, a younger, commoner-looking person than Katherine had chosen before she left England. “This is their bedroom,” and she led Katherine through a door opposite the fireplace into an inner room. There in their little beds lay the boys who were all of kith or kin left to Katherine Liddell.

How lovingly she bent over and gazed at them!

Cecil had grown much. He looked sunburnt and healthy. One arm was thrown up behind his head, the other stretched straight and stiff beside him, ending in a closely clinched little brown fist. His lips, slightly apart, emitted the softly drawn regular breath of profound slumber, and the smile which some pleasant thought had conjured up before he closed his eyes still lingered round his mouth. Katherine longed to kiss him, but feared to break

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his profound and restful slumbers. She passed to Charlie. His attitude was quite different. He had thrown the clothes from his chest, and his pinky white throat was bare; one little hand lay open on the page of a picture-book at which he had been looking when sleep overtook him; the other was under his soft round cheek; his sweet and still baby face was grave if not sad. He looked like a little angel who had brought a message to earth, and was grieved and wearied by the sin and sorrow here below. Katherine's heart swelled with tenderest love as she gazed upon him, and unconsciously she bent closer till her lips touched his brow. Then a little hand stole into hers, and, without moving, as though he had expected her, he opened his eyes and whispered, "Will you come and kiss me every night, as grannie did?"

"I will, my darling, every night."

"Will grannie *never* come and kiss me again?"

"Never, Charlie! She will never come to either of us in this life." A big tear fell on the boy's forehead.

"Don't cry, auntie; she loves us all the same." And he kissed the fair cheek which now lay against his own as his aunt knelt beside his bed.

"Go to sleep, dear love; to-morrow you shall take me to see your garden and the pony."

"You will be sure to come?"

"Yes, quite sure."

In a few minutes the clasp of the warm little hand relaxed, and Katherine gently disengaged herself.

"The boys are no longer first in their mother's heart," thought Katherine, as she returned to the drawing-room. "Were they ever first? They are—they might become all the world to me. They might fill my life and give it a fresh aspect. The new ties at which Mr. Newton hinted can never exist for me. Could I accept an honorable man and live with a perpetual secret between us? Could I ever confess? No. My most hopeful scheme is to be a mother to these children. And oh! I do want to be happy, to feel the joy in life that used to lift up my spirit in the old days when we were struggling with poverty! I *will* throw off this load of self-contempt. I have not really injured any one."

In the drawing-room Colonel Ormonde was seated beside Lady Alice, making conversation to the best of his ability. She looked serenely content, and held a piece of crochet, the kind of fancy-work which occupied the young ladies in the "sixties." The

rector and Mr. Errington were in deep conversation on the hearth-rug, and Mrs. Ormonde was reading the paper.

“So you have been visiting the nursery?” said the Colonel, rising and offering Katherine a chair. “Your first introduction to our young man, I suppose?”

“Yes. What a great boy he is!—the picture of health!”

“Ay, he is a Trojan,” complacently. “The other little fellows are looking well, eh?”

“Very well indeed. Cis is wonderfully grown; but Charlie is much what he was.”

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“He’ll overtake his brother, though, before long,” said Colonel Ormonde, encouragingly, as he rang and ordered the card-table to be set.

“You play whist, I suppose? We want a fourth.”

“I am quite ignorant of that fascinating game,” returned Katherine, “and very sorry to be so useless.”

“It *is* lamentable ignorance! Lady Alice, will you take compassion on us? No?—then we *must* have Errington.”

Errington did not seem at all reluctant, and the two young ladies were left to entertain each other.

Katherine, who had gone to the other end of the room to look at some water-color drawings, came back and sat down beside her. Lady Alice looked amiable, but did not speak, and Katherine felt greatly at a loss what to say.

“What very fine work!” she said at length, watching the small, weak-looking hands so steadily employed.

“Yes, it is a very difficult pattern. My aunt, Lady Mary, never could manage it, and she does a great deal of crochet, and is very clever.”

“It seems most complicated. I am sure I could never do it.”

“Do you crochet much?”

“Not at all.”

“Then,” with some appearance of interest, “what *do* you do?”

“Oh! various things; but I am afraid I am not industrious. I would rather mend my clothes than do fancy work.”

“Mend your clothes!” repeated Lady Alice, in unfeigned amazement.

“Yes. I assure you there is great pleasure in a symmetrical patch.”

“But does not your maid do that?”

“Now that I have one, she does. However, you must show me how to crochet, if you will be so kind; my only approach to fancy-work is knitting. I can knit stockings. Isn’t that an achievement?”

“But is it not tiresome?”

“Oh! I can knit like the Germans, and talk or read.”

“Is it possible?” A long pause.

“Mrs. Ormonde says you are very learned and studious,” said Lady Alice, languidly.

“How cruel of her to malign me!” returned Katherine, laughing. “Learned I certainly am not; but I am fond of indiscriminate reading, though not studious.”

“I like a nice novel, with dreadful people in it, like Miss St. Maur’s. Have you read any of hers?”

“I don’t think so. I do not know the name.”

“The St. Maurs are Devonshire people—a very old country family, I believe. Still, when she writes about the season in London, I don’t think it is very like.” Another pause.

“You have been in Italy, I think, Lady Alice?” recommenced Katherine.

“Oh yes, often. Papa is always cruising about, you know, and we stop at places. But I have never been in Rome.”

“Yachting must be delightful.”

“I do not like it; I am always ill. Aunt Mary took me to Florence for a winter.”

“Then you enjoyed that, I dare say,” said Katherine.

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“I got tired of it. I do not care for living abroad; there is nothing to do but to go to picture-galleries and theatres.”

“Well, that is a good deal,” returned Katherine, smiling. “Where do you like to live, Lady Alice?”

“Oh, in the country. I am almost sorry Mr. Errington has a house in town. I am so fond of a garden, and riding on quiet roads! I am afraid to ride in London. The country is so peaceful! no one is in a hurry.”

“What a happy, tranquil life she will lead under the aegis of such a man as Mr. Errington!” thought Katherine.

“Do you play or sing?” asked Lady Alice, for once taking the initiative.

“Yes, in a very amateur fashion.”

“Then,” with more animation, “perhaps you would play my accompaniments for me; I always like to stand when I sing. Mrs. Ormonde says she forgets her music. Is it not odd?”

“Well, people in India do as little as possible. I shall be very pleased to play for you. Shall we practice to-morrow?”

“Oh yes; immediately after breakfast. There is really nothing to do here.”

“Immediately after breakfast I am going out with the boys—Mrs. Ormonde’s boys. Have you seen them? But we shall have plenty of time before luncheon.”

“Are you fond of children?” slowly, while her busy needle paused and she undid a stitch or two.

“I am fond of these children; I do not know much about any other.”

“Beverley’s children (my eldest brother’s) are very troublesome; they annoy me very much.” Silence while she took up her stitches again. “The worst of this pattern is that if you talk you are sure to go wrong.”

“Then I will find a book and not disturb you,” said Katherine, good-humoredly. She felt kindly and indulgent toward this gentle helpless creature, who seemed so many years younger than herself, though barely two, in fact. That she was Errington’s *fiancee* gave her a curious interest in Katherine’s eyes. She would willingly have done him all possible good; she was strangely attracted to the man she had cheated. There was a simple natural dignity about him that pleased her imagination, yet she almost dreaded to

speak to him, lest the very tones of her voice, the encounter of their eyes, should betray her.

At last Errington, looking at his watch, declared that as the rubber was over, he must say good-night.

“What, are you not staying here to-night?” said Colonel Ormonde.

“No; I have a good deal of letter-writing to get through to-morrow, so did not accept Mrs. Ormonde’s kind invitation.”

“You’ll have a deuced cold drive. Come over on Thursday, will you? Old Wray, the banker, is to dine here, and one or two Monckton worthies. Stay till Tuesday or Wednesday. The next meets are Friday and Monday, on this side of the county. There will not be many more this season.”

“Thank you; I shall be very happy.” He crossed to where Lady Alice still sat placidly at work, and made his adieux in a low tone, holding her hand for a moment longer than mere acquaintanceship warranted, and having exchanged good-nights, left the room, followed by his host.

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There was a good fire in Katherine's bedroom, and having declined the assistance of Mrs. Ormonde's maid, she put on her dressing-gown and sat down beside it to think. She was still quivering with the nervous excitement she had striven so hard and so successfully to conceal.

When Mrs. Ormonde had given her rapid explanation of who Errington was, and without a pause presented him, Katherine felt as if she must drop at his feet. Indeed, she would have been thankful if a merciful insensibility had made her impervious to his questioning eyes. *She* well knew who he was.

He was the real owner of the property she now possessed. The will she had suppressed bequeathed all John Liddell's real and personal property to Miles Errington, only son of his old friend Arthur Errington, of Calton Buildings, London, E. C., and Calcutta. She, the robber, stood in the presence of the robbed. Did he know by intuition that she was guilty? How grave and questioning his eyes were! Why did he look at her like that? How he would despise her and forbid his affianced wife to be outraged by her presence if he knew!

He looked like a high-minded gentleman. If he seemed almost sternly grave, his smile was kind and frank, and she had made herself unworthy to associate with such men as he.

But he was rich. He did not need the money she wanted so sorely. What of that? Did his abundance alter the everlasting conditions of right and wrong? Perhaps if she had not attempted to play Providence for the sake of her family, and let things follow their natural course, Mr. Errington might have spared a few crumbs from his rich table—a reasonable dole—to patch up the ragged edges of their frayed fortunes. Then she would not be oppressed with the sense of shame, this weight of riches she shrank from using. She had murdered her own happiness; she had killed her own youth. Never again could she know the joyousness of light-hearted girlhood, while nothing the world might give her could atone for the terrible trespass which had broken the harmony of her moral nature by the perpetual sense of unatoned wrong-doing. How she wished she had never come to Castleford! True, her seeing Mr. Errington did not make her guilt a shade darker, but oh, how much more keenly she felt it under his eyes! And now she could not rush away. She must avoid all eccentricities lest they might possibly arouse suspicion. Suspicion? What was there to suspect? No one would dream of suspicion. Then that will! She would try and nerve herself to destroy it, though it seemed sacrilege to do so. Whatever she did, however, she must think of Cis and Charlie. Having committed such an act, her only course was to bear the consequences, and do her duty by the innocent children, whose fate would be cruel enough should she indulge in any weak repentance or seek relief in confession. She had burdened herself with a disgraceful secret, and she must bear it her

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life long. It gave her infinite pain to face Miles Errington, yet while at one moment she longed to fly from him, the next she felt an extraordinary desire to hear him speak, to learn the prevailing tone of his mind, to know his opinions. There was an earnestness in his look and manner that appealed to her sympathies. He was a just, upright gentleman. What would he think of the dastardly deed by which she had robbed him?

"I must not think of it. I must try and forget I ever did it, and be as good and true as I can in all else. And the will! I must destroy it. I am sure my poor old uncle meant to do away with it. Perhaps if it were clean gone I might feel more at rest. How strange it is that instead of growing accustomed to the contemplation of my own dishonesty I become more keenly alive to the shame of my act as time rolls on! Perhaps if I am brave and resolute I may conquer the scorpion stings of self-reproach. How dear those two sweet peaceful years have cost me! Would I undo it all to save myself these pangs? No. Then I suppose to bear is to conquer one's fate."

CHAPTER XV.

CROSS PURPOSES.

The first ten days at Castleford would have been dull indeed to Katherine but for the society of Cis and Charlie in the mornings, and the interest she took in watching Errington (who was of course a frequent visitor) in the evenings.

Though she avoided conversing with him as much as possible, he was a constant study to her. He was different from all the men she had previously met. She often wondered if anything could disturb him or hurry him. Had he ever climbed trees and torn his clothes, or thrashed an adversary? Had he any weaknesses, or vivid joys, or passionate longings? Yet he did not seem a prig. His manner, though dignified, was easy and natural; his eyes, though steady and penetrating, were kindly; his bearing had the repose of strength. It was too awful to contemplate what his estimate of herself would be if he knew; but then he must *never* know!

As it was, he seemed inclined to be friendly and communicative, pleased when he met her strolling in the garden with Lady Alice, and gratified to find that she could accompany his *fiancee's* songs. Indeed he said he had never heard Lady Alice sing so well as when Miss Liddell played for her.

Apart from the boys and Errington, Katherine found time hang very heavily on her hands. The aimless lingering over useless fancy-work or second-rate novels, the discussion of such gossip as their correspondence supplied, by means of which Mrs. Ormonde and Lady Alice got through the day, were infinitely wearisome to her.

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Miles Errington was one of those happy individuals said to be born with a silver spoon in his mouth. The only son of a wealthy father, who, though enriched by trade, had come of an old Border race, he had had the best education money could procure. More fortunate still in the endowments of nature, he was well formed, strong, active, and blessed with perfect health; while mentally he was intelligent and reflective, thoughtful rather than brilliant, and by temperament profoundly calm. He had never got into scrapes or committed extravagance. He was the despair of managing mammas and fascinating young married women; yet he was not unpopular with either sex. Men respected his strong, steady character, his high standard, his sound judgment in matters affecting the stable and the race-course; women were attracted by his obligingness and generosity. Still he was the sort of man with whom few became intimate, and none dared take a liberty. Preserved by his fortunate surroundings and strong tranquil nature from difficulties or temptations, he could hardly understand the passionate outbreaks of weaker and more fiery men.

His greatest physical pleasure was an exciting run with the hounds; his deepest interest centred in politics; though never indulging in sentiment, he was an earnest patriot. Whether he could be moved by more personal feelings remained to be proved. At present the sources of tenderer affection, if they existed, lay so deep below the strata of reason and common-sense that only some artesian process could pierce to the imprisoned spring's and set the "water of life" free, perhaps to bound, geyser-like, into the outer air.

Having travelled by sea and land, and looked into the social and political condition of many countries, having mixed much with men and women at home and abroad, Errington thought it time to take his place in the great commonwealth—to marry, and to try for a seat in the House of Commons. He therefore selected Lady Alice Mordaunt. She was rather pretty, graceful, gentle, and quite at his service. He really like her in a sort of fatherly way; he looked forward with quiet pleasure to making her very happy, and did not doubt she would in his hands mature into a sufficient companion, for though Errington was not naturally a selfish man, his life and training disposed him to look on those connected with him as on the whole created for him.

He had been absent for two or three days, having gone up to town to visit his father, who had been somewhat seriously unwell, and as he rode toward Castleford he gave more thought than usual to his young *fiancee*. In truth, a visit to Colonel Ormonde was a great bore to him. He had nothing in common with the Colonel, whose pig-headed conservatism jarred on Errington's broader views, while his stories and reminiscences were exceedingly uninteresting, and sometimes worse. Mrs. Ormonde's small coquetries, her airs and graces, were equally unattractive to him. Still it was well to have Lady Alice at Castleford, within easy reach, while there was so much to occupy his time and attention in the country. As soon as he was sure of his election he would hasten his marriage, and perhaps get the honey-moon over in time to take his seat while there was still a month or two of the session unexpired.

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From Lady Alice it was an easy transition of thought to the new guest at Castleford. Where had he seen her face? and with what was he associated in her mind? Nothing agreeable; of that he was quite sure. The vivid blush and indescribable shrinking he had noticed more than once (and Errington, like most quiet men, was a close observer) seemed unaccountable. Miss Liddell was far from shy; she was well-bred and evidently accustomed to society; her avoidance had therefore made the more impression. His experience of life had hitherto been exceedingly unemotional, and Katherine's unexpected betrayal of feeling puzzled him not a little.

At this point in his reflections he had reached that part of the road where it dipped into a hollow, on one side of which the Melford woods began. A steep bank rose on the right, thickly studded with beech and oak trees, still leafless, but the scanty, yellowish grass which grew beneath them was tufted with primroses and violets.

As Errington came round a bend in the little valley the sound of shrill, childish laughter came pleasantly to his ear, and the next minute brought him in sight of a lady in mourning whom he recognized immediately, and two little boys, who were high up the back, busily engaged filling a basket with sweet spring blossoms.

Errington paused, dismounted, and raising his hat, approached her.

"I did not expect so meet *you* so far afield," he said. "You are not afraid of a long walk."

"My nephews have led me on from flower to flower," she returned, again coloring brightly, but not shrinking from his eyes. "Now I think it is time to go home."

"It is not late," he returned. "How is every one at Castleford?"

"Quite well. Lady Alice has lost her cold, and regained her voice—she was singing this morning," said Katherine, smiling as if she knew the real drift of his question.

"I am glad to hear it," he returned, soberly.

Errington and Lady Alice did not write to each other every day.

"Auntie," cried Cis, "the basket is quite full. If you open your sunshade and hold it upside-down, I can fill that too."

"No dear; you have quite enough. We must go back now."

"Oh, not yet, please?" The little fellow came tumbling down the bank, followed by Charlie, who immediately caught his aunt's hand and repeated, "Not yet, auntie!"

"These are Mrs. Ormonde's boys, I suppose?" said Errington.

“Yes; have you never seen them before?”

“Never. And have you not had enough climbing?” he added, good-humoredly, to Charlie.

“No, not half enough!” cried Cis. “There’s *such* a bunch of violets just under that biggest beech-tree, nearly up at the top! Do let me gather them—just those; do—do—do!”

“Very well; do not go too fast, or you will break your neck.”

Both boys started off, leaving their basket at Katherine’s feet.

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“I remember now,” said Errington, looking at her, “where I saw I saw you before. Is was two—nearly three—years ago, at Hyde Park corner, when that elder boy had a narrow escape from being run over.”

“Were *you* there?” she exclaimed, so evidently surprised that Errington saw the impulse was genuine. “I recollect Mr. Payne and Colonel Ormonde; but I did not see *you*.”

“Then where *have* you met me?” was at his lips, but he did not utter the words.

“Well, Payne was of real service; I did nothing. The little fellow had a close shave.”

“He had indeed,” said Katherine, thoughtfully, with downcast eyes; then, suddenly raising them to his, she said, as if to herself, “And you were there too! How strange it all is!”

“I see nothing so strange in it, Miss Liddell,” smiling good-humoredly. “Have you any superstition on the subject?”

“No; I am not superstitious; yet it was curious—I mean, to meet by accident on that day just before—” She stopped. “And now I am connected with Colonel Ormonde, living with Mr. Payne’s sister and—and talking here with—*you*.”

“These coincidences occur perpetually when people move in the same set,” returned Errington, feeling absurdly curious, and yet not knowing how to get at the train of recollection or association which underlay her words—words evidently unstudied and impulsive.

“I suppose so. And, you know—Mr. Payne,” Katherine continued, quickly—“how good he is! He lives completely for others.”

“Yes, I believe him to be thoroughly, honestly good. How hard he toils, and with what a pitiful result!”

“I wish he would go. Why does he stand there making conversation?” thought Katherine, while she said aloud: “I don’t see that. If every one helped two or three poor creatures whom they knew, we should not have all this poverty and suffering which are distracting to think about.”

“I doubt it; it would be more likely to pauperize the whole nation.”

Here Charlie and Cis, with earth-stained knees and hands—the latter full of violets—reluctantly descended. Adding these to the basket already overflowing, they had a short wrangle as to who should carry it, and then Katherine turned her steps homeward. Errington passed the bridle over his arm, and to her great annoyance, walked beside her.

“Are you, then, disposed to give yourself to faith and to good works?”

“I do not know. I should like to help those who want, but I fear I am too fond of pleasure to sacrifice myself—at least I was and I suppose the love will return. Of course it is easy to give money; it is hard to give one’s self.”

“You seem very philosophic for so young a lady.”

“I am not young,” said Katherine, sadly; “I am years older than Lady Alice.”

“How many—one or two?” asked Errington, in his kind, fatherly, somewhat superior tone, which rather irritated her.

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“The years I mean are not to be measured by the ordinary standard; even *you* must know that some years last longer—no, that is not the expression—press heavier than others.”

“Even I? Do you think I am specially matter-of-fact?”

“I have no right to think you anything, for I do not know you; but you give me that impression.”

“I dare say I am; nor do I see why I should object to be so considered.”

Here Cecil, who got tired of a conversation from which he could gather nothing, put in his oar: “Are you Mr. Errington?”

“I am. How do you know my name?”

“I saw you going out with the Colonel to the meet—oh, a long while ago! And Miss Richards and nurse were talking about you.”

“They said you had a real St. Bernard dog—one that gets the people out of the snow,” cried Charlie. “Will you let him come here? I want to see him.”

“*You* had better come and pay him a visit.”

“Oh yes, thank you!” exclaimed Cis. “Auntie will take us, perhaps. Auntie will take us to the sea-side, and then we shall bathe, and go in boats, and learn to row.”

“Cis, run with me to that big tree at the foot of the hill. Auntie will carry the basket,” cried Charlie, and the next moment they were off.

“Fine little fellows,” said Errington. “I like children.”

“I am going to ask Mrs. Ormonde to lend them to me for a few months, for they are all I have of kith or kin.”

“They are not at all like you,” returned Errington, letting his quiet, but to her most embarrassing, eyes rest upon her face.

“Yet they are my only brother’s children.” Here Katherine paused with a sense of relief; they had reached a stile where a footway led across some fields and a piece of common overgrown with bracken and gorse. It was the short-cut to Castleford, by which Cecil had led her to the Melford Woods.

“Oh, do come round by the road, auntie,” he exclaimed; “perhaps Mr. Errington will let me ride his horse.”

“I do not know if *he* will, Cis, but I certainly will not. I am tired too, dear, and want to get home the shortest way I can, so bid Mr. Errington good-by, and come with me. No, don’t shake hands; yours are much too dirty.”

“Never mind; when you are a big boy I’ll give you a mount. Good by, Master Charlie—-*you* are Charlie, are you not? Till we meet at dinner, Miss Liddell.” He raised his hat, and divining that she wished him to let her get over the stile unassisted, he mounted his horse and rode swiftly away.

“I am sure he would have given me a ride if you had gone by the road, auntie,” said Cecil, reproachfully.

“I could not have allowed, you, dear; so do not think about it.” Errington meanwhile rode on, unconsciously slackening his pace as he mused. “No, she certainly has never seen me before, yet she knows me. How? She was very glad to get rid of me just now. Why? I am inoffensive enough. There is something uncommon about her; she gives me the idea of having a history, which is anything but desirable for a young woman. What fine eyes she has! She is something like that Sibyl of Guercino’s in the Capitol. Why does she object to me? It is rather absurd. I must make her talk, then I shall find out.”

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Here his horse started, and broke the thread of his reflections. By the time the steed had pranced and curvetted a little, Errington's thoughts had turned into some of their usual graver channels, and Katherine Liddell was—well, not absolutely forgotten.

The object of his reflections reached the house rather late for the boys' tea, and expecting to find her hostess and Lady Alice enjoying the same refreshment, she gave her warm out-door jacket to Cecil, who immediately put it on as the best mode of taking it upstairs, and went into Mrs. Ormonde's morning-room, where afternoon tea was always served. It was a pleasant room in warm summer weather, as its aspect was east, and the afternoons were cool and shady there; but of a chill evening at the end of March it was cold and dim, and needed the glow of a good fire to make it attractive.

Daylight still lingered to the sky, but was fast fading, and the dancing light of a cheerful fire was a pleasant contrast to the gray shadows without. The room was very nondescript; its furniture was of the spidery fashion which ruled when the "first gentleman" held the reins; thin hard sofas and scanty draperies were supplemented by Persian rugs and showy cushions, while various specimens of doubtful china crowded the mantel-piece and consoles. Mrs. Ormonde was quite innocent of original taste, but was a quick, industrious imitator, while of comfortable chairs she was a most competent judge.

Quite sure of finding Mrs. Ormonde, Lady Alice, and Miss Brereton—another visitor—-refreshing themselves after their out-door exercise, and intending to announce the pleasant news of Errington's return, Katherine exclaimed, "Lady Alice!" as she crossed the threshold, then seeing no one, stopped.

"Lady Alice is not here," said a strong, harsh voice, and a tall figure in a shooting-coat and gaiters rose from the depths of a large arm-chair, the back of which was toward the door and stood before her.

Katherine was slightly startled, but guessed it was one of two guests expected to arrive that day. She advanced, therefore, and said, "Mrs. Ormonde is unusually late, but I am sure she will soon be here."

"Meantime tea is quite ready. It has stood twice the regulation five minutes; and is there any just cause or impediment why it should not be poured out?"

"Not that I am aware of," returned Katherine, taking off her hat and smoothing back her hair, which showed golden tints in the fitful fire-light.

The low tea-table was set before the fire, she drew a chair beside it and removed the cozy from the teapot.

Recognizing De Burgh from Mrs. Ormonde's description, she felt that he was even more at home at Castleford than herself, and she also came to the conclusion that he knew who she was. She had been prepared by Mrs. Ormonde's evident admiration to dislike De Burgh, having made up her mind that he would prove an empty-headed, insolent grandee, whose pretensions imposed upon her sister-in-law's somewhat slender experience, and whose life was probably given up to physical enjoyment. He had not, however, the aspect of a mere pleasure-seeker. His dark, strong face and bony frame looked as if he could work as well as play.

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“Do you take sugar?”

“No, thank you; neither sugar nor cream.”

“Neither? That is very self-denying!”

“Not self-denying! Were I foolish enough to do what I did not like, I should take the sugar and cream. They do not happen to please my palate.”

“It is well we do not all like the same things.”

“It is indeed!” He held his cup untasted for a moment, looking thoughtfully into the fire. “Tea is the best drink you can have in difficult, fatiguing journeys. Even the gold-diggers of Australia know that. They drink hard enough when they are on the spree, but when at work in earnest they stick to the teapot,” he said, turning his eyes full upon her with a cool, critical gaze, which half amused, half irritated her. It was curious to sit there talking easily with a total stranger. Perhaps she ought to have left him to himself, but it was not much matter. Looking toward the window to avoid her companion’s eyes, she exclaimed:

“It is raining quite fast! I am glad I brought the children home before this shower.”

“An avant-courier of April. You were walking with Mrs. Ormonde’s boys, then?”

“Yes; I take them out every day.”

“An uncommonly good-looking governess,” thought De Burgh. “You have not been here long, I think?” he said.

“About three weeks. The boys are quite used to me now, and enjoy their walks, for I take them outside the grounds,” said Katherine, feeling sure that De Burgh must guess who she was.

“Indeed! You are a daring innovator. I suppose they were kept on the premises till you came?”

“They were; and it is always tiresome to be kept within bounds.”

“I quite agree with you. The sentiment is extremely natural, only young ladies rarely confess it.”

“Why?”

“Oh, you ought to know better than I do. You give me the idea of being a plucky woman.”

“You must be quick in gathering ideas,” said Katherine, dryly.

“Yes; some subjects inspire me,” he returned, handing in his cup. “Another, please. I am a bit of a physiognomist. I think I could give a rough sketch of your character.” He stirred the fire to a brighter blaze and added, “It is so deuced dark since that shower came on I can hardly see you, but I will tell you my ideas, if you care to hear them.”

“Yes, I should,” she returned, laughing. “It will be curious to hear the result of an instantaneous estimate. Why, five minutes ago you had never seen me.”

“Five minutes? No; ten at least. Well, then, I should say you are a remarkably plucky girl, though perhaps not impervious to panic. And, let me see,” fixing his keen, fierce eyes on hers, “gifted with no small power of enjoyment. With a strong dash of the rebel in you, and—well, I could tell you more, but I won’t.”

Katherine laughed good-humoredly.

“Have I hit it off?” he asked, after waiting for her to speak.

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“I cannot tell. Do we ever know ourselves?”

“That’s true; but few admit their ignorance. I begin to think that you are dangerous, in addition to your other qualities, as you can refrain from discussing yourself; that is a bait which draws out most women.”

“And most men,” added Katherine. “We haven’t much to reproach each other with on that score.”

“No, I must admit that. Self is a fascinating topic.”

“Some more tea?” asked Katherine, demurely.

“No, thank you. I am not absolutely insatiable. Tell me,” he went on, with a quaint familiarity which was not offensive, “how can a girl with your nature—mind, I have not told half I guess—how can you stand your life here—walking about with those brats, making tea while the others are out amusing themselves, hammering away at the same round day after day? You are made for different things.”

“I should not care to live at Castleford all the days of my life,” said Katherine, a little surprised by his question, and feeling there was a mistake somewhere; “but I do not intend to stay long.”

“Oh, indeed! How do you get on with Mrs. Ormonde? She doesn’t worry you about the boys? She is a jolly, pretty little woman; but you are not exactly the sort of young lady I should have fancied would be her choice.”

“Why not?” asked Katherine, beginning to see his mistake.

“Because”—began De Burgh, looking full at her, and then paused. “You are too handsome by half!” were the words on his lips, but he did not utter them; he substituted, “You don’t seem quite the thing for Mrs. Ormonde.”

“She finds I suit her admirably,” said Katherine, gravely.

“I don’t quite understand”—De Burgh was beginning, when the door opened to admit Mrs. Ormonde.

“Ah, Mr. De Burgh, I did not expect you so early; but I am glad Katherine was here to give you your tea. It is not necessary to introduce you. I was afraid you would have been caught in that shower, Katie.”

“We just escaped it. I hope Lady Alice has found shelter, or she will renew her cold.”

“You are Miss Liddell, then?” said De Burgh, as he placed a chair for Mrs. Ormonde and took her cloak.

“To be sure. Didn’t you guess who she was?”

“Mr. De Burgh guessed a good deal, but he did not guess my identity,” said Katherine, handing her a cup of tea.

“What! Were you playing at cross questions and crooked answers?”

“Something of that sort,” he returned, and changed the subject by asking if they had heard how Errington’s father was.

“Better, I suppose, for Mr. Errington has returned. He met us when we were in Melford Woods.”

“I dare say he met Alice and Miss Brereton, then,” said Mrs. Ormonde; “they were riding in that direction.”

“Lady Alice will be taken care of, then,” said Katherine, and taking her hat she went away, seeing that Mrs. Ormonde was quite ready to absorb the conversation.

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“So that is Katherine Liddell,” said De Burgh, looking after her, regardless of Mrs. Ormonde’s declaration that she was going to scold him.

“Yes. Is she not like what you expected?”

“Expected? I did not expect anything; but she isn’t a bit like what you described.”

“How so? Did I say too much?”

“Yes, a great deal too much, but the wrong way.”

“What do you mean?”

“Why, you talked as if she was a regular gushing school-girl, ready to swallow any double-barrelled compliment one chose to offer, whereas she is a finely developed woman, by Jove! with brains too, or I am much mistaken. Why, my charming little friend, she is older in some ways than you are.”

“Oh, nonsense. You need not flatter *me*.”

“It’s not flattery, it’s—”

The arrival of the riding party with the addition of Errington prevented him from finishing his sentence.

CHAPTER XVI.

HANDLING THE RIBBONS.

De Burgh was told off to take Katherine in to dinner that day and the next, and bestowed a good deal of his attention on her during the evening. He rather amused her, for he was a new type to her. The men she had met during her sojourn on the Continent were chiefly polished French and Italians, whose softness and respectful manner to women were perhaps exaggerated, and a sprinkling of diplomatic and dilettante Englishmen. De Burgh’s style was curiously—almost roughly—frank, yet there was an unmistakable air of distinction about him. He seemed not to think it worth while to take trouble about anything, yet he could talk well when by chance a topic interested him, Katherine would have been very dull had she not perceived that he was attracted by her. She was by no means so exalted a character as to be indifferent to his tribute; nevertheless she was half afraid of the cynical, outspoken, high-born Bohemian, who seemed to have small respect for people or opinions. She showed little of this feeling, however, having held her own with spirit in their various arguments, as, it need scarcely be said, they rarely agreed.

“What is this mysterious piece of work I see constantly in your hands?” asked De Burgh, taking his place beside Katherine when the men came in after dinner a few days after his arrival.

“It is a black silk stocking for Cecil.”

“One of the nephews, eh? So you are capable of knitting! It must be a dreary occupation.”

“No; it becomes mechanical, and it is better than sitting with folded hands.”

“I am not sure it is. I have great faith in natures that can take complete rest—men who can do nothing, absolutely nothing—and so create a reserve fund of fresh energy for the next hour of need. There is no strength in fidgety feverishness.”

“There is not much feverishness in knitting,” returned Katherine, beginning a new row.

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“There is very little feverishness about *you*, yet you are not placid. I am extending and verifying my original estimate of your character, you see.”

“A most interesting occupation,” said Katherine, carelessly.

“*Yes*, most interesting. I wish I had more frequent opportunities of studying it; but one never sees you all day. Where do you hide yourself?”

“I take long rambles with the children, and—” She paused.

“Does it amuse you to play nurse-maid?”

“Yes, at present. Then my nephews and I were playfellows long ago.”

“I imagine it is a taste that will not last.”

“Perhaps not.”

“Miss Brereton and Lady Alice, with Errington and myself, are going to ride over to Melford Abbey to-morrow. You will, I hope, be of the party?”

“Thank you. I do not ride.”

“It is rather refreshing to meet a young lady who is not horsy, but it is a loss to yourself not to ride.”

“I dare say it is. Yet what one has never known cannot be a loss. I am sorry I was not accustomed to ride in my youth.”

“It is not too late to learn, remote as that period must be,” said De Burgh, smiling. “You are in the headquarters of horsemen and horsewomen at present. Appoint me your riding-master, and in a couple of months I shall be proud of my pupil.”

“I am not particularly brave,” she returned, “and the experiment would produce more pain than pleasure.”

“Pain! nothing of the kind. I have a capital lady’s horse, steady as a rock, splendid pacer, temper of an angel. He is quite at your service. Let me telegraph for him, and begin your lessons the day after to-morrow.” De Burgh raised himself from his lounging position, and leaned forward to urge his pleading more earnestly. “Let me persuade you. You will thank me hereafter.”

“Thank you,” said Katherine, shaking her head. “It is too late. I shall never learn how to ride, but I should like to know how to drive.”

“There I can be of use to you too. You will want an instructor. Pray take me!”

The last words, spoken a little louder than the rest, caught Mrs. Ormonde’s ear as she was crossing the room, and she paused beside her sister-in-law to ask, “Take him for what?—for better or worse, Katherine?”

“Blundering little idiot!” thought De Burgh; while Katherine answered, with remarkable composure.

“Nothing so formidable; only to be my instructor in the art of driving.”

“Well, and do you accept?”

“Yes; I shall be very pleased to learn. I should like to be able to ‘conduct’ a pair of ponies, as the French would say.”

“Ah yes! and cut a dash in the Park,” said Mrs. Ormonde, taking the seat De Burgh reluctantly vacated for her. “I don’t see why she should not, Mr. De Burgh; do you?”

“Certainly not, provided only Miss Liddell can handle the ribbons.”

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“Very well, Katherine: you devote yourself to acquire the art here, and then join us in a house in town this spring. I was reading the advertisements in the *Times* to-day. I always look at the houses to let, and there is one to let in Chester Square which would suit us exactly; that is, if you will join. She ought to have a season in town, ought she not, Mr. De Burgh?”

He looked keenly at Katherine, and smiled. “Yes, Miss Liddell ought to taste the incomparable delights of the season by all means. Life is incomplete without it.”

“I should like to experience it certainly, for once, but I shall be more in the mood for such excitements next year—*perhaps*,” returned Katherine, gravely.

“Oh, my dear Katie, never put things off! At all events, be presented. That would be a sort of beginning; and I am to be presented too, so we might go together.”

“I do not intend to be presented,” said Katherine; “it would be needless trouble. I have not the least ambition to go to court.”

“But, Katherine, it is absolutely necessary to take your proper position in society. It is not, Mr. De Burgh?”

“What is your objection?” asked De Burgh, disregarding his hostess. “Are you too radical, or too transcendental, or what?”

“Neither. I simply do not care to go, and do not see the necessity of going.”

“You were always the strangest girl!” cried Mrs. Ormonde, a good deal annoyed. “But still, if you were with *us*, you might see a good deal—”

“You know, Ada, I am fixed for this year, and would not change even if I could.”

“Forgive me for interrupting you,” said Errington, coming from the next room. “But if you are disengaged, Lady Alice would be greatly obliged by your playing for her.”

“Certainly,” cried Katherine. She had a sort of pleasure in obliging Errington, and Lady Alice for his sake; and putting her knitting into its little case, she rose and accompanied him to what was called the music-room, because it contained a grand piano and an old, nearly stringless violin.

“I don’t think,” said De Burgh, looking after her, “that your sister-in-law is quite as much under your influence as you fancy.”

“Oh, don’t you?” cried Mrs. Ormonde, feeling a flash of dislike to Katherine thrill through her. It was terribly trying to find an admirer, of whom she was so proud, drawn from her by that “tiresome, obstinate girl”; it was also enough to vex a saint to see her turn a deaf

ear to her more experienced and highly placed sister's suggestion. "When you know a little more of her you will see how obstinate and headstrong she is."

"Ah! troublesome qualities those, especially in a rich woman, and a handsome one to boot. There is something very taking about that sister-in-law of yours, Mrs. Ormonde. If I were Lady Alice I wouldn't trust Errington with her: she would be a dangerous rival."

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“Oh, nonsense! Do you think our Admirable Crichton could go wrong?”

“I don’t know. If he ever does, he’ll go a tremendous cropper.”

“Well, Mr. De Burgh, if you would like to go in and win, you had better make the running now. Once she ‘comes out’ in town, you will find a host of competitors.”

“Ha! I suppose you think a rugged fellow like me would have little or no chance with the curled darlings of May Fair and South Kensington?” Mrs. Ormonde looked down on her fan, but did not speak. De Burgh laughed. “Who is going to bring her out?” he asked.

“I am,” with dignity.

De Burgh’s reply was short and simple. He said, “Oh!” and the interjection (is there an interjection now?—I am not young enough to know) brought the color to Mrs. Ormonde’s cheek and a frown to her fair brow. “The young lady is, on the whole, original,” he continued. “She does not care to be presented.”

“Do you believe her? I don’t. She only said so from love of contradicting.”

“Yes, I believe her; she does not care about it now; but she will probably get the court fever after a plunge into London life. Who is singing?—that is something different from the penny whistling Lady Alice gives us.”

“Why it must be Katherine! It is the first time she has sung since she came. She is always afraid of breaking down, she says. I don’t believe she has sung since the death of her mother.” De Burgh’s only reply was to walk into the next room. Leaving Mrs. Ormonde in a state of irritation against him, Katherine, and the world in general.

Katherine was singing a gay Neapolitan air. She had a rich, sympathetic voice, and sang with arch expression.

Errington stood beside her, and Lady Alice, the rector’s wife and one or two other guests, were grouped round.

“Thank you. That is thoroughly Italian. You must have studied a good deal,” said Errington, who rather liked music, and was accustomed to the best.

“Very nice indeed,” added Lady Alice. “Very nice” was her highest praise. “I should like to learn the song.”

“I do not think it would suit you,” observed Errington.

“Why, Katherine, I had no notion you could ‘tune up’ in this way,” cried Colonel Ormonde. “Give us another, like a good girl; something English—’Robin Adair.’ There was a fellow in ‘ours’ used to sing it capitally.”

“I cannot sing it, Colonel Ormonde. I am very sorry.”

“Oh, Katherine! I have heard you sing it a hundred times,” cried Mrs. Ormonde, joining them. “Why, it was a great favorite with poor dear Mrs. Liddell.”

“I cannot sing it, Ada,” repeated Katherine, quick and low. As she spoke she caught Errington’s eyes.

“No one ought to dictate to a songstress,” he said, very decidedly. “Give us anything you like, so long as you sing.”

Kate bent her head, feeling that he understood her, and her hands wandered over the keys for a minute; then, with a glance at Colonel Ormonde, she began “Jock o’ Hazeldean.”

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Katherine was not the kind of girl to nurse her grief, to dwell upon it with morbid insistence: but she remembered, warmly, lovingly. At times gusts of passionate regret swept over her and shook her self-control, and she dared not attempt her mother's favorite song; the mere request for it called up a cloud of memories. She saw the dear face, the sweet faded blue eyes that used to dwell upon her so tenderly, with such unutterable content. No other eyes would ever look upon her thus; never again could she hope for such perfect sympathy as she had once known.

"Does that make up for 'Robin Adair,' Colonel Ormonde?" she said when the song was ended.

"A very good song and very well sung, but it's not equal to 'Robin Adair.'"

"Lady Alice, will you try that duet of Helmer's?" asked Katherine; and Lady Alice graciously assented.

"I shall miss your accompaniment dreadfully when I leave," she said, when the duet was accomplished. "I feel so sure when you play, and you help me. I hope you will come and see me. Lady Mary, my aunt, would be very pleased; don't you think she would?" to Errington, appealingly.

"Certainly. I hope, Miss Liddell, you will not desert Alice. If you will permit it, Lady Mary Vincent will have the pleasure of calling on you."

"That will be very kind," returned Katherine, softly. If this man were safely married and settled, she thought, she would like to be friends with his wife, and serve him in any way she could. If his eyes did not always confuse and distress her, how much she could like him!

As she rose from the piano, De Burgh, who had been speaking aside with Colonel Ormonde, left him to join her. "I have settled it all with Ormonde," he said. "I am to have the pony-carriage and the dun ponies (not those Mrs. Ormonde generally drives) to-morrow; so, if it does not rain, I'll give you your first lesson; that is, *if* you will allow me."

"You are very prompt," returned Katherine, "and very good to take so much trouble. If it is fine, then, to-morrow. Pray arm yourself with patience. Are not the dun ponies rather frisky?"

"Spirited, but free from vice. Ormonde had them from *my* stables. It's no use learning to drive with dull, inanimate brutes. You'll consider yourself engaged?"

"I do, if Mrs. Ormonde does not want me to go anywhere with her."

"She will not," said De Burgh, confidently.

“Good-night,” returned Katherine. “Tell Mrs. Ormonde I have stolen away, for I have a slight headache.”

“What? going already?” cried De Burgh. “No more songs? The evening, then, is over.”

The following day was soft and bright. March had evidently made up his martial mind to go out in a lamb-like fashion, and De Burgh was unusually amiable and communicative. “When shall you be ready to start?” he asked, following Katherine from the breakfast-table.

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“To start where?” she asked.

“What! have you forgotten our plans of last night?” was his counter-question. “I am to give you your first lesson in driving this morning. I only wait your orders before going to see the ponies put in. We had better take advantage of the fine morning.”

“Ay, that’s right, De Burgh; make hay while the sun shines,” said Ormonde, with his usual tact and jocularity. “But it would be better to have tried a quieter pair than Dick and Dandie.”

“I think you may trust Miss Liddell to me,” returned De Burgh, impatiently. “Well, when shall I bring round the trap?”

“Whenever you like. I am afraid you have set yourself a tiresome task.”

De Burgh laughed. “If you prove careless or disobedient, why, I’ll not repeat the dose. In half an hour, then, I’ll have the carriage at the door.”

That half-hour was spent by Katherine in explaining to Cis and Charlie that she could not go out with them that day, for the morning was promised to De Burgh, and after luncheon she had undertaken to try over the song which had pleased her with Lady Alice, who was to leave the next day. The little fellows thought themselves very ill-used. But Miss Richards, who had greatly prized her deliverance from long muddy rambles since Katherine’s advent, promised to take them to fish in a stream which ran between the Castleford and Melford properties.

“Do you suppose I shall dare to touch the reins of these terrible creatures?” said Katherine when De Burgh dashed up to the door, and held the spirited, impatient animals steady with some difficulty.

“We’ll get rid of some of the steam first, and you will get accustomed to their playfulness,” he returned. “Here, Ormonde, haven’t you a rug for Miss Liddell? It may come on to rain.”

“Yes; here you are;” and Colonel Ormonde, who was examining the turn-out, tucked up his fair guest carefully, and warned them to be back in good time, as he wanted De Burgh to ride over with him to see some horses which were for sale a mile or two at the other side of Monckton.

“What a frightful pace;” said Katherine, after they had whirled out of the gates, yet feeling comforted by De Burgh’s evident mastery of the ponies.

“You are not frightened? Don’t you think I can manage them?”

“I am not comfortable, because I am not accustomed to horses and furious driving.”

“Oh, they will settle down presently. Where shall we go—through Garston? It’s a fine place. Perhaps you have seen it?”

“I have not, and I should like to see it very much.” She was delighted with the suggestion. It would be a help to her, a consolation, to see so visible a token of Errington’s wealth.

“Curious fellow, Errington,” resumed De Burgh. “I suppose he is about the only man who isn’t spoiled by the most unbroken prosperity. Still, a fellow who never did anything wrong in his life is rather uninteresting; don’t you think so?”

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“Has he never done anything wrong? That seems rather incredible.”

“If he has, he has kept it deucedly close. But you are right; it is very incredible.”

They drove on for a while in silence. It was a delicious morning—a blue sky flecked with fleecy white clouds, bright sunlight, birds singing, hedges budding, all nature welcoming the first sweet intoxication of renewed youth stirring in her veins. Katherine loved the spring-time, and felt its influence profoundly, but it was the first spring in which she had been alone; this time last year she—they—had been at Bordighera. How heavenly fair it had been! But De Burgh was speaking:

“You did not hear, or rather heed, what I said, Miss Liddell; that’s not civil.”

“Indeed it is not—forgive me. What did you say?”

“I suppose you like country life best, as you demolished Mrs. Ormonde’s scheme respecting a house in town so promptly?”

“I enjoy looking at the country, but I know nothing of country life. I am not sure I should like it.”

“What’s your objection to drawing-rooms and balls—the season generally?”

“I do not object; but is my deep mourning suited to these gayeties, Mr. De Burgh?”

“Well, no. I beg your pardon. Mrs. Ormonde started it, you know. I fancy it would take double-distilled mourning to keep her out of the swim.”

“It is impossible for one nature to judge another which is totally different, fairly.”

“Very true and very prudent. I have not got to the bottom of your character yet, but I am pursuing my studies,” said De Burgh, with a grim sort of smile. “You see they are settling down to their work now,” pointing his whip to the ponies. “I’ll give you the reins in a minute or two.”

“I think I ought to begin with something quieter,” said Katherine, looking at them uneasily.

De Burgh laughed. “There is a nice stretch of level road before us—nothing to interfere with you. Change places with me, if you please. Here, put the reins between your fingers—so; now a turn of the wrist guides them. I’ll hold your hand for a bit. You had better not let the whip touch them—so. There you are. I’ll show you how to handle the ribbons before you are a fortnight older; that is if you will come out every day with me.”

“Would you take that trouble?” exclaimed Katherine.

“I can take a good deal of trouble if I like my work. Now hold them steady, and keep your eye on them. When we come to the trees, on there, turn to the left.”

“So far there doesn’t seem to be much difficulty; they seem to go all right of their own accord,” she said, after a few minutes.

“They are a capital pair; but there is nothing to disturb them.”

For the rest of the way to Garston, De Burgh only spoke to give the lesson he had undertaken, and Katherine found herself growing interested and pleased. When they entered the gates, however, she asked him to take the reins. She wanted to look about her, to remark the surroundings of Errington’s house.

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It was a fine place, somewhat flat, perhaps, but beautiful with splendid trees, and a small lake, through which ran the stream in another part of which Cis and Charlie were going to fish. The house stood well, the grounds were admirably laid out and perfectly kept; evidences of wealth were on all sides.

“I suppose it costs a great deal of money to keep up a place like this,” said Katherine, breaking a silence which had lasted some minutes: De Burgh never troubled himself to speak unless he really had something to say.

“I shouldn’t care to live here on less than ten thousand a year,” he returned, glancing round.

“And has Mr. Errington all that money?”

“His father has a good deal more. He bought this place for him, I believe. Old Errington is very wealthy, and on his last legs, from what I hear.”

“Ten thousand a year! What a quantity of money!”

“Hem! I think I could get through it without much trouble.”

“Then you have always been rich?”

“Rich! I have been on the verge of bankruptcy all my life. I never knew what it was to have enough money.”

“But you seem to have gone everywhere and done everything.”

“Yes, by discounting my future at a ruinous rate,” he returned, with a sort of reckless candor that amused his hearer. “You scarcely understand me, I suppose.”

“I think I do. I know how uncomfortable it is to want money.”

“Indeed! Still, it’s not so hard on women as on men.”

“Why?”

“We want so much more.”

“Then you have so many more chances of earning it.”

“Earning it! Oh, that is a new view of the case!”

“I should not mind doing it; that is, if I could succeed.”

“Do you know, I took you for your nephews’ governess. It never crossed my mind you were an heiress. As a rule, heiresses are revolting to the last degree.”

“I feel the compliment.”

“Remember, I like their money, only I object to its being encumbered.”

“You are wonderfully frank, Mr. De Burgh.”

“I dare say you said ‘brutally frank’ in your thoughts, Miss Liddell, and you are right. I am rather a bad lot, and a little too old to mend. But let it be a saving clause in your mind, if I ever recur to it, that the fact of your being nice enough for the governess impelled me to offer driving lessons to the heiress. Will you take the reins? You might hold them forever if you choose.”

“Not yet, thank you—when we get out on the road again,” returned Katherine, not seeing or seeming to see his covert meaning. “You are surely not a democrat?”

“A democrat? No. I have no particular view as regards politics; but if the devil ever got so completely the upper hand in this world as to leave it without a class to serve and obey *us*, their natural superiors, I’d decline to stay here any longer, and descend by the help of a bullet to lower regions, where I should have better society.”

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“More congenial society, I am sure,” said Katherine, laughing, though revolted by his tone. She felt it would never do to show she was. “You are quite different from any one *I* ever met. Do you know, you give me the idea of a wicked Norman Baron in the Middle Ages.”

De Burgh laughed, as if he rather enjoyed the observation. “I know,” he said; “a regular melodramatic villain, ’away with him to the lowest dungeon beneath the castle moat’ sort of fellow, who would draw a Jew’s teeth before breakfast and roast a restive burgher after. I wonder, considering you possess the two strongest attractions for men of this description—money and (may I say it?) beauty—that you trust yourself with me.”

“Ah! you concealed your vile opinions successfully; so you see I could not know my danger,” returned Katherine, laughing. “You are not at all a modern man.”

“I accept the compliment.”

“Which I did not intend for one. When we get through the gates I will take the reins again.”

“Certainly; but the ponies’ heads will be turned homeward, and I am afraid they will pull. They have steadied down wonderfully.” The rest of the drive was spent in careful instruction, and Katherine was surprised to find how quickly the time had gone when they reached the house.

De Burgh interested her in spite of her dislike of the opinions and sentiments he expressed. There was something picturesque about the man, and she felt that he was attracted to her in a curious and almost alarming manner. Yet she was conscious of an inclination to play with fire. It was some time since she felt so light-hearted. The sight of Errington’s luxurious surroundings seemed to take something from the load upon her conscience, and this sense of partial relief gave brilliancy to her eyes, as the fresh balmy air gave her something of her former rich coloring.

“By Jove!” cried Colonel Ormonde, as Katherine took her place at luncheon, “your drive has agreed with you. I’ve never seen you look so well. You must pursue the treatment. How did she get on, De Burgh?”

“Not so badly. But Miss Liddell is more timid than I expected. She’ll get accustomed to the look of the cattle in a little while. Courage is largely made up of a habit. I’ll take some of that cold lamb, Ormonde.” And De Burgh spoke no more till he had finished his luncheon.

“Do you know, Miss Liddell, that my father was an old friend of your uncle’s?” said Errington that evening, as he placed himself beside her on a retired sofa, while Miss Brereton was executing some gymnastics on the piano. “I have just been taking to

Ormonde about him. I remember having been sent to call upon him—long ago, when I was at college, I think. He lived in some wild north-land; I remember it was a great way off. Then my father went for a trip to Calcutta, and I fancy lost sight of his old chum."

Katherine grew red and white as he spoke; she could only murmur, "Yes, I was told they had been friends."

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“Then you must accept me as a hereditary friend,” said Errington, kindly. “I shall tell my father that I have made your acquaintance, though he does not take much interest in anything now, I am sorry to say.”

“I am sorry—” faltered Katherine.

“Both Lady Alice and I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you in town,” continued Errington, having waited in vain for her to finish her sentence. “I am going to see her safely in her aunt’s charge to-morrow, and shall not return, I fancy, till you have left.”

“You are both very good. I shall be most happy to see you again,” returned Katherine, mastering her forces, though she felt ready to fly and hide her guilty head in any corner. Errington felt that she was unusually uneasy and uncomfortable with him, so made way the more readily for De Burgh, who monopolized her for rest of the evening.

The next day was wet, and for a week the weather was unsettled, so that Katherine had only one more lesson in driving before the party broke up, and De Burgh too was obliged to leave.

But Katherine prolonged her stay. Charlie, in ardor for fishing, had slipped into the river and caught a severe, feverish cold.

The way in which he clung to his auntie, the evident comfort he derived from her presence, the delight he had in holding her cool soft hand in his own burning little fingers, made him impossible for her to leave him. By the time he was able to sit up and play with his brother, poor Charlie was a pallid little skeleton, and his auntie bade him a tender adieu, determined to lose no time in finding sea-side quarters for the precious invalid.

CHAPTER XVII.

TAKING COUNSEL.

Miss Payne was busy looking over several cards which lay in a small china dish on her work-table. It was early in the forenoon, and she still wore a simple muslin cap and a morning gown of gray cashmere. Her mouth looked very rigid and her eyes gloomy. To her enters her brother, fresh and bright, a smile on his lips and a flower in his button-hole.

Miss Payne vouchsafed no greeting. Looking at him sternly, she asked, “Well! what do you want?”

“To ask at what hour Miss Liddell arrives, and if I am to meet her at the station.”

“She is not coming to-day,” snapped Miss Payne; “she is not coming till Saturday.”

“Indeed!” In a changed tone, “I hope she is all right?”

“It’s hard to answer that. It seems one of the nephews has had a feverish cold, and she did not like to leave him. I do not feel sure there is not some real reason under this, for she adds that she is anxious to see and consult me about some matter she has much at heart. Perhaps there is a man at the bottom of it.”

“I hope not,” said Bertie, quietly, “unless she has found some former friend at Castleford. I do not think Miss Liddell is the sort of girl to accept a man on five or six weeks’ acquaintance, and she has scarcely been at Castleford so long.”

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“It is impossible to fathom the folly of women when a lover is in the case.”

“You are hard, Hannah.”

“I do not care whether I am or not. I don’t want to lose Miss Liddell before the time agreed for.”

“No doubt she is a profitable—”

“It is no question of profit,” interrupted Miss Payne, grimly. “Whether she goes or whether she stays she is bound to me financially for twelve months. But I am interested in Katherine, and it will be far better for her to stay on here and feel her way before she launches into the whirl of what they call society. I want to save her for a while from the wild rush of dressing, driving, dining, dancing, that has swept away all my girls sooner or later. Look here: the mothers are flocking round her already.” She began to take the cards out of the dish and read the names: “Lady Mary Vincent, 23 Waldegrave Crescent; she is a sister of that Lord Melford who ran such a rig years ago. *Her* boys are still at Eton. I suppose she comes because her niece and Miss Liddell have struck up a friendship at Castleford. Then here are Mrs. and Miss Alford; we all knew them in Rome; there’s a son *there*; they are respectable people, well off, and fighting their way up judiciously enough. Lady Barrington; *she* has a nephew, but she will be useful. Mr. and Mrs. Tracey; they were at Florence, and have a couple of daughters; there may be a nephew or a cousin, but I never heard of one; they are pleasant, sensible, artistic people, who just enjoy themselves and don’t trouble. Lady Mildred Reptan, Miss Brereton, John de Burgh; I don’t know these. All these people evidently think she is in town, or have only just come themselves, but you see the outlook.”

“John de Burgh,” repeated Bertie, thoughtfully. “I remember something about him; nothing particularly good. I believe he is on the turf. Yes, he is a famous steeple-chase rider, and rather fast—not too desirable a follower for Miss Liddell.”

“She met him at Castleford, and I rather think he is related to Colonel Ormonde.” Miss Payne put back the cards in the dish as she spoke, and remained silent for some instants.

“You will be glad when Miss Liddell returns,” said Bertie.

“So will you,” she returned, tartly. “But I hope you won’t dip into her purse so freely as you used for your reformed drunkards and ragged orphans. It was *too* bad.”

“Miss Liddell never waits to be asked. She seems on the lookout for cases on which to bestow money. As she has plenty, why should I hesitate to accept it?”

Miss Payne slowly rubbed her nose with the handle of a small hook she used for pulling out the loops of her tatting. “Katherine Liddell is an uncommon sort of girl,” she said,

“but I like her. I have an idea that she likes me better than any of the others did, yet there are not many things on which we agree. She is a little flighty in some ways, but she has some sense too,

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some notion of the value of money; she does not lose her dead about dress, nor does she buy costly baubles at the jewellers'. She, certainly wastes a good many pounds on books, when a three-guinea subscription to Mudie's would answer the purpose quite as well. Then she is honestly deeply grieved at the loss of her mother, but she does not parade it, or nurse it either, and I think she has some opinion of *my* judgment. Still she is a little unsettled, and not quite happy."

"I think she deserves to be happy," observed Bertie, with an air of conviction—"if any erring mortal can deserve anything."

"We seldom get our deserts, either way, *here*; indeed, this world is so upside down I am inclined to believe there must be another to put it straight."

"We have fortunately better proof than that," returned her brother, gravely.

"I must say I feel very curious to know what Katherine's plan is; I am terrible afraid there is a man in it."

"Nothing more probable;" and Bertie fell into a fit of thought. "You know Mrs. Needham!" he asked suddenly.

"Well, I just know her."

"She is a most earnest, energetic woman, though we are not quite of one mind on all subjects. She wants to secure Miss Liddell's assistance in getting up a bazar for the Stray Children's Home. I shall bring her to call on you."

"Don't!"—very emphatically. "I know more than enough people already, and I don't want any well-dressed beggars added to the number."

"Well, I will not interfere; but that is of little consequence. If Mrs. Needham wants to come, she'll come."

"I hate these fussy subscription-hunting women!" cried Miss Payne.

"She does *not* hunt for subscriptions, nor does she take any special interest in religious matters, but she approves of this particular charity. She is an immensely busy woman, and writes in I don't know now many newspapers."

"Newspapers! And are our opinions made up for us by rambling hussies of *that* description?"

Bertie burst out laughing. "If Mrs. Needham heard you!" he exclaimed. "She considers herself 'the glass of fashion and the mould of form,' the most successful and important woman in the world—the English world."

Miss Payne's only reply was a contemptuous upward toss of the head. "If you will be at Euston Square on Saturday to meet the five-fifty train from Monckton," she resumed, "I should be obliged to you—Miss Liddell travels alone—and you can dine with us if you like after, unless you are going to preach the gospel somewhere."

"Thank you. Why do you object to my preaching?"

"Because I like things done decently and in order. You are not ordained, and there are plenty of churches and chapels, God knows, for people to go to, if they would wash their faces and be decent. Now I can't stay here any longer, so good-by for the present." She took up a little basket containing an old pair of gloves, large scissors, and a ball of twine, and walked briskly away to attend to the plants in her diminutive conservatory.

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De Burgh did not prolong his absence; he returned to Castleford while Katherine was still in attendance on the little invalid; but he found his stay neither pleasant nor profitable. Katherine was far too much occupied nursing her nephew to give any time or attention to her impatient admirer.

“Miss Liddell is a peculiar specimen of her sex,” he growled, in his usual candid and unaffected manner, as he and Colonel Ormonde sat alone over their wine. “She never leaves those brats. She must know that it’s not every girl *I* should take the trouble of teaching, and yet she throws over each appointment I make. Does she intend to adopt your wife’s boys? Adopted sons are an appendage no man would like to accept with a bride, be she ever so well endowed.”

“Oh, she will forget them as soon as she falls in love! You must carry on the siege more vigorously.”

“How the deuce are you to do it when you never get within hail of the fortress? There is something peculiar about Katherine Liddell I can’t quite make out. If she were a commonplace woman, angular, squinting, or generally plain, I could go in and win and collar the cash without hesitation, but somehow or other I can’t go into the affair in this spirit. I want the woman as well as the money.”

“Well, I see no reason why you shouldn’t have both. Your faintness of heart never lost *you* any fair lady, I am sure, Jack.”

“Perhaps not.” And he smoked meditatively for a minute or two.

“Then you will not leave us to-morrow?” said Ormonde.

“When does *she* go up to town?” asked De Burgh.

“On Monday, I believe.”

“Then I’ll run up the day after to-morrow. Old De Burgh has just come back from the Riviera. I’ll go and do the dutiful, and tell him I have found a suitable partner for my joys and sorrows; it will score to my credit. He doesn’t half like me, you know. Then I’ll have a dozen better chances to cultivate Miss Liddell in town, and away from your nursery, than I have here. Give me her address. She is a frank, unconventional creature, and won’t mind coming out with me alone.”

“Very true. Mrs. Ormonde has persuaded me to take her to town for a couple of months; so we’ll be there to back you up.”

“Good! Meanwhile I will do my best for my own hand. If she starts on Monday, I’ll pay my respects to the peerless one by the time she has swallowed her luncheon on Tuesday,” said De Burgh, with a harsh laugh.

Thus it came to pass that De Burgh's card was amongst those preserved for Katherine's inspection; but she postponed her departure first to Wednesday, next to Saturday, and De Burgh grew savagely impatient when Colonel Ormonde informed him of these changes in a private note.

When at last she did arrive, Miss Payne was struck by the look of renewed hope and cheerfulness in her young friend's face. Her movements even were more alert, and her voice had lost its languid tone.

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“I thought you would find it difficult to get away,” said Miss Payne, as she assisted her to remove her travelling dress. “But I am very pleased to see you again, and to see you looking more like yourself.”

“I *feel* more like my old self,” returned Katherine, actually kissing Miss Payne—a kind of treatment exceedingly new to her.

“In fact, I am full of a project which will, I hope, make me much happier. I will tell you all about it after dinner, if we are alone. Your advice will be of great value to me.”

“Such as it is, I shall be glad to give it; though I do not suppose you’ll take it unless it suits your wishes.”

“Perhaps not,” said Katherine, laughing; “but I think it will.”

“She is going to marry some fortune-hunting scamp,” thought Miss Payne. “I was afraid no good would come of her visit to that little dressy dolly sister-in-law of hers.” She only said, “Dinner will be ready in half an hour, and we shall be quite alone.”

Then she went quickly down stairs to her brother, who was gazing out of the window, but not seeing what he looked at.

“You can’t dine here to-day, Bertie,” said Miss Payne, abruptly, as she entered the room.

“And why not?”

“Because she wants to have some confidential conversation with me after dinner, and we must be alone.”

“Have you any idea what it will be about?”

“No; and I am astonished at your putting the question. You may come in after church to-morrow if you like.”

“Thank you. I shall be rather late, as I am going to an open-air service beyond Whitechapel.”

“Well, I do hope you’ll get something to eat after. Are *you* going to preach?”

“No. I seldom preach. I haven’t the gift of eloquence.”

“Which means you have a little common-sense left. Really, Gilbert, for a man of thirty-five, or nearly thirty-five, you are too credulous.”

“It is my nature to be so,” he returned, laughing. “Well, good-by to you. It is really unkind to turn me out in this unceremonious fashion.” So saying, with his usual sweet-tempered compliance he departed.

“What a good boy he is!” said Miss Payne to herself, looking at the grate, while by a dual brain action she made a brief calculation as to how much longer she must burn coal. “He ought to have been a girl. Why don’t rich young women see that he is the very stuff to make a pleasant husband, instead of those monsters of strength and determination that fools of women make gods of, and themselves door mats for, and often find to be only big pumpkins after all?”

Miss Payne’s anticipations were of the gloomiest when, after their quickly despatched dinner, she settled herself between the fire and window with her favorite tatting, drawing up the knots with vicious energy. She opened proceedings by an interrogative “Well?” and closed her mouth with a snap.

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“Well, my dear Miss Payne,” began Katherine, who had settled herself comfortably in a corner of the sofa, “I have an important plan in my mind, and I want your co-operation. I should have written to you about it, only I waited to get Colonel Ormonde’s consent.”

“It’s a man!” ejaculated Miss Payne to herself.

“To begin: I was not at all satisfied with the boys when I first went to Castleford. They were not exactly neglected, but they were quite secluded. Mrs. Ormonde scarcely saw them, and their governess or attendant was not at all lady-like; she speaks with a London accent and misplaces her *h’*s; altogether she is not the sort of person I should have placed with the boys. Then the poor little fellows clung to me and monopolized me as if I had been their mother; they made me feel like one. Moreover, I seemed to see my own dear mother and hear her voice when they spoke to me. She loved them so much!”

Katherine paused suddenly, but almost immediately resumed: “The youngest, Charlie, is not yet seven, and is very delicate. He has had rather a sharp attack of bronchitis. I am very anxious about him. How I want to take them to the sea-side next month, and to keep them there all the summer, and I want your help to find a nice place. I know nothing of the English coast. More than this: I feel I could not get on without you, so you must come with us. Suppose, dear Miss Payne, we take a house with a garden near the sea, and you let this one? I will gladly pay all extra cost, while our original agreement, as far as I myself am concerned, shall hold good.”

Miss Payne listened attentively to this long speech, the expression of her countenance relaxing; but she did not reply at once.

“I think,” she said, after a moment’s thought, “that you are exceedingly liberal, but I am not sure you are wise. As far as I am concerned, I should like your plan very much. I do not profess to be fond of children, but I dare say these little boys would not interfere with me. As regards yourself, if you keep the children for the whole summer, it is possible Mrs. Ormonde might be inclined to leave them with you altogether, and this would create a burden for you—a burden you are by no means called upon to bear. It is a dangerous experiment.”

“Not to me,” returned Katherine, thoughtfully. “In fact it is a consummation for which I devoutly wish. I should like to adopt my nephews.”

“That would certainly be foolish. It would not be kind to the children, Katherine (as you wish me to call you). In the course of a year or two you will marry, and then the creatures who had learned to love you and look on you as a mother would be again motherless. Do not take them from their natural guardian.”

“What you say is very reasonable. You cannot know how certain I feel that I shall *not* marry. However, let us leave all that to arrange itself in the future; let us think of the present. Colonel and Mrs. Ormonde are coming up to town, for two or three months, in May, and I do not like the idea of Cis and Charlie being left behind; so will you help me, my dear Miss Payne? Shall you mind a spring and summer in some quiet sea-side place?”

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Again Miss Payne reflected before she spoke. "I should rather like it: and your idea of letting this house is a good one. Yes, I shall be happy to assist you as far as I can. The first question is, where shall we go?"

"That, I am sure, *you* know best."

An interesting disquisition ensued. Miss Payne rejected Bournemouth, Weymouth, Worthing, Brighton, and Folkestone, for what seemed to Katherine sufficient reason, and finally recommended Sandbourne, a quiet and little-known nook on the Dorsetshire coast, as being mild but not relaxing, not too near nor too far from town, and possessing fine sands, while the country round was less bare and flat than what usually lies near the coast.

Finally the "friends in council" decided to go down and look at the place. "For," observed Miss Payne, "if we are to go away the beginning of next month, we have little more than a fortnight before us."

"By all means," cried Katherine, starting up. "Let us go to-morrow; we might 'do' the place in a day, and come back the next. You are really a dear, to fall into my views so readily."

"To-morrow? Oh! that's a little too fast; the day after, if you like. Now I wish you would look at these cards; they have all been left for you in the last few days."

Katherine took and looked over them with some running comments. "Mrs. Tracy! I shall be quite glad to see them again; they were always so kind and pleasant. Lady Mary Vincent! I did not think she would call so soon; I think I must go and see her to-morrow. I rather like her niece, Lady Alice Mordaunt; she is a nice, gentle girl. She is to be married very soon to a man who interested me a good deal; such a thoughtful, clever man, but rather provokingly composed and perfect—a sort of person who never makes a mistake."

"He must be a remarkable person," said Miss Payne.

"He will soon be in Parliament, and has some of the qualities which make a statesman, I imagine. I shall watch his progress." Here Katherine took up a card, and while she read the inscription, "John Fitzstephen de Burgh," a slight smile crept round her lips. "I had no idea *he* was in town, or that he would take the trouble of calling on me so soon. I thought he was too utterly offended."

"Why?" asked Miss Payne, looking at her curiously.

"He is rather ill-tempered, I fancy, and he was vexed because I preferred staying with Charlie to going out with him: he offered to teach me how to drive; so I believe, like the rich young man in the gospel, he went away in desperation."

“Hum! Is *he* a rich young man?”

“He is not young, and I am not sure about his being rich. He has a hunting-lodge and horses, yet I don’t fancy he is rich. He is a sort of relation of the Ormondes.”

“I suspect he is a spendthrift, and would like *your* money.”

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“Oh, very likely; but, my dear Miss Payne, you need not warn me; I am quite sufficiently inclined to believe that the men who show me attention are thinking more of what I have than what *I* am. Believe me it is not an agreeable frame of mind. Mr. De Burgh is a strange sort of character. He amuses me; he is not a bit like a modern man. He doesn’t seem to think it worth while to conceal what he feels or thinks. There is an odd well-bred roughness about him, if I may use such an expression; but I greatly prefer him to Colonel Ormonde.”

“Oh, you do? Colonel Ormonde is just an average man,” added Miss Payne.

“I should hope the general average is higher; but I must not be ill-natured. He has always been very kind to me.”

This was a pleasant interlude to Katherine. She had succeeded in hushing her heart to rest for a while, in banishing the thoughts which had long tormented her. Nothing had comforted and satisfied her as did this project of adopting her nephews. It is true she had not yet announced it, but in her own mind she resolved that once they were under her wing, she would not let them go again, unless indeed something quite unforeseen occurred; nor did she anticipate any difficulties with their mother. She would thus secure a natural legitimate interest in life, and make a home, which to a girl of her disposition was essential. Yet she knew well that in renouncing the idea of marriage she was denying one of the strongest necessities of her nature. The love and companionship of a man in whom she believed, for whom she could be ambitious, who would link her with the life and movement of the outer world, who would be the complement of her own being, was a dream of delight. Not that she felt in the least unable to stand alone, or fancied she was too delicate to take care of herself, but life without the love of another self could never be full and perfect. She was too true a woman not to value deeply the tenderness of a man; yet she had firmly resolved in justice to herself, in fairness to any possible husband, to renounce that crown of woman’s existence. It was the only atonement she could make. Well, at least her loving care of these dear little boys, who were in point of fact motherless, would in some degree expiate her evil deed, and would keep her heart warm and her mind healthy.

[**extra space]

Possessed of the true magic, “money,” obstacles faded away. The expedition to Sandbourne was most successful. Katherine was brighter than Miss Payne had ever seen her before. The day was sunny, the place looked cheerful and picturesque. It lay under a wooded hill, ending in a bold rocky point, which sheltered it and a wide bay from the easterly winds. A splendid stretch of golden sands offered a playground for the racing waves, and an old tower crowned an islet near the opposite point of the land, which there lay low, and was covered with gorse and heather.

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There was an objectionable row of lodging-houses, against which must be entered a low, red-brick, ivy-grown inn, old-fashioned, picturesque, and comfortable. One or two villas stood in their own grounds but were occupied, and one, evidently older was shut up.

Perhaps because it was inaccessible, perhaps because it had a pleasant outlook across the bay to the island and tower at its western extremity, Katherine at once determined it was the very place to suit them, and made her way to the local house agent to see what could be done toward securing it. Cliff Cottage was not on his books, said the agent; but if the lady wished "he would apply to the owner, who had gone with his wife in search of health to the Riviera. In the meantime there is Amanda Villa, at the other end of Beach Terrace, very comfortable and elegantly furnished"—pointing to a glaring white edifice with a Belvedere tower in would-be Italian style. "I don't think you could find anything better." But the aspect of Amanda Villa did not please either lady, so they returned to Cliff Cottage: and remarking a thin curl of blue smoke from one of the chimneys, they ventured to make their way to a side entrance, where their knocking was answered by an old deaf caretaker, who, for a consideration, permitted them to inspect the house. It proved to be all Katherine wished. Though the furniture was scanty and worn, it was clean and well kept, and "We can easily get what is necessary," she concluded, with the sense of power which always goes with a full purse.

"Let us go back to the agent and get the address of the owner."

"Better make your offer through him," returned Miss Payne, and Katherine complied.

The days which succeeded seemed very long. Katherine had taken a fancy to the quaint pretty abode, and was impatient to be settled there with her boys. There was a "preparatory school for young gentlemen," which was an additional attraction to Sandbourne, both children being extremely ignorant even for their tender years; and Katherine was greatly opposed to Colonel Ormonde's intention of sending Cecil away to a boarding-school. She wished him to have some preliminary training before he was plunged into the difficulties of a large boarding-school. To Colonel Ormonde her will was law, and if only she could get the house she wanted, all would go well.

Of course Katherine lost no time in visiting her *protegee* Rachel. She had written to her during her absence to let her feel that she was not forgotten; and the replies were not only well written and expressed, but showed a degree of intelligence above the average.

When Katherine entered the room where Rachel sat at work she was touched and delighted at the sudden brightening of Rachel's sunken eyes, the joyous flush that rose to her cheek.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, “I did not expect you so soon. How good of you to come!” She placed a chair, and in reply to Katherine’s friendly question, “How have you been going on?” Rachel gave an encouraging account of herself. Mrs. Needham had introduced her to two families, both of whom wished her to work in the house, which, though infinitely disagreeable to her, she did not like to refuse.

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“Perhaps,” she added, “the counter-irritation was good for me, for I feel more braced up. And of all your many benefits, dear Miss Liddell, nothing has done me so much good as the books you sent me, except the sight of yourself. Do not think I am exaggerating, but I am a mere machine, resigned to work because I must not die, save when I see you and speak to you; then I feel I can live—that I have something to live for, to show I am not unworthy of your trust in me. Perhaps time will heal even such wounds as mine. Is it not terrible to try and live without hope?”

“But you must hope, Rachel. You are not alone. I feel truly, deeply interested in you; believe me, I will always be your friend. You are looking better, but I want to see your eyes less hollow and your mouth less sad. We are both young, and life has many lights and shades for us both, so far as we can anticipate.”

A long and confidential conversation ensued, in the course of which Katherine quite forgot there was any difference of position between herself and the humble dressmaker whom her bounty of purse and heart had restored.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“MRS. NEEDHAM.”

When Katherine returned that afternoon she found Miss Payne was not alone. On the sofa opposite to her sat a lady—a large, well-dressed lady—with bright black eager eyes, and a high color. She held open on her lap a neat black leather bag, from which she had taken some papers, and was speaking quickly, in loud dictatorial tones, when Katherine came in.

“Here is Miss Liddell,” said Miss Payne.

“Ah! I am very glad,” cried the large lady, starting up and letting the bag fall, much of its contents scattering right and left.

“Mrs. Needham, Miss Liddell,” said Miss Payne, with the sort of rigid accent which Katherine knew expressed disapprobation.

“Oh, thank you—don’t trouble!” exclaimed Mrs. Needham, as Katherine politely bent down to collect the letters, note-book, memorandum, *etc*. “So sorry! I am too careless in small matters. Now, my dear Miss Liddell, I must explain myself. Mr. Payne and I are deeply interested in the success of a bazar which I am trying to organize, and he suggested that I should see you and make our objects thoroughly clear.”

With much fluency and distinctness she proceeded to describe the origin and progress of the work she advocated, showing the necessity for a new wing to the “Children’s Refuge,” and entreating Katherine’s assistance at the bazar.

This Katherine gently but firmly declined. “I shall be most happy to send you a check, but more I cannot undertake,” she said.

“Well, that is very good of you; and in any case I am very pleased to have made your acquaintance. Mr. Payne has told me how ready you are to help in all charitable undertakings. Now in an ordinary way I don’t do much in this line; my energies have been directed to another channel. I am not what is generally called a religious woman; I am too broad in my views to please the orthodox; but, at the same time, religion is in our present stage essential.”

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“I am sure religion is much obliged to you,” observed Miss Payne. “How do you and my brother get on?”

“Remarkably well. *I* think him rather a fanatic; he thinks me a pagan. But we both have common-sense enough to see that each honestly wishes to help suffering humanity, and on that broad platform we meet. Mr. Payne tells me you don’t know much of London, Miss Liddell. I can help you to see some of its more interesting sides. I shall be most happy, though I am a very busy woman. I am a journalist, and my time is not my own.”

“Indeed?” cried Katherine. “You mean you write for newspapers?”

“Yes; that is, I get what crumbs fall from the press_men’s_ table. They get the best work and the best pay; but I can work as well as most of them, and sometimes mine goes in in place of what some idle, pleasure-loving scamp has neglected. Let me see”—pulling out her watch—“five minutes to four. I must not stay. I have to look in at Mrs. Rayner’s studio; she has a reception, and will want a mention of it. Then there are Sir Charles Goodman’s training schools for deaf-mutes and the new Art Photography Company’s rooms to run through before I go to the House of Commons to do my ‘Bird’s-eye View’ letter for the Australian mail to-morrow.”

“My dear Mrs. Needham, you take my breath away!” exclaimed Katherine. “I am sure you could show me more of London—I mean what I should like to see—than any one else.”

“Very well. Let me know when you come back to town, and you shall hear a debate if you like. I am not a society woman, but I have the *entree* to most places. Now good-morning—good-morning. You see your agreeable conversation has made me forget the time.” And shaking hands cordially, she hastened away.

“*Our* agreeable conversation,” repeated Miss Payne, with a somewhat cynical accent. “I wonder how many words you and I uttered! Why she makes me stupid. Really Gilbert ought not to inflict such a tornado on us.”

“I like her,” said Katherine; “there is something kind and true about her. I should like to see some of the places she goes to and the work she does. She seems happy enough, too. I must not forget to write to her and send that check I promised.”

“Hem! If you give right and left you’ll not have much left for yourself,” growled Miss Payne. Katherine laughed.

“Oh, by-the-way,” resumed her chaperon, “I forgot to tell you that Colonel Ormonde arrived, shortly after you went out, with a large basket of flowers. He was vexed at missing you. He came up about some business, and wanted to take you to see some

one. However, he could not come back. I can't say that I think he is well mannered. He was quite rough and brusque, and asked with such an ill-bred sneer if you were off on any private business with my brother."

"I can't help thinking that he was annoyed because I appointed Mr. Payne co-trustee with Mr. Newton to my deed of gift," said Katherine, thoughtfully. "But I know I could not have chosen a better man."

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“Well, I believe so,” returned his sister, graciously. “He is coming to dinner, so you can give him your check.”

It was a great day for Cis and Charlie when they arrived in London to stay with “auntie,” who was at the station to receive and convey them to Wilton Street.

Charlie still looked pale and thin enough to warrant a general treatment of cuddling and coddling calculated to satisfy any affectionate young woman’s heart. They were to sleep at Miss Payne’s residence, in order to be rested and fresh for their journey to the sea-side next day.

Miss Payne herself was unusually amiable, for she had let her house satisfactorily for the greater part of the season, and this as Katherine paid for the Sandbourne villa, was clear gain.

When the boys and their auntie drove up to Miss Payne’s abode she was a good deal annoyed to find De Burgh at the door in the act of leaving a card. He hastened to hand her out of the carriage, exclaiming:

“This is the first bit of luck I have had for weeks. You always manage to be out when I call. Come along, my boys. What lucky little fellows you are to come to town for the season!”

“Ah, but we are not going to stay in town. We are going to the sea-side to bathe, and to sail in boats, and—”

“Run in, Charlie, like a good boy,” interrupted Katherine. “Your tea will be quite ready.”

“I suppose you will think me horribly intrusive if I ask you to let me come in?” said De Burgh. There was something unusually earnest in his tone.

“Oh, not at all,” returned Katherine, politely, though she would have much preferred bidding him good-morning. “Here, Sarah, pray take the boys to their room and get their things off. I am sure they want their tea.”

Miss Payne’s sedate elderly house-maid looked quite elated as she took Charlie’s hand and, preceded by Cecil, led him upstairs.

“Are you really ‘out’ when I come?” asked De Burgh when they reached the drawing-room.

Katherine took off her hat and pushed her hair off her brow as she seated herself in a low chair.

“Yes, I think so. I do not usually deny myself to any visitor.” She looked up, half amused, half interested, by the almost imploring expression of his usually hard face.

“I rather suspect I am not a favored guest?”

“Why do you say that, Mr. De Burgh? am I uncivil?”

“No. What a fool I am making of myself! Tell me, are you really going away to-morrow to bury yourself alive?”

“I am *really*.”

“After all, I believe you are right. *I* am always bored in London. Women think it a paradise.”

“I like London so well that I shall probably make it my headquarters.”

“It’s rather premature for you to make plans, isn’t it?”

“Whether it is or not, I have arranged my future much to my own satisfaction.”

“The deuce you have! What, at nineteen?”

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“Is that an attempt to find out my age?” asked Katherine, laughing.

“No! for I fancy I know it. How far is this place you are going to from town, and how do you get to it?”

“The journey takes about three hours and a half, and you travel by the Southwestern line.”

“Well, I intend to have the pleasure of running down to see you presently, if you will permit me.”

“Oh, of course, we shall be very happy to see you.”

“I hope so,” said De Burgh, with a smile. “I don’t think you are very encouraging. If there are any decent roads about this place, shall we resume the driving lessons?”

“Thank you”—evasively. “I think of buying a donkey and chaise—certainly a pony for the boys.”

De Burgh laughed. “I suppose there is some boating to be had there. I shall certainly have a look at the place, even if I be not admitted to the shrine.” There was a pause, during which De Burgh seemed in profound but not agreeable thought; then he suddenly exclaimed: “By-the-way, have you heard the news? Old Errington died, rather sudden at last, some time last night.”

“Indeed!” cried Katherine, roused to immediate attention. “I am very sorry to hear it. The marriage will then be put off. You know they were going to have it nearly a month sooner than was at first intended, because Mr. Errington feared the end was near. He was with his father, I hope?”

“Yes, I believe he hardly left him for the last few days. Now the wedding cannot take place for a considerable time.”

“It will be a great disappointment,” observed Katherine.

“To which of the happy pair?”

“To both, I suppose,” she returned.

“Do you think they cared a rap about each other?”

“Yes, I do indeed. Every one has a different way of showing their feelings, and Mr. Errington is *quite* different from *you*.”

“Different—and immensely superior, eh?”

“I did not say so, Mr. De Burgh.”

“No, certainly you did not, and I have no right to guess at what you think. You are right. I am very different from Errington; and *you* are very different from Lady Alice. I fancy, were you in her place, even the irreproachable bridegroom-elect would find he had a little more of our common humanity about him than he suspects,” said De Burgh, his dark eyes seeking hers with a bold admiring glance.

Katherine’s cheek glowed, her heart beat fast with sudden distress and anger. De Burgh’s suggestion stirred some strange and painful emotion.

“You are in a remarkably imaginative mood, Mr. De Burgh,” she said, haughtily. “I cannot see any connection between myself and your ideas.”

“Can’t you? Well, my ideas gather round you very often.”

“I wish he would go away; he is too audacious,” thought Katherine. While she said, “I think Mr. Errington will be sorry for his father; I believe he has good feeling, though he is so cold and quiet.”

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“Oh, he has every virtue under the sun! At any rate he ought to be fond of him, for I fancy the old man has toiled all his life to be able to leave his son a big fortune.”

“Has he no brothers or sisters?”

“Two sisters, I believe, older than himself; both married.”

There was another pause. Katherine would not break it. She felt peculiarly irritated against De Burgh. His observations had greatly disturbed her. She could not, however, tell him to go, and he stood there looking perfectly at ease. This awkward silence was broken by the welcome appearance of Cecil, who burst into the room, exclaiming: “Auntie, tea is quite ready! There is beautiful chicken pie and buttered cakes, and *such* a beautiful cat!”

“What! for tea, Cis?” said Katherine, letting him catch her hand and try to drag her away.

“No—o. Why, what a silly you are! Puss is asleep in an arm-chair. Do come, auntie. The lady said I was tell you that tea was *quite* ready.”

“Which means that the audience is over,” said De Burgh; “and I rather think you are not sorry.” He smiled—not a pleasant smile. “Well, young man, did you never see me before?”—to Cecil, who was staring at him in the deliberate, persistent way in which children gaze at objects which fascinate yet partly frighten them.

“I was thinking you were like—” The little fellow paused.

“Like whom?”

Cis tightened his hold on his auntie’s hand, and still hesitated.

“Whom is Mr. De Burgh like?” asked Katherine, amused by the boy’s earnestness.

“Like the wicked uncle in the ‘Babes in the Wood.’ Auntie gave it to me. Such a beautiful picture book!”

De Burgh laughed heartily and good-humoredly. “I can tell you, my boy, you would not find me a bad sort of uncle if it were ever my good fortune to call you nephew.”

“But I have no uncle—only auntie,” returned Cis.

“Ay, a very pearl of an auntie. Try and be a good boy. Above all, do what you are bid. I never did what I was bid, and you see what I have come to.”

“I don’t think there is much the matter with you,” said Cis, eying him steadily. Then, with a sudden change in the current of his thoughts, he cried, “Do come, auntie; the cakes will be quite cold.”

“I will keep you no longer from the banquet,” said De Burgh. “I know you are wishing me at—well, my probable destination; so good-by for the present.” Then, to Cecil: “Shall I come and see you at—what is the name of the place?—Sandbourne, and take you out for a sail in a boat—a big boat?”

“Oh, yes, please.”

“Will you come with me, though I *am* like the wicked uncle?”

“Yes, if auntie may come too.”

“If she begs very hard she may. Well, good-morning, Miss Liddell. I’ll not forget Sandbourne, *via* Southwestern Railway.” So saying, De Burgh shook hands and departed.

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The next day Miss Payne escorted her suddenly increased party to their marine retreat, returning the following afternoon to attend to the details of letting her house, for which she had had a good offer.

Then came a breathing space of welcome repose to Katherine. The interest—nay, the trouble—of the children drew her out of herself, and dwarfed the past with the more urgent demands of the present. Cliff Cottage was a pretty, pleasant abode. The living rooms, which were of a good size, two of them opening with bay-windows on the pleasure-ground which surrounded the house on three sides, were, with the bedrooms over them, additions to a very small abode.

These Katherine succeeded in making pretty and comfortable. To wake in the morning and hear the pleasant murmur of the waves; to open her window to the soft sweet briny air, and look out on the waters glittering in the early golden light; to listen to the laughter and shrill cries of Cis and Charlie chasing each other in the garden, and feel that they were her charge—all this contributed to restore her to a healthy state of mind, to strengthen and to cheer her.

Cecil, to his dismay at first, was dispatched every morning to school, where he soon made friends and began to feel at home. Charlie Katherine taught herself, as he was still delicate. Then a pony was added to the establishment, and old Francois, ex-courier and factotum, used to take the young gentlemen for long excursions each riding turn about on the quiet, sensible little Shetland.

The pale cheeks which helped to make Charlie so dear to his aunt began to show something of a healthy color before the end of May, and Katherine sometimes laughed to find herself boasting of Cecil's parts and progress to Miss Payne. But the metamorphosis wrought by the young magicians in this important personage was the most remarkable of the effects they produced. Had Miss Liddell been less pleasant and profitable, it is doubtful if Miss Payne would have consented to allow children—boys—to desecrate the precincts of her spotless dwelling; they were in her estimation extremely objectionable. Katherine was, however, a prime favorite; she had touched Miss Payne as none of her former inmates ever did.

Years of battling with the world had coated her heart with a tolerably hard husk; but there was a heart beneath the stony sheath, and by some occult sympathy Katherine had pierced to the hidden fount of feeling, and her chaperon found there was more flavor and warmth in life than she once thought.

When, therefore, she had completed her business in London and was settled at Cliff Cottage, she was surprised to find that the boys did *not* worry her; nay, when they came racing to meet her in wild delight to show a tangled dripping mass of shells and sea-weed which they had collected in their wading, scrambling wanderings on the shore and among the rocks, she found herself unbending, almost involuntarily, and examining

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their treasures with unfeigned interest. Then Cecil's very fluent descriptions of his experiences at school, his escapades, his torn garments, the occasional quarrels between the two boys, their appropriation of Francois, and their breakages—all seemed to grow natural and pardonable when the young culprits ran to take her by the hand, and looked in her face with their innocent, trusting eyes. On the whole, Miss Payne had never been so happy before, and Katherine forgot the shifting sands on which she was uprearing the graceful fabric of her tranquil life.

Sometimes they lured Bertie to spend a couple of days with them—days which were always marked with a white stone. What arguments and rambles Katherine enjoyed with him, and what goodly checks she drew to further his numerous undertakings!

De Burgh did not fail to carry out his threat of inspecting Sandbourne. He found a valid excuse in a commission from Colonel Ormonde to advise Miss Liddell respecting a pair of ponies she had asked him to buy for her.

His visit was not altogether displeasing. No woman is quite indifferent to a man who admires her in the hearty, wholesale way which De Burgh did not try to conceal. Katherine was much too feminine not to like the incense of his devotion, especially when he kept it within certain limits. She did not credit him with any deep feeling; but in spite of her strong conviction that he was attracted by her money, she recognized a certain sincerity in his liking for herself. She enjoyed the idea of humbling his immense assurance, believing that any pain she might inflict would be short-lived, while he was amazed to find how swiftly the hours flew past when he allowed himself to spend a couple of days at Sandbourne—surprised to feel so little of the contemptuous bitterness with which he generally regarded his fellow-creatures, and sometimes wondered if it were possible that something more simple than even his boyish self had come back to him.

Still, Bertie Payne was a more welcome guest than De Burgh, in spite of his unspoken but evident devotion. With Bertie she could speak openly of matters on which she would not touch when with the other. To Bertie she could talk of the mysteries of life, and argue on questions of belief. She was touched by the eagerness he showed to convert her to his own extremely evangelical views, and though differing from him on many points, she deeply respected the sincerity of his convictions.

The degree of favor shown by her to "that psalm-singing Puritan," as De Burgh termed him, was gall and wormwood to the latter, and indeed so irritated his spirit that he was driven to speak of the annoyance it caused him to Mrs. Ormonde, of whose discretion and judgment he had but a poor opinion.

Meantime no one heard or saw anything of Errington, who was supposed to be deep in the settlement of his father's affairs, and winding up the estate, as the well-known house of Errington ceased to exist when the head and founder was no more. Lady Alice had gone to stay with her brother and sister-in-law, who lived abroad, as it was impossible for her to enter into the gayeties of the season under existing circumstances, and the marriage was postponed until the end of July.

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In short, a lull had stilled the actors in this little drama. The stream of events had entered one of the quiet pools which here and there hold the most rapid current tranquil for a time.

With Mrs. Ormonde all went well. She had the newest and most charming gowns and bonnets, mantles and hats. She found herself very well received by society, and quite a favorite with Lady Mary Vincent, who was a very popular person. So much occupied was the pretty little woman that May was nearly over before she could find time to accept her sister-in-law's repeated invitation to Cliff Cottage.

"I am going down to Sandbourne on Friday," she said to De Burgh one evening as she was waiting for her carriage after a musical party at Lady Mary Vincent's.

"Indeed! I thought you were going last Monday."

"Oh, I could not go on Monday. But if I don't go on Friday I do not think I shall manage my visit at all. Tell me, what does Katherine find to keep her down there? Is it Bertie Payne?"

"How can I tell? She seems contented enough. For that matter, she might find my society equally attractive. Payne does not go down as often as I do."

"No?—but then Katherine has a leaning to sanctity, and you are no saint."

"True. By-the-way, talking of saints, there is a report that old Errington's affairs were not left in as flourishing a condition as was expected."

"Oh, nonsense! It is some mere ill-natured gossip."

"I hope so. I think I will come down on Saturday and escort you back to town."

"Pray do; it will enliven us a little." A shout of "Mrs. Ormonde's carriage!" cut short the conversation, and Mrs. Ormonde did not see De Burgh again until they met at Cliff Cottage.

Mrs. Ormonde's visit, long anticipated, did not prove an unmixed pleasure. She objected to what she considered the terribly long drive of some five miles from the railway station to Katherine's secluded residence; she turned up her pretty little nose at the smallness of the cottage and its general homeliness; she evinced an unfriendly spirit toward Miss Payne, who was perfectly unmoved thereby; and when the boys, well washed and spruced up, approached her, not too eagerly, she scarcely noticed them. This, of course, reacted on the little fellows, who showed a decided inclination to avoid her.

She was tired after a warm journey and previous late hours, and dreadfully afraid that sea air and sun together would have a ruinous effect on her complexion. When, however, she had had tea and made a fresh toilette, she took a less gloomy view of life at Sandbourne, and having recovered her temper, she remembered it would be wiser not to chafe her sister-in-law.

“To be sure,” thought the astute little woman, “the boys’ settlement is out of her power to revoke; but it would be rather good if she came to live with us, instead of filling the pockets of this prim, presumptuous, self-satisfied old maid. I am sure she is awfully selfish, and I do hate selfishness.”

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So reflecting, she descended serene and smiling. Half an hour after, she had so completely recovered herself as to declare she had never seen the boys look so well, that they were quite grown, *etc*., *etc*.

After dinner Cecil displayed his exercise and copy books, and received a due meed of praise, not unmixed with a little sarcastic remark or two respecting the wonderful effect of his aunt's influence, which did not escape the notice of her son, who felt, though he did not understand why, that she was not quite so well pleased as she affected to be.

"And don't you feel dreadfully dull here?" asked Mrs. Ormonde, as the sisters-in-law strolled along the beach under the shelter of the east cliff, which hid them from the bright morning sunlight.

"No, not as yet. I should not like to live here always; but at present I like the place. You must confess it is very pretty."

"Yes, just now, when the weather is fine. When you have rain and a gale, it must be fearfully dreary."

"We have had some rough days, but the bay has a beauty of its own even in a storm, and we shall not be here in the winter."

"De Burgh runs down to see you pretty often?" asked Mrs. Ormonde, after a short pause. The old regimental habit of calling men by their surnames still returned when she was off guard.

"Yes," replied Katherine, calmly; "he seems to enjoy a day by the sea-side."

Mrs. Ormonde laughed—a hard laugh. "I dare say *you* enjoy it too."

"Mr. De Burgh is not particularly sympathetic to me, but I like him better than I did."

"Oh, I dare say he makes himself very pleasant to you, and I never knew him show attention to an unmarried woman before, nor to many married women either. Of course it would be absurd to suppose that if you had not a good fortune you would see quite so much of him."

"Naturally," returned Katherine. "I fancy my money would be of great use to him; so it would to most men. That does not affect me. If it is an incentive to make them agreeable and useful, why, so be it."

"I did not expect to hear *you* talk like that. Now I hate and despise mercenary men."

"Well, you see, the man or the woman *must* have money or there can be no marriage."

“How worldly you have grown, Kate!” cried Mrs. Ormonde, in a superior tone. She did not perceive anything but sober seriousness in her sister-in-law’s tone, and was infinitely annoyed at her taking the insinuations against De Burgh’s disinterestedness with such indifference. “I suppose you think it would be a very fine thing to be Baroness De Burgh, and go to court with all the family jewels on.”

“I shall certainly not go as Katherine Liddell.”

“Pray, why not? Ah, yes; it would all be very fine! But I am too deeply interested in you, dear, not to warn you that De Burgh would make a very bad husband; he has such a horrid, sneering way sometimes; and as to being faithful—constancy is a thing unknown to him.”

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“What would Colonel Ormonde say if he knew you gave his favorite kinsman so bad a character?”

“Oh, my dear Katherine, you must not betray me! Duke would be furious. But of course your happiness is my first consideration.”

“Thank you,” returned Katherine, gravely.

“And Mr. Payne, how does he like Mr. De Burgh’s visits here?”

“I don’t think he minds”—seriously. “I should be sorry if he were annoyed. I am very fond of Bertie Payne.”

This declaration somewhat bewildered Mrs. Ormonde. But before she could find suitable words to reply, Charlie came running to meet them, jumping up to kiss his aunt first, and cried; “Mr. De Burgh has come. I saw him driving up to the hotel outside the omlibus.”

“The omnibus!” repeated Mrs. Ormonde.

“He would find no other conveyance from the train unless he ordered one previously,” said Katherine, laughing.

“Dear me! I suppose he will be here directly. How early he must have started!” in a tone of annoyance. “I feel so hot and uncomfortable after this dreadfully long walk, I *must* change my dress before I see any one.” And she hastened on.

After holding his aunt’s hand for a while, Charlie darted away to overtake Francois, whom he perceived at a little distance.

“I declare, Katherine, you are quite supplanting me with those boys!” exclaimed their mother, querulously.

“Ada, I would not for the world wean them from you, if—I mean”—stopping the words which rushed to her lips. “I should be sorry. But you have new ties—another boy. Could you not spare Cis and Charlie to me—for I have no one?”

“I am sure that is your own fault. However, if after three or four months’ experience you are not tired of them, I shall be very much surprised.”

On reaching the house, Mrs. Ormonde went straight to her own apartment to “refit,” and Katherine sat down in the smaller drawing or morning room, which looked west and was cool. She had not been there many minutes before De Burgh was announced.

“Alone!” he exclaimed. “Where is Mrs. Ormonde?”

“She will be here immediately.”

“Has she persuaded you to return with her? I wish you would. Lady G—— gives a dinner at Richmond on Thursday; it will be rather amusing. I know most of the fellows who are going, and I think you would enjoy it. You like good talkers, I know.”

“Thank you; I have refused.”

“Absolutely?”

“Absolutely.”

De Burgh came over and leaned his shoulder against the side of the window opposite to where Katherine sat.

“What are you thinking of, if I may ask, Miss Liddell?” he said. “You have scarcely heard what I said. They are not pleasant thoughts, I fancy.”

“No,” she returned, glad to put them into words that she might exorcise them. “Ada has just reproached me with supplanting her with her boys, and it made me feel, as Americans say ‘bad.’”

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“Why?” he asked. “Why should you not? I would lay long odds that you love them more than she does. You are more a real mother to them. Why are you always straining at gnats? You really lose a lot of time, which might be more agreeably occupied, worrying over the rights and wrongs of things. Follow my example: go straight ahead for whatever you desire, provided it’s not robbery, and let things balance themselves.”

“Has that system made you supremely happy?”

“Happy! Oh, that is a big word. I have had some splendid spurts of enjoyment; and now I have an object to win. It will give me a lot of trouble; it’s the heaviest stake I ever played for; but it will go hard with me if I don’t succeed.”

De Burgh had been looking out at the stretch of water before him as he spoke, but at his last words his eyes sought Katherine’s with a look she could not misunderstand. She shivered slightly, an odd passing sense of fear chilling her for a moment as she turned to lay her hat upon the table near, saying, in a cold, collected tone.

“You must always remember that the firmest resolution cannot insure success.”

“It goes a long way toward it, however,” he replied.

“Ah, there is Cis!” cried Katherine, glad to turn the conversation, “come back from school. Are you not earlier than usual, Cis?”—as the boy came bounding over the grass to the open window.

“No, auntie; it is one o’clock.”

“Well, young man,” said De Burgh, who was not sorry to be interrupted, as he felt he was treading dangerous ground, and with instinctive tact endeavored always to keep friends with Katherine’s pets, “I have brought you a present, if auntie will allow you to keep it.”

“What is it?—a box of tools, real tools? I do so want a box of tools! But auntie is afraid I will cut myself.”

“No; it’s a St. Bernard puppy that promises to turn out a fine dog.”

“Oh, thank you! thank you! that *is* nice. I don’t think you are a bit like the wicked uncle now. May I go and fetch it now, this moment?”

“Not till after dinner, dear.”

“Oh, isn’t it jolly! A real St. Bernard dog!”—capering about. “You *are* a nice man!”

“What *are* you making such a noise for, Cis?” exclaimed his mother coming in, looking admirably well, fresh, becomingly dressed. “Go away, dear, and be made tidy for your dinner. Well, Mr. De Burgh, I never dreamed of your arriving so early. Did you get up in the middle of the night?”

“Not exactly. The fact is, I must drive over to Revelstoke late this evening and catch the mail train. I have a command to dine with the Baron to-morrow, to talk over some business of importance, and dared not refuse, as you can imagine. The everlasting old tyrant has been quite amiable to me of late.”

“Then you’ll not be here to escort me back to town, and I hate travelling alone!” cried Mrs. Ormonde.

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“Unfortunately no,” said De Burgh. “But I have a piece of news for you that will freeze the marrow in your bones: Errington is completely ruined.”

“Impossible!” cried both his hearers at once.

“It’s too true, I assure you. When, after the old man’s death, he began to look into things with his solicitor, he was startled to find certain deficiencies. Then the head clerk, the manager, who had everything in his hands—bossed the show, in short—-disappeared, and on further examination it proved that the whole concern was a mere shell, out of which this scoundrel had sucked the capital. There was an awful amount of debt to other houses, several of which would have come down, and ruined the unfortunates connected with them, if Errington had not come forward and sacrificed almost all he possessed to retrieve the credit of his name. He says he ought to have undertaken the risks as well as reaped the profit of the concern. Garston Hall is advertised for sale; so is the house in Berkley Square; his stud is brought to the hammer—everything is given up. What he’ll do I haven’t an idea. But I must say I think his sense of honor is a little overstrained.”

“And Lady Alice!” ejaculated Katherine.

“Of course Melford will soon settle that, if it is not settled already, for a good deal was done before the matter got wind. There hasn’t been such a crash for a long time. In short, Errington is utterly, completely ruined.”

“I never heard of such a fool!” cried Mrs. Ormonde. “It was bad enough to be disappointed of the wealth old Errington was supposed to have left behind him, but to give up everything! Why, he is only fit for a lunatic asylum. What an awful disappointment for poor Lady Alice!”

Katherine did not, could not speak. The rush of sorrow for the heavy blow which had fallen on the man she had robbed, the shame and self-reproach, which had been lulled asleep for a while, which now woke up with renewed power to torment and irritate—-these were too much for her self-control, and while Mrs. Ormonde and De Burgh eagerly discussed the catastrophe, she kept silence and struggled to be composed.

CHAPTER XIX.

CONFESSION.

“Errington is completely ruined!” De Burgh’s words repeated themselves over and over again in Katherine’s ears through the darkness and silence of her sleepless night. What would become of him—that grave, stately man who had never known the touch of anything common or unclean? How would he live? And what an additional blow the rupture of his engagement with Lady Alice! He was certainly very fond of her. It was

like him to give up all he possessed to save the honor of his name, but how would it be if he were penniless? Had *she* not robbed him, he might have enough to live comfortably after satisfying every one. As she thought, a resolution to restore what she had taken formed itself in her

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mind. Perhaps if he could show that he had still a solid capital, his engagement to Lady Alice need not be broken off. If she could restore him to competence, he would not refuse some provision for the poor dear boys. Were she secure on *this* point, she would be happier without the money than with it. But the humiliation of confession—and to *such* a father confessor? How could she do it? Yet it must be done.

"Good gracious, Katherine, you look like a ghost!" was Mrs. Ormonde's salutation when the little party met at breakfast next morning. "Pray have you seen one?"

"Yes; I have been surrounded by a whole gallery of ghosts all night—which means that a bad conscience would not let me sleep."

"What nonsense! Why, you are a perfect saint, Kate, in some ways; but in others I must say you are foolish; yes, dear, I must say it—*very* foolish."

"I dare say I am," returned Katherine; "but whether I am or not, I have an intense headache, so you must excuse me if I am very stupid."

"I am sure you want change, Katherine. Do come back with me to town. There is quite time enough to put up all you want before 11, and the train goes at 11.10. There is a little dance, 'small and early' at Lady Mary Vincent's this evening, and I know she would be delighted to see you."

"I do not think hot rooms the best cure for a headache," observed Miss Payne; "and till yesterday Katherine had been looking remarkably well. She was out boating too long in the sun."

"You are very good to trouble about me, Ada. My best cure is quiet. I will go and lie down as soon as I see you off, and I dare say shall be myself again in the evening. I may come up to town for a day or two before you return to Castleford, but I will let you know."

Nothing more was said on the subject then, but when Katherine returned from the station after bidding her sister-in-law good-by, Miss Payne met her with a strong recommendation to take some "sal volatile and water, and to lie down at once."

"I did not, of course, second Mrs. Ormonde's suggestions—the idea of your going for rest or health to *her* house!—but I am really vexed to see you look so ill. How do you feel?"

"Very well disposed to follow your good advice. If I could get some sleep, I should be quite well." Katherine smiled pleasantly as she spoke. She was extremely thankful to secure an hour or two of silence and solitude.

During the night her heart, her brain, were in such a tumult she could not think consecutively. Alone in her room, and grown calmer, she could plan her future proceedings and screw her courage to the desperate sticking-point of action such as her conscience dictated.

She fastened her door and set her window wide open. After gazing for some time at the sea, golden and glittering in the noonday sun, and inhaling the soft breeze which came in laden with briny freshness, she lay down and closed her eyes. But though keeping profoundly still, no restful look of sleep stole over her set face; no, she was thinking hard, for how long she could not tell. When, however, she came downstairs to join Miss Payne at tea, the anxious, nervous, alarmed expression of her eyes had changed to one of gloomy composure.

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“Though I do not care to stay with Ada, I want to go to town to-morrow for a little shopping, and to see Mr. Newton if I can. I will take the quick train at half-past eight and return in the evening. You might send to meet the nine o’clock express. Should anything occur to keep me, I will telegraph.”

“Very well”—Miss Payne’s usual reply to Katherine’s propositions. “But are you quite sure you feel equal to the journey?”

“Yes, quite equal,” returned Katherine, with a short deep sigh. “I believe it will do me good.”

That Errington had been stunned by the blow which had fallen so suddenly upon him cannot be disputed. His first and bitterest concern was dread lest the character of his father’s house, which had always stood so high, lest the honor of his own name, should suffer the smallest tarnish. It was this that made him so eager to ascertain the full liabilities of the firm, so ready to sacrifice all he possessed so that no one save himself should be the loser. “If I accepted a handsome fortune from transactions over which I exercised no supervision, I must hold myself doubly responsible for the result,” he argued, and at once set to work to turn all he possessed into money.

In truth the prospect of poverty did not dismay him.

His tastes were very simple. It was the loss of power and position, which wealth always bestows, which he would feel most, and the necessity of renouncing Lady Alice.

This was imperative. Yet it surprised him to perceive how little he felt the prospect of parting with her on his own account. Indeed he was rather ashamed of his indifference. It was for Lady Alice he felt. It would be such a terrible disappointment—not that Errington had much personal vanity. He hoped and thought Lady Alice Mordaunt liked him in a calm and reasonable manner, which is the best guarantee for married happiness. But it was the loss of a tranquil home, a luxurious life, an escape from the genteel poverty of a deeply embarrassed earl’s daughter to the ease and comfort of a rich man’s wife, that he deplored for her. Poor helpless child! she would probably find a rich husband ere long who would give her all possible luxuries, for a noble’s daughter of high degree is generally a marketable article. But he, Miles Errington, would have been kind and patient. Would that other possible fellow be kind and patient too? Knowing his own sex, Errington doubted it. He had a certain amount of the generosity which belongs to strength. To children, and the kind of pretty, undecided women who rank as children, he was wonderfully considerate. But it was quite possible that were he married to a sensible, companionable wife he might be exacting.

At present it seemed highly improbable that he should ever reach a position which would enable him to commit matrimony. Thirty-four is rather an advanced age at which to begin life afresh.

The prospect of bachelorhood, however, by no means dismayed him. Indeed it was more a sense of his social duties as a man of fortune and a future senator that had impelled him to seek a wife, not an irresistible desire for the companionship of a ministering spirit. He was truly thankful that his marriage had bean delayed, and that he was not hampered by any sense of duty toward a wife in his design of sacrificing his all to save his credit.

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After the first few days of stunning surprise, Errington set vigorously to work to clear the wreck. Garston was advertised; his stud, his furniture—everything—put up for sale, and his own days divided between his solicitor and his stock-broker. His first step was to explain matters to his intended father-in-law, who, being an impulsive, self-indulgent man, swore a good deal about the ill-luck of all concerned, but at once declared the engagement must be at an end.

As Lady Alice was still in Switzerland with her brother and his wife, it was considered wise to spare her the pain of an interview. Lord Melford explained matters to his daughter in an extremely outspoken letter, enclosing one from Errington, in which, with much good feeling, he bade her a kindly farewell. To this she replied promptly, and a week saw the extinction of the whole affair. Errington could not help smiling at this "rapid act." It was then about three weeks after the blow had fallen—a warm glowing June morning. Errington's man of business had just left him, and he had returned to his writing-table, which was strewn, or rather covered, with papers (nothing Errington ever handled was "strewn"), and continued his task of making out a list of his private liabilities, which were comparatively light, when his valet—not yet discharged, though already warned to look for another master—approached, with his usually impassive countenance, and presented a small note.

Errington opened it, and to his inexpressible surprise read as follows:

"TO MR. ERRINGTON,—Allow me to speak to you alone.
"KATHERINE LIDDELL."

"Who brought this?" asked Errington, suppressing all expression as well as he could.

"A young person in black, sir—leastways I think she's young."

"Show her in; and, Harris, I am engaged if any one calls."

Errington went to the door to meet his most unexpected visitor. The next moment she stood before him. He bowed with much deference. She bent her head in silence, but did not offer to shake hands. She wore a black dress and a very simple black straw hat, round which a white gauze veil was tied, which effectually concealed her face.

"Pray sit down," was all Errington could think of saying, so astonished was he at her sudden appearance.

Katherine took a seat opposite to his. She unfastened and took off her veil, displaying a face from which her usual rich soft color had faded, sombre eyes, and tremulous lips. Looking full at him, she said, without greeting of any kind, "Do you think me mad *to* come here?"

“I am a little surprised; but if I can be of any use—” Errington began calmly. She interrupted him.

“I hope to be of use to *you*. No one except myself can explain how or why; that is the reason I have intruded upon you.”

“You do not intrude, Miss Liddell. I am quite at your service; only I hope you are not distressing yourself on my account.”

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“On yours and my own.” Her eyes sank, and her hands played nervously with the handle of a small dainty leather bag she carried, as she paused. Then, looking up steadily, and speaking in a monotonous tone, as if she were repeating a lesson, with parched lips she went on: “I did you a great wrong some years ago. I was sorry, but I had not the courage to atone until I learned (only yesterday) that you had lost, or rather given up, your fortune, and that your engagement might be broken off. (I *must* speak of these things. You will forgive me before I come to an end.) Then I felt something stronger than myself that forced me to tell you all.” Her heart beat so hard that her voice could not be steadied. She stopped to breathe.

“I fear you are exciting yourself needlessly,” said Errington, quite bewildered, and almost fearing that his visitor’s brain was affected.

“Oh, listen!—do listen! My uncle, John Liddell, your father’s old friend, left all his money to you. I hid the will, and succeeded as next of kin. The property amounts to something more than eighty thousand pounds, and I have not spent half the income, so there are some savings besides. Can you not live comfortably on that, and marry Lady Alice?”

Errington gazed at her for a moment speechless. A sigh of relief broke from Katherine. The color rose to her cheeks, her throat, her small white ears, and then slowly faded.

“I can hardly understand you, Miss Liddell. I fear you are under the effect of some nervous hallucination.”

“I am not. I can prove I am not.” She drew forth the packet inscribed “MS. to be destroyed,” and laid it before him. “There is the will. Thank God I never could bring myself to destroy it. Here, pray read it.” She opened the document and handed it to him.

There were a few moments’ dead silence while Errington hastily skimmed the will. “*I* am most reluctantly obliged to believe you,” he said at length. “But what an extraordinary circumstance! How”—looking earnestly at her—“how did it ever occur to you to—to—”

“To commit a felony?” put in Katherine, as he paused.

“No; I was not going to use such a word,” he said, gravely, but not unkindly.

“If you have time to listen I will tell you everything. Now that I have told the ugly secret that has made a discord in my life, I can speak more easily.” But her sweet mouth still quivered.

“Yes, tell me all,” said Errington, more eagerly than perhaps he had ever spoken before.

In a low but more composed voice Katherine gave a rapid account of the circumstances which led to her residence with her uncle: of her intense desire to help the dear mother

whose burden was almost more than she could bear; then of the change which came to the old miser—his increasing interest in herself, and finally of his expressed intention to change his will—as she hoped, in her favor; of her leaving it, by his direction, in the writing-table drawer; of his terribly sudden death.

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Then came the great temptation. "When Mr. Newton said that if the will existed it would be in the bureau, but that as he had been on the point of making another, so he (Mr. Newton) hoped he had destroyed the last," continued Katherine, "a thought darted through my brain. Why should it be found? *He* no longer wished its provisions to be carried out. I should not, in destroying or suppressing it, defeat the wishes of the dead. I determined, if Mr. Newton asked me a direct question, I would tell him the truth; if not, I would simply be silent. In short, I mentally *tossed* for the guidance of my conduct. Silence won. Mr. Newton asked nothing; he was too glad that everything was mine. He has been very, very good to me. I imagined that half my uncle's money would go to my brother's children, but it did not; so when I came of age I settled a third upon them. Of course the deed of gift is now but so much waste paper, and for them I would earnestly implore you to spare a little yearly allowance for education, to prepare them to earn their own bread. I feel sure you will do this, and I do deeply dread their being thrown on Colonel Ormonde's charity; their lot would be very miserable. My poor little boys!" Her voice broke, and she stopped abruptly.

Errington's eyes dwelt upon her, almost sternly, with the deepest attention, while she spoke. Nor did he break silence at once; he leaned back in his chair, resting one closed hand on the table before him. At last he exclaimed: "I wish you had not told me this! I could not have imagined you capable of such an act."

"And more," said Katherine; "although I wish to make what reparation I can, had that act to be done again—even with the anticipation of this bitter hour—I'd do it."

She looked straight into Errington's eyes, her own aflame with sudden passion. He was silent, his brow slightly knit, a puzzled expression in his face. The natural motion of his mind was to condemn severely such a lawless sentiment, yet he could not resist thinking of those brilliant speaking eyes, nor help the conviction that he had never met a real live woman before. It was like a scene on the stage; for demonstrative emotion always appeared theatrical to him, only it was terribly earnest this time.

"You would not say so were you calmer," said Errington, in a curious hesitating manner. "Why—why did you not come and tell me your need for your uncle's money? Do you think I am so avaricious as to retain the fortune, or all the fortune, that ought to have been yours, when I had enough of my own?"

"How could I tell?" she cried. "If I knew you then as I do now I *should* have asked you, and saved my soul alive; but what did the name of Errington convey to me? Only the idea of a greedy enemy! Are men so ready to cast the wealth they can claim into the lap of another? When you spoke to me that day at Castleford I thought I should have dropped at your feet with the overpowering

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sense of shame. But withal, when I remember my disappointment, my utter inability to help my dear overtasked mother, round whom the net of difficulty, of debt, of fruitless work, was drawing closer and closer, I again feel the irresistible force of the temptation. You, who are wise and strong and just, might have resisted; but"—with a slight graceful gesture of humility—"you see what I am."

"If you had stopped to think!" Errington was beginning with unusual severity, for he was irritated by the confusion in his own mind, which was so different from his ordinary unhesitating decision between right and wrong.

"But when you love any one very much—so entirely that you know every change of the dear face, the meaning even of the drooping hand or the bend of the weary head; when you know that a true brave heart is breaking under a load of care—care for you, for your future, when it will no longer be near to watch over and uphold you—and that no thought or tenderness or personal exertion can lift that load, only the magic of gold, why, you would do almost anything to get it. Would you not if you loved like *this*?" concluded Katherine. She had spoken rapidly and with fire.

"But I never have," returned Errington, startled.

"Then," said she, with some deliberation, "wisdom for you is from one entrance quite shut out." She pressed her handkerchief to her eyes, and was very still during a pause, which Errington hesitated to break.

"It is no doubt lost breath to excuse myself to a man of your character, only do believe I was not meanly greedy! Now I have told you everything, I readily resign into your hands what I ought never to have taken. And—and you will spare my nephews wherewithal to educate them? Do what I can, this is beyond my powers, but I trust to your generosity not to let them be a burden on Colonel Ormonde. I leave the will with you." She made a movement as if to put on her veil.

"Listen to me, Miss Liddell," said Errington, speaking very earnestly and with an effort. "You are in a state of exaltation, of mental excitement. The consciousness of the terrible mistake into which you were tempted has thrown your judgment off its balance. I do not for an instant doubt the sincerity of your proposition, but a little reflection will show you I could not entertain it."

"Why not? I am quite willing to bear the blame, the shame, I deserve, rather than see you parted from the woman who was so nearly your wife, who would no doubt suffer keenly, and who—"

“Pray hear me,” interrupted Errington. “To part with Lady Alice is a great aggravation of my present troubles; but considering the kind of life to which we were both accustomed, and which she had a right to expect, I am sincerely thankful she was preserved from sharing my lot. Alone I can battle with life; distracted by knowing I had dragged *her* down, I should be paralyzed. I shall

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always remember with grateful regard the lady who honored me by promising to be my wife, but I shall be glad to know that she is in a safe position under the care of a worthier man than myself. *That* matter is at rest forever. Now as to using the information you have placed in my power, you ask what is impossible. First, it is evident that the late Mr. Liddell fully intended to alter his will in your favor. It would have been most unjust to have bestowed his fortune to me. I am extremely glad it is yours."

"But," again interrupted Katherine, "why should you not share it at least? Why should you be penniless while I am rich with what is not mine?"

"I shall not be absolutely penniless," said Errington, smiling gravely. "Even if I were," he continued, with unusual animation, "do you think me capable of rebuilding my fortune on your disgrace? or of inventing some elaborate lie to account for the possession of that unlucky will? No amount of riches could repay me for either. I dare say the temptation you describe was irresistible to a nature like yours, and I dare say too the punishment of your self-condemnation is bitter enough. Now you must reflect that your duty is to keep the secret to which you have bound yourself. If you raise the veil which must always hide the true facts of your succession, you would create great unhappiness and confusion in Colonel Ormonde's family, and injure the innocent woman whom he would never have married had he not been sure you would provide for the boys. It would so cruel to break up a home merely to indulge a morbid desire for atonement. No, Miss Liddell. Be guided by me; accept the life you have brought upon yourself. *I*, the only one who has a right to do it, willingly resign what ought to have been yours without your unfortunately illegal act. Your secret is perfectly safe with me. Time will heal the wounds you have inflicted on yourself and enable you to forget. Leave this ill-omened document with me; it is safer than in your hands. Indeed there is no use in keeping it."

"But what—what will become of *you?*" she asked, with strange familiarity, the outcome of strong excitement which carried her over all conventional limits.

"Oh, I have had some training in the world both of men and books, and I hope to be able to keep the wolf from the door."

"Would you not accept part at least—a sum of money, you know, to begin something?" asked Katherine, her voice quivering, her nerves relaxing from their high tension, and feeling utterly beaten, her high resolves of sacrifice and renunciation tumbling about her, like a house of cards, at the touch of common-sense.

"I do not think any arrangements of the kind practicable," returned Errington, with a kind smile. "I understand your eagerness to relieve your conscience by an act of restitution, but now you are exonerated. I ask nothing but that you should forgive yourself, and knit

up the ravelled web of your life. The fortune ought to be yours—is yours—shall be yours."

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“Will you promise that if you ever want help—money help—you will ask me? I shall have more money every year, for I shall never spend my income.”

“I shall not want help,” he returned, quietly. “But though it is not likely we shall meet again, believe me I shall always be glad to know you are well and happy. Let this painful conversation be the last we have on this subject. For my part, I grant you plenary absolution.”

“You are good and generous; you are wise too; your judgment constrains me. Yet I hope I shall *never* see you again. It is too humiliating to meet your eyes.” She spoke brokenly as she tied the white veil closely over her face.

“Nevertheless we part friends,” said Errington, and held out his hand. She put hers in it. He felt how it trembled, and held it an instant with a friendly pressure. Then he opened the door and followed her to the entrance, where he bowed low as she passed out.

Errington returned at once to his writing-table and his calculations. He took up his pen, but he did not begin to write. He leaned back in his chair and fell into an interesting train of thought. What an extraordinary mad proceeding it was of that girl to conceal the will! It was strangely unprincipled. “How impossible it is to trust a person who acts from impulse! The difference between masculine and feminine character is immense. No man with a grain of honor in him would have done what she did; only some dastardly hound who could cheat at cards. And she—somehow she seems a pure good woman in spite of all. I suppose in a woman’s sensitive and weaker nature good and evil are less distinct, more shaded into each other. After all, I think I would trust my life to the word of this daring law-breaker.” And Errington recalled the expressive tones of her voice, surprised to feel again the strange thrill which shivered through him when she had looked straight into his eyes, her own aglow with momentary defiance, and said, “Had it to be done again, I’d do it!” He had never been brought face to face with real emotion before. He knew such a thing existed; that it led like most things to good and to evil; that it was exceedingly useful to poets, who often touched him, and to actors, who did not; but in real every-day life he had rarely, if ever, seen it. The people with whom he associated were rich, well born, well trained; a crumpled rose leaf here and there was the worst trouble in their easy, conventional, luxurious lives. Of course he had met men on the road to ruin who swore and drank and gambled and generally disgraced themselves. Such cases, however, did not affect him much; he only touched such characters with moral tongs. Now this delicate, refined girl had humbled herself before him. Her sweet varying tones, her moist glowing eyes, the indescribable tremulous earnestness which was the undertone of all she said, her determined efforts for self-command, made a deep impression on him. Was she right when she said that from him “wisdom by one entrance was quite shut out?” At all events he felt, though he did not consciously acknowledge it even to himself, that this impulsive, inexperienced girl, whom he strove to look down upon from the unsullied heights of his own integrity, had

revealed to him something of life’s inner core which had hitherto been hidden from his sight.

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But all this dreaming was unpardonable waste of time when so much serious work lay before him. So Errington resolutely turned from his unusual and disturbing reverie, dipped his pen in the ink, and began to write steadily.

CHAPTER XX.

PLENARY ABSOLUTION.

Katherine never could distinctly remember what she did after leaving Errington. She was humbled in the dust—crushed, dazed. She felt that every one must perceive the stamp of “felon” upon her.

The passionate desire to restore his rightful possessions to Errington, to confess all, had carried her through the dreadful interview. She was infinitely grateful to him for the kind tact with which he concealed the profound contempt her confession must have evoked, but no doubt that sentiment was now in full possession of his mind. It showed in his unhesitating, even scornful, rejection of her offered restitution. She almost regretted having made the attempt, and yet she had a kind of miserable satisfaction in having told the truth, the whole truth, to Errington; anything was better than wearing false colors in his sight.

It was this sense of deception that had embittered her intercourse with him at Castleford; otherwise she would have been gratified by his grave friendly preference.

How calm, how unmoved, he seemed amid the wreck of his fortunes. Yes, his was true strength—the strength of self-mastery. How different, how far nobler than the vehemence of De Burgh’s will, which was too strong for his guidance! But Lady Alice could never have loved Errington—never—or she would have loved on and waited for him till the time came when union might be possible. Had *she* been in her place! But at the thought her heart throbbed wildly with the sudden perception that *she* could have loved him well, with all her soul, and rested on him, confident in his superior wisdom and strength—a woman’s ideal love. And before this man she had been obliged to lay down her self-respect, to confess she had cheated him basely, to resign his esteem for ever! It was a bitter punishment, but even had she been stainless and he a free man, she, Katherine, was not the sort of girl *he* would like. She was too impulsive, too much at the mercy of her emotions, too quick in forming and expressing opinions. No; the feminine reserve and tranquility of Lady Alice were much more likely to attract his affections and call forth his respect. This was an additional ingredient of bitterness, and Katherine felt herself an outcast, undeserving of tenderness or esteem.

The weather was oppressively warm and sunless. A dim instinctive recollection of her excuse for coming to town forced Katherine to visit some of the shops where she was in the habit of dealing, and then she sat for more than a weary hour in the Ladies’ Room at

Waterloo Station, affecting to read a newspaper which she did not see, waiting for the train that would take her home to the darkness and stillness in which friendly night would hide her for a while. The journey back was a continuation of the same tormenting dream-like semi-consciousness, and by the time she reached Cliff Cottage she felt physically ill.

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“It was dreadfully foolish to go up to town in this heat,” said Miss Payne, severely, when she brought up some tea to Katherine’s room, where she retreated on her arrival. “I dare say you could have written for what you wanted.”

“Not exactly”—with a faint smile.

“I never saw you look so ill. You must take some sal volatile, and lie down. If there had been much sun, I should have said you had had a sunstroke. I hope, however, a good night’s rest will set you up.”

“No doubt it will; so I will try and sleep now.”

“Quite right. I will leave you, and tell the boys you cannot see them till to-morrow.” So Miss Payne, who had a grand power of minding her own affairs and abstaining from troublesome questions, softly closed the door behind her.

It took some time to rally from the overwhelming humiliation of this crisis. Katherine came slowly back to herself, yet not quite herself. Miss Payne had been so much disturbed by her loss of appetite, of energy, of color, that she had insisted on consulting the local doctor, who pronounced her to be suffering from low fever and nervous depression. He prescribed tonics and warm sea-water baths, which advice Katherine meekly followed. Soon, to the pride of the Sandbourne AEsculapius, a young practitioner, she showed signs of improvement, and declared herself perfectly well.

Perhaps the tonic which had assisted her to complete recovery was a letter which reached her about a week after the interview that had affected her so deeply. It was addressed in large, firm, clear writing, which was strange to her.

“I venture to trouble you with a few words,” (it ran) “because when last I saw you I was profoundly impressed by the suffering you could not hide. I cannot refrain from writing to entreat you will accept the position in which you are placed. Having done your best to rectify what is now irrevocable, be at peace with your conscience. I am the only individual entitled to complain or interfere with your succession, and I fully, freely make over to you any rights I possess. Had your uncle’s fortune passed to me, it would have been an injustice for which I should have felt bound to atone: nor would you have refused my proposition to this effect. Consider this page of your life blotted out, casting it from your mind. Use and enjoy your future as a woman of your nature, so far as I understand it, can do. It will probably be long before I see you again—which I regret the less because it might pain you to meet me before time has blunted the keen edge of your self-reproach. Absent or present, however, I shall always be glad to know that you are well and happy.

“Will you let me have a line in reply?

“Yours faithfully, MILES ERRINGTON.”

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The perusal of this letter brought Katherine the infinite relief of tears. How good and generous he was! How heartily she admired him! How gladly she confessed her own inferiority to him! Forgiven by him, she could face life again with a sort of humble courage. But oh! it would be impossible to meet his eyes. No; years would not suffice to blunt the keen self-reproach which the thought of him must always call up—the shame, the pride, the dread, the tender gratitude. Long and passionately she wept before she could recover sufficiently to write him the reply he asked. Then it seemed to her that the bitterness and cruel remorse had been melted and washed away by these warm grateful tears. He forgave her, and she could endure the pressure of her shameful secret more easily in future. At last she took her pen, and feeling that the lines she was about to trace would be a final farewell, wrote:

"My words must be few, for none I can find will express my sense of the service *yours* have done me. I accept your gift. I will try and follow your advice. Shall the day ever come when you will honor me by accepting part of what is your own? Thank you for your kind suggestion not to meet me; it would be more than I could bear. Yours, KATHERINE."

Then with deepest regret she tore up his precious letter into tiny morsels, and striking a match, consumed them. It would not do to incur the possibility of such a letter being read by any third pair of eyes. Moreover, she was careful to post her reply herself. And so, as Errington said, that page of her story was blotted out, at least, from the exterior world, but to her own mind it would be ever present: round this crisis her deepest, most painful, ay, and sweetest memories would cling. It was past, however, and she must take up her life again.

She felt something of the weakness, the softness, which convalescents experience when first they begin to go about after a long illness, the dreamy, quiet pleasure of coming back to life. The boys continued to be her deepest interest. So time went on, and no one seemed to perceive the subtle change which had sobered her spirit.

The season was over, and Mrs. Ormonde descended on Cliff Cottage for a parting visit. She had only given notice of her approach by a telegram.

"You know you are quite too obstinate, Katherine," she said, as the sisters-in-law sat together in the drawing-room, waiting for the cool of the evening before venturing out. "You never came to me all through the season except once, when you wanted to shop, and now you refuse to join us at Castleford in September, when we are to have really quite a nice party: Mr. De Burgh and Lord Riversdale and—oh! several really good men."

"I dare say I do seem stupid to you, but then, you see, I know what I want. You are very good to wish for me. Next year I shall be very pleased to pay you a visit."

“Then what in the world will you do in the winter?”

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“Remain where I am—I mean with Miss Payne—and look out for a house for myself.”

“But, my dear, you are much too young to live alone.”

“I am twenty-one now; I shall be twenty-two by the time I am settled in a house of my own. And, Ada, I am going to ask you a favor. Lend me your boys to complete my respectability.”

“What! for altogether? Why, Katherine, you will marry, and—”

“Well, suppose I do, that need not prevent my having the comfort of my nephews’ company until the fatal knot is tied.”

“Now, dear Katherine, *do* tell me—*are* you engaged to any one? Not a foreigner?—-anything but a foreigner!”

“At present,” said Katherine, with some solemnity, “I am engaged to two young men.”

“My dear! You of all young girls! I am astonished. There is nothing so deep, after all, as a demure young woman. I suppose you are in a scrape, and want Colonel Ormonde to help you out of it?”

“I think I can manage my own affairs.”

“Don’t be too sure. A girl with money like you is just the subject for a breach-of-promise case. Do I know either of these men?”

“Yes, both.”

“Who are they?” cried Mrs. Ormonde, with deepening interest.

“Cis and Charlie,” returned Katherine, laughing.

“I really cannot see anything amusing in this sort of stupid mystification,” cried Mrs. Ormonde, in a huff.

“Pray forgive me; but your determination to marry me out of hand tempts me to such naughtiness. However, be forgiving, and lend me the boys till next spring. They might go to Castleford for Christmas.”

“Oh no,” interrupted Mrs. Ormonde, hastily. “I forgot to mention that Ormonde has almost promised to spend next Christmas in Paris. It is such a nuisance to be in one’s own place at Christmas; there is such work distributing blankets and coals and things. If one is away, a check to the rector settles everything. I assure you the life of a country gentleman is not all pleasure.”

“Then you will let me have the boys?”

“Well, dear, if you really like it, I do not see, when you have such a fancy, why you should not be indulged.”

“Thank you. And I may choose a school for Cis?”

“I am sure the neither Ormonde nor I would interfere; just now it is of no great importance. But—of course—that is—I should like some allowance for myself out of their money.”

“Of course you should have whatever you are in the habit of receiving.”

After this, Mrs. Ormonde was most cordial in her approbation of everything suggested by her sister-in-law. The friendly conversation was interrupted by the entrance of Cecil with his satchel over his shoulder. He went straight to his young aunt and hugged her.

“Well, Cis, I see you don’t care for mother now,” exclaimed Mrs. Ormonde, easily moved to jealousy, as she always was.

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“Oh yes, I do! only you don’t like me to jump on you, and auntie doesn’t mind about her clothes.” And he kissed her heartily.

“Do you want to come back to Castleford?”

“What, now? when the holidays begin next week?”—this with a rueful expression. “Why, we were to have a sailing boat, and old Norris the sailor and his boy are to come out every evening.”

“Then you don’t want to come?”

“Oh, mayn’t we stay a little longer, mother? It *is* so nice here!”

“You may stay as long as your aunt cares to keep you, for all I care,” cried Mrs. Ormonde, somewhat spitefully.

“Oh, thank you, mother dear—thank you!” throwing his arms round her neck. “I’ll be such a good boy when I come back; but it *is* nice here. Then you have baby, and he does not worry you as much as we do.” Katherine thought this a very significant reply.

“There! there!” cried Mrs. Ormonde, disengaging herself from the warm clinging arms. “Go and wash your hands; they are frightfully dirty.”

“It’s clean dirt, mother. I stopped on the beach to help Tom Damer to build up a sand fort.”

“Why did Miss North let you?”

“Oh, I was by myself! I don’t want *any* one to take care of me,” said Cecil, proudly.

“Good heavens! do you let the child walk about alone?” cried Mrs. Ormonde, with an air of surprise and indignation.

“Run away to Miss North,” said Katherine, and as Cecil left the room she replied: “As Cecil is nine years old, Ada, and a very bright boy, I think he may very well be let to take care of himself. The school is not far, and he cannot learn independence too soon.”

“Perhaps so. But of course you know better than I do. You were always more learned, and all that; besides, you are not over anxious, as a mother would be.”

“Nor careless either,” said Katherine thinking of the nights at Castleford when she used to steal to the bedside, of little feverish, restless Charlie, while his mother kept within the bounds of her own luxurious chamber.

“No, no; certainly not,” returned Mrs. Ormonde, remembering it was as well not to offend so strong a person as she felt Katherine to be. “Only Cecil is a tiresome, self-willed boy, and very likely to get into mischief.”

“If you wish it, Ada, I shall, of course, have him escorted to and fro to school.”

“Oh, just as you like. I suppose you know the place better than I do.”

“Colonel Ormonde has never come down to see me,” resumed Katherine, after a pause. “You must tell him I am quite hurt.”

“Well, dear, you must know that Duke is rather vexed with you.”

“Vexed with me! Why?” asked Katherine, opening her eyes.

“You see, he thinks you ought to have come to us for a while; and then De Burgh came back from this last time in such a bad temper that my husband thought you were not behaving well to him—making a fool of him, in short; inviting him down here to amuse yourself, and then refusing him, if you *did* refuse.”

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“No, I did not; for Mr. De Burgh never gave me an opportunity,” cried Katherine, indignantly. “Nor did I ever ask him here. I cannot prevent his coming and lodging at the hotel. I am quite ready to talk to him, because he amuses me, but I am not bound to marry every man who does. Tell Colonel Ormonde so, with my compliments.”

“I am sure *I* don’t want you to marry De Burgh! Indeed, I am surprised at Duke; but you see, being chums and relations (and men stick together so), that he only thinks of De Burgh, who, *entre nous*, has been awfully fast. He *is* amusing, and very *distingue*, but I am afraid he only cares for your money, dear.”

“Very likely,” returned Katherine, with much composure.

“Then another reason why the Colonel does not care to come down is that he has a great dislike to that Miss Payne. *She* is really hostess here, and it worries Duke to have to be civil to her.”

“Why?” asked Katherine. “I can imagine her being an object of perfect indifference; but dislike—no!”

“Well, dear, men never like that sort of women;—people, you know, who eke out their living by—doing things, when they are plain and old. Handsome adventuresses are quite another affair—they are amusing and attractive.”

“How absurd and unreasonable!”

“Yes, of course; they are all like that. Then he thinks Miss Payne has a bad and dangerous influence on you. He disapproves of your living on with her, for you don’t take the position you ought, and—”

Katherine laughed good-humoredly as Mrs. Ormonde paused, not knowing very well how to finish her speech. “Colonel Ormonde will hide the light of his countenance from me, then, I am afraid, for a long time; for I like Miss Payne, and I am going to stay with her for the period agreed upon; and I will *not* marry Mr. De Burgh, nor will I let him ask me to do so, for there is a degree of honesty about him which I like. You may repeat all this to your husband, Ada, and add that but for a lucky chance his wife and myself would have been among the sort of women who eke out their living by doing things. I don’t think I should be afraid of attempting self-support if all my money were swept away.”

“Don’t talk of such a thing!” cried Mrs. Ormonde, turning pale. “Thank God what you have settled on the boys is safe!”

Katherine’s half-contemptuous good humor carried her serenely through this rather irritating visit, but the totally different train of thought which it evoked assisted her to recover her ordinary mental tone. It was, however, touched by a minor key of sadness,

of humility (save when roused by any moving cause to indignation), which gave the charm of soft pensiveness to her manner.

Mrs. Ormonde was rather in a hurry to go back to town, as she had important interviews impending with milliner and dressmaker prior to a visit to Lady Mary Vincent at Cowes, from which she expected the most brilliant results, for the little woman's social ambition grew with what it fed upon. Nor did the rational repose of Katherine's life suit her. Books, music, out-door existence, were a weariness, and in spite of her loudly declared affection for her sister-in-law she found a curious restraint in conversing with her.

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They parted, therefore, with many kind expressions and much satisfaction.

“I will write you an account of all our doings at Cowes. I expect it will be very gay and pleasant there. How I wish you were to be of the party, instead of moping here!” said Mrs. Ormonde.

“Thank you. I should like it all, no doubt, but not just now. I will keep you informed of our small doings.”

So Mrs. Ormonde steamed on her way rejoicing, and Katherine re-entered a pretty low pony-carriage in which she drove a pair of quiet, well-broken ponies, selected for her by Bertie Payne, whose conversion had not obliterated his carnal knowledge of horseflesh. A small groom always accompanied her, for though improved by the practice of driving, she did not like to be alone with her steeds.

She had nearly reached the chief street of Sandbourne, when a tall gentleman in yachting dress strolled slowly round the corner of a lane which led to the beach. He paused and raised his hat. She recognized De Burgh and drew up.

“And so you are driving in capital style,” was his greeting; “all by yourself, too. Will you give me a lift back?”

“Certainly. Where have you come from?”

“Melford’s yacht. I escorted my revered relative, old De Burgh, down to Cowes. He has a little villa there. As he has grown quite civil of late, I think it right to encourage him. Melford was there, and invited me to take a short cruise. So I made him land me here just now. The yacht is still in the offing. Lady Alice was on board.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Katherine, with much interest. “How is she?”

“So far as one can judge from the exterior, remarkably well, and exactly the same as ever. It is rather funny, but they had Renshaw on board too, the son of the big brewer who has bought, or is going to buy, Errington’s house in Berkeley Square. I fancy it is not impossible he may come in for Errington’s ex-*fiancee* as well as his ex-residence.”

“It cannot be, surely!” cried Katherine, flushing with a curious feeling.

“Why not? I don’t say immediately. I have no doubt everything will be done decently and in order.”

“Well, it is incomprehensible.”

“Not to me. What can—(Make that little brute on the off side keep up to the collar. You want a few lessons from me still.) What can a girl like Lady Alice do? She is an earl’s

daughter. She cannot dig; to beg she is ashamed; she must therefore take to herself a husband from the mammon of unaristocratic money-grubbers."

"I should like to meet her again—poor Lady Alice!" said Katherine, more to herself than to her companion.

"I think you are wasting your commiseration," he returned. "She seems quite happy."

"She may be successful in hiding her feelings."

De Burgh laughed. "Tell me," he asked, "do you really think Errington is the sort of fellow women break their hearts about?"

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“I cannot tell. He seems to me very good and very nice.”

“That is a goody-goody description. Well done!”—as Katherine guided her ponies successfully through the gate of her abode and turned them round the gravel sweep. “I must say you have a pretty little nook here.”

“Had you arrived an hour sooner you would have seen Mrs. Ormonde. I have just seen her off by the 12.30 train. She has been paying us a farewell visit, and is gone to Lady Mary Vincent.”

“Indeed! She will have her cup of pleasure running over there; they live in a flutter of gayety all day long.”

Here De Burgh sprang to the ground and assisted Katherine to alight.

“Will you lunch with us?” she asked, an additional tinge of color mounting to her cheek; for she knew De Burgh was no favorite of Miss Payne, who was no doubt rejoicing at the prospect of repose and deliverance from their late guest, who generally managed to rub her hostess the wrong way.

“You are very kind. I shall be delighted.”

While Katherine went ostensibly to put aside her hat—really to warn Miss Payne—De Burgh strolled into the drawing-room. How cool and fresh and sweet with abundant flowers it was! An air of refined homeliness about it, the work and books and music on the open piano, spoke of well-occupied repose. Its simplicity was graceful, and indicated the presence of a cultured woman.

De Burgh wandered to the window—a wide bay—and took from a table which stood in it a cabinet photograph of Katherine, taken about a year before. He was absorbed in contemplating it when she came in, and he made a step to meet her. “This is very good,” he said. “Where was it taken?”

“In Florence.”

“It is like”—looking intently at her, and then at the picture. “But you are changed in some indescribable way, changed since I saw you last, years ago—that is, a month—-isn’t it a month since you drove me from paradise?—but *you* don’t remember.”

“But, Mr. De Burgh, I did not drive you away. You got bored, and went away of your own free-will.”

“I shall not argue the point with you—not now; but tell me,” with a very steady gaze into her eyes, “has anything happened since I left to waken up your soul? It was by no

means asleep when I saw you last, but it has met with an eye-opener of some kind, I am convinced."

"I should not have given you credit for so much imagination, Mr. De Burgh."

Here Miss Payne made her appearance, and the boys followed. They were treated with unusual good-humor and *bonhomie* by De Burgh, who actually took Charlie on his knee and asked him some questions about boating, which occupied them till lunch was announced.

Miss Payne was too much accustomed to yield to circumstances not to accept De Burgh's attempts to be amiable and agreeable. He could be amusing when he chose; there was an odd abruptness, a candid avowal of his views and opinions, when he was in the mood, that attracted Katherine.

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“You *are* a funny man!” said Cecil, after gazing at him in silence as he finished his repast. “I wish you would come out in the boat with us. Auntie said we might go.”

“Very well; ask her if I may come.”

“He may, mayn’t he?”—chorus from both boys.

“Yes, if you really care to come: but do not let the children tease you.”

“Do you give me credit for being ready to do what I don’t like?”

“I can’t say I do.”

“When do you start on this expedition?”

“About seven, which will interfere with your dinner, for Miss Payne and I have adopted primitive habits, and do not dine late; we indulge in high tea instead.”

“Nevertheless, I shall meet you at the jetty. Till then adieu.”

“May we come with you?” cried the boys together—“just as far as the hotel?”

“No, dears; you must stay at home,” said Katherine, decidedly.

“Then do let him come and see how the puppy is. He has grown quite big.”

“Yes, I’ll come round to the kennel if you’ll show me the way,” replied De Burgh, with a smiling glance at Katherine. “Till this evening, then,” he added, and bowing to Miss Payne, left the room, the boys capering beside him.

“I should say that man has breakfasted on honey this morning,” observed Miss Payne, with a sardonic smile. “Does he think that he has only to come, to see, and to conquer?”

“He has been quite pleasant,” said Katherine. “I wonder why he is not always nice? He used to be almost rude at Castleford sometimes.” She paused, while Miss Payne rose from the table and began to lock away the wine. “I wonder what has become of Mr. Payne? He has not been here for a long time.”

“What made you think of him?” asked his sister, sharply.

“I suppose the force of contrast reminded me of him. What a difference between Bertie and Mr. De Burgh!—your brother living only to help others, and utterly forgetful of self; he regardless of everything but the gratification of his own fancies—at least so far as we can see.”

“Yes; Mr. De Burgh can hardly be termed a true Christian. Still, Gilbert is rather too weak and credulous. I suspect he is very often taken in.”

“Is it not better he should be sometimes, dear Miss Payne, than that some poor deserving creature should perish for want of help?”

“Well, I don’t know. Self-preservation is the first law of nature, and if that law were more carefully obeyed, fewer would need help.”

“Life is an unsolvable problem,” said Katherine, and the remark reminded her of her humble friend Rachel. She therefore sat down and wrote her a kind, sympathetic letter, feeling some compunction for having allowed so long an interval to elapse since her last.

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Her own troubles had occupied her too much. Now that time was beginning to accustom her to their weight, her deep interest in Rachel revived even with more than its original force. Katherine did not make intimates readily. Let there be ever so small a nook in the mind, ever so tiny an incident in the past, which must be hidden from all eyes, and there can be no free pass for outsiders, however dear or valued, to the sanctum of the heart, which must remain sealed, a whispering gallery for its own memories and aspirations. But Rachel Trant never dreamed of receiving confidence, nor, after once having strung herself up to tell her sad story, did she allude to her bitter past, save by an occasional word expressing her profound sense of the new life she owed to Katherine; nor did the latter, when talking with her face to face, ever realize that there was any social difference between them. Rachel's voice, manner, diction, and natural refinement were what might be expected from a gentlewoman, only that through all sounded a strain of harsh strength, the echo of that fierce despair from whose grip the tender consideration of her new friend had delivered her. The evening's sail was very tranquil and soothing. De Burgh was agreeable in the best way; that is, he was sympathetically silent, except when Katherine spoke to him. The boys and their governess sat together in the bow of the boat, where they talked merrily together, occasionally running aft to ask more profound questions of De Burgh and auntie. Fear of rheumatism and discomfort generally kept Miss Payne at home on these occasions.

De Burgh walked with Miss Liddell to her own door, but wisely refused to enter. "No," he mused, as he proceeded to his hotel; "I have had enough of a *solitude a trois*. It's an uncomfortable, tantalizing thing, and though I have been positively angelic for the last seven or eight hours, I can't stand any more intercourse under Miss Payne's paralyzing optics. I wonder if any fellow can keep up a heavenly calm for more than twenty-four hours? Depends on the circulation of the blood. I wonder still more if it is possible that Katherine is more disposed to like me than she was? She is somehow different than when I was here last. So divinely soft and kind! I have known a score or two of fascinating women, and gone wild about a good many, but *this* is different, why the deuce should she *not* love me? Most of the others did. Why? God knows. I'll try my luck; she seems in a propitious mood."

CHAPTER XXI.

"NO."

Next morning's post brought a letter from Bertie, which was a kind of complement to Katherine's reflections of the night before. After explaining that he had hitherto been unable to take a holiday from his various avocations, he promised to spend the following week with his sister and Miss Liddell. He then described the success of Mrs. Needham's bazar, and proceeded thus:

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“Meeting my old friend Mrs. Dodd a few days ago, I was sorry to find from her that your favorite, Rachel Trant, had been very unwell. She had had a great deal of work, thanks to your kind efforts on her behalf, and sat at it early and late; then she took cold. I went to see her, and found her in a state of extreme depression, like that from which you succeeded in rousing her. I think it would be well if she could have a little change. Are there any cheap, humble lodgings at Sandbourne, where she might pass a week or two? I shall pass this matter in your hands.”

“I am sure old Norris’s wife would take her in. They have a nice cottage, almost on the beach, close to the point.”

“No doubt. Really that Rachel of yours is in great luck. I wonder how many poor girls in London are dying for a breath of sea-air?”

“Ah, hundreds, I fear. But then, you see, they have not been brought under my notice, and Rachel has; so I will do the best I can for her. I am sure she is no common woman.”

“At all events she has no common luck.”

Katherine lost no time in visiting Mrs. Norris, and found that she was in the habit of letting a large, low, but comfortable room upstairs, where the bed was gorgeous with a patchwork quilt of many colors, and permitting her lodgers to dine in a small parlor, which was her own sitting-room.

The old woman had not had any “chance” that season, as she termed it, and gladly agreed to take the young person recommended by her husband’s liberal employer. So Katherine walked back to write both to Bertie and their *protegee*.

During her absence De Burgh had called, but left no message. And Katherine felt a little sorry to have missed him, as she thought it probable he would go on to town that afternoon, and she wanted to hear some tidings of Errington, yet could hardly nerve herself to ask.

The evening was gloriously fine, and as Miss Payne did not like boating, the pony-carriage was given up to her, the boys, and Miss North the governess, for a long drive to a farm-house where the boys enjoyed rambling about, and Miss Payne bought new-laid eggs.

When they had set out, Katherine took a white woolen shawl over her arm—for even in July the breeze was sometimes chill at sundown—and strolled along the road, or rather cart track, which led between the cliffs and the sea to the boatman’s cottage. She passed this, nodding pleasantly to the sturdy old man, who was busy in his cabbage garden, and pursued a path which led as far as a footing could be found, to where the

sea washed against the point. It was a favorite spot with Katherine, who was tolerably sure of being undisturbed here. The view across the bay was tranquilly beautiful; the older part of Sandbourne only, with the pretty old inn, was visible from her rocky seat among the bowlders and debris which had fallen from above, while the old tower at the opposite point of the bay stood

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out black and solid against the flood of golden light behind it. She sat there very still, enjoying the air, the scene, the sweet salt breath of the sea, thinking intently of Rachel Trant's experience, of her fatal weakness, of the unpitying severity of that rule of law under which we social atoms are constrained to live; of the evident fact that were we but wise and good we might always be the beneficent arbiters of our own fate; that there are few pleasures which have not their price; and after all, though she, Katherine, had paid high for hers, it had not cost too much, considering she had been groping in the dimness of imperfect knowledge. Oh, hew she wished she had never attempted to act providence to her mother and herself, but trusted to Errington's sense of generosity and justice! Of course it would have been humiliating to beg from a stranger, yet before that stranger she had been compelled to lower herself to the dust, and—

The unwonted sound of approaching feet startled her. She turned, to see De Burgh within speaking distance. "I am like Robinson Crusoe in my solitude here," she said, smiling. "I turn pale at the sound of an unexpected step, as he did at the print of Friday's foot."

"And to continue the smile," he returned, leaning against a rock near her, "the footprint or step, as in Crusoe's case, only announces the advent of a devoted slave." He spoke lightly, and Katherine scarce noticed what seemed to her an idle compliment.

"I fancied you had gone to town," she said.

"No; I am not going to town; I don't know or care where I am going. Some kind friends might say I am on my way to the dogs."

"I hope not," said Katherine, gravely. "I imagine, Mr. De Burgh, that if you had some object of ambition—"

"I should become an Admirable Crichton? I don't think so. There are such dreary pauses in the current of all careers!"

"Of course. You would not live in a tornado!"

"I am not so sure"—laughing. "At all events I shall never be satisfied with still life like our friend Errington."

"Do you know anything of him? Mrs. Ormonde never mentions his name."

"Of course not; when a fellow can't keep pace with his peers, away with him, crucify him."

"As long as a few special friends are true——"

“If they are,” interrupted De Burgh; and Katherine did not resume, hoping he would continue the theme, which he did, saying: “He has left his big house, gone into chambers somewhere, and has I believe, taken up literature, politics, and social subjects. So Lady Mary Vincent says. I fancy he is a clever fellow in a cast-iron style.”

“What a change for him!”

“I believe there was something coming to him out of the wreck, and I think he is a sort of man who will float. I never liked him myself, chiefly, I fancy, because I know he doesn’t like me. Indeed, I don’t care for people in general.” There was a pause, during which Katherine glanced at her companion, and was struck by his sombre expression, the stern compression of his lips.

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“Did you call at the cottage?” she asked.

“No; you were out this morning, and I did not like to intrude again,” he laughed. “Growing modest in my sere and yellow days, you see; so I thought I should perhaps find you here, as I saw your numerous party drive past the hotel.”

“I like this corner, and often come here. But, Mr. De Burgh, you look as if the times were out of joint.”

“So they are”—suddenly seating himself on a flat stone nearly at Katherine’s feet, leaning his elbow on another, and resting his head on his hand, so as to look up easily in her face.

“What gloomy dark eyes he has!” she thought.

“I should like to tell you why,” he went on.

“Very well,” returned Katherine, who felt a little uneasy.

“I am pretty considerably in debt, to begin with. If I paid up I should have about three half-pence a year to live on. Besides my debts I have an unconscionably ancient relative whose title and a beggarly five thousand a year must come to me when he dies, if he ever dies. This venerable impediment has some hundred or more thousands which he can bequeath to whom he likes. Hitherto he has not considered me a credit to the family. Well, I went to him the other day, on his own invitation, and to my amazement he offered to pay my debts—on one condition.”

“I do hope he will,” cried Katherine, as De Burgh paused. She was quite interested and relieved by the tone of his narrative.

“Ay, but there’s the rub. I can’t fulfil the condition, I fear. It is that I should marry a woman rich enough to replace the money my debts will absorb; a particular woman who doesn’t care for me, and whom, knowing the hideous tangle of motives that hangs round the central idea of winning her, I am almost ashamed to ask; but a woman that any man might court; a woman I have loved from the first moment my eyes met hers, who has haunted and distracted me ever since, and who is, I dare say, a great deal too good for me; but a creature I will strive to win, no matter what the cost of success. This girl or rather (for there is a richness and ripeness of nature about her which deserves the term) this fair, sweet woman—I need not name her to you.” He stopped, and his passionate pleading eyes held hers. Katherine grew white, half with fear, half with sincere compassion. She tried to speak. At last the words came.

“You make me terribly sad, Mr. De Burgh,” she said, with trembling lips. “You make me *so* sorry that I cannot marry you; but I cannot—indeed I cannot. Will Lord De Burgh not pay your debts if he knows you have done your best to persuade me to marry you?”

De Burgh laughed a cynical laugh. “You are infinitely practical, Katherine. (I am going to call you Katherine for the next few minutes. Because I think of you as Katherine, I love to speak your name to yourself; it seems to bring me a little nearer to you.) Listen to me. Don’t you think you could endure me as a husband? I am a better fellow than I seem, and mine is no foolish boy’s fancy. I am a better man when I am near you. Then this old cousin of mine will leave me all he possesses if you are my wife, and the Baroness de Burgh, with money enough to keep her place among her peers, would have no mean position; nor is a husband passionately devoted to you unworthy of consideration.”

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“It is not indeed. But, Mr. De Burgh, do you honestly think that devotion would last? These violent feelings often work their own destruction.”

“Ay: God knows they do, amazingly fast,” he returned, with a sigh and a far-away look. “But what you say applies to all men. If you ever marry you must run the risk of inconstancy in the man you accept. I am at least old enough and experienced enough to value a good woman when I have found one, especially when she does not make her goodness a bore. And you—you have inspired me with something different from anything I have ever felt before. Yes, yes,” he went on, angrily, as he noticed a slight smile on her lips. “I see you try to treat this as only the stereotype talk of a lover who wants your money more than yourself; but if you listen to the judgment of your own heart, it is true and honest enough to recognize truth in another, and it will tell you that, whatever my faults (and they are legion), sneaking and duplicity are not among them. It is quite true that when first I heard of you I thought your fortune would be just the thing to put me right, as I have no doubt my dear friend Mrs. Ormonde has impressed upon you, but from the moment I first spoke to you I felt, I knew, there was something about you different from other women. I also knew that in the effort to win the heiress I was heavily handicapped by the sudden strong passion for the woman which seized me.”

“That surely ought to have been a means of success?” said Katherine, a good deal interested in his account of himself.

“No: it made me, for the first time in my life, hesitating, self-distrustful, and awfully disgusted at having to take your money into consideration. Had you been an ordinary woman, ready to exchange your fortune for the social position I could give my wife, and perhaps with a certain degree of liking for the kind of free-lance reputation I am told I possess, I should have carried my point, and presented the future Baroness de Burgh to my venerable kinsman months ago.”

“And suppose the unfortunate heiress had been a soft-hearted, simple girl?” said Katherine, with a slight faltering in her tones. “Suppose she were credulous, loving, attracted by you—you are probably attractive to some women—and married you believing in your disinterested affection?”

De Burgh, who had risen from half-recumbent position, and stood leaning against a larger fragment of rock, paused before he replied: “I think that I am a gentleman enough not to be a brute, but I rather believe a woman of the type you describe would not have a blissful existence with me.”

“I am sure of it. You are quite capable of making the life of such a woman too dreadful to think of.” She shuddered slightly.

De Burgh looked curiously at her. “If you will have the goodness to undertake my punishment,” he said, “by marrying me without love, and letting me prove how earnestly

I could serve you and strive to win it, I'll strike the bargain this moment. I have been reckless and unfortunate. Now give me a chance; for I *do* love you, Katherine. I'd love you if you were the humblest of undowered women."

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The tears stood in her eyes, for the passion and feeling in his voice struck home to her.

“I believe it,” she said, softly, “and I am almost sorry I cannot love you. But I do not, nor do I think I ever could. You will find others quite as likely to draw forth your affection as I am. But there are some natural barriers of disposition, and—oh, I cannot define what—which hold us apart. Yet I am interested in you, and would like to know you were happy. Yet, Mr. De Burgh, I must not sacrifice my life to you. If I did, the result might not be satisfactory even to yourself.”

“Sacrifice your life! What an unflattering expression!” cried De Burgh, with a hard laugh. “So there is no hope for me?”

Katherine shook her head.

“I felt there was but little when I began,” he said, as if to himself. “Tell me, are you free? Has some more fortunate fellow than myself touched that impregnable heart of yours? I know I have no right to ask such a question.”

“You have not indeed, Mr. De Burgh. And if I could not with truth say ‘no,’ I should be vexed with you for asking it. Weighted as I am with money enough to excite the greed of ordinary struggling men, I shall not be in a hurry to renounce my comfortable independence.”

De Burgh’s eyes again held hers with a look of entreaty. “That independence will last just as long as your heart escapes the influence of the man whom you will love one day; for though love lies sleeping, it is in you, and will spring to life some time, all the stronger and more irresistible because his birth has not come early. *Then* you will feel more for *me* than you do now.”

“I do feel for you, Mr. De Burgh”—raising her moist eyes to his.

“Thank you”—taking her hand and kissing it. “Will you, then be my friend, and promise not to banish me? I’ll be sensible, and give you no trouble.”

“Oh yes, certainly,” said Katherine, glad to be able to comfort him in any way; and she withdrew her hand.

“I am not going to worry you with my presence now,” he continued. “I shall say good-by for the present. I am going away north. I have entered a horse for a big steeple-chase at Barton Towers, and will ride him myself. If I win I can hold out awhile longer. You must wish me success.”

“I am sure I do, heartily. After this, *do* give up racing.”

“Very well. But”—pressing her hand hard—“I’ll tell you what I will *not* give up, my hope of winning *you*, until you are married to some one else and out of my reach.”

He kissed her hand again, and then, without any further adieu, turned away, walking with long swift steps toward the town, not once looking back.

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“Thank God he is gone!” was Katherine’s mental exclamation as the sound of his foot-fall died away. She was troubled by his intensity and determination, and touched by his unmistakable sincerity. “If I loved him I should not be afraid to marry him. I think he might possibly make a good husband to a woman he was really attached to; but I have not the least spark of affection for him, though there is something very distinguished in his figure and bearing; even his ruggedness is perfectly free from vulgarity. Yes, he is a sort of man who might fascinate some women; but he is terribly wrong-headed. If he keeps hoping on until I marry, he has a long spell of celibacy before him. I dare say he will be married himself before two years are over.”

She sat awhile longer thinking, her face growing softer and sadder. Then she rose, wrapped her shawl round her, and walked slowly back to the cottage, where she found the rest of the party just returned, joyous and hungry.

Bertie came down late on the following Saturday, and brought a note from Rachel Trant to Katherine, accepting her offer of quarters at Sandbourne with grateful readiness. Katherine was always pleased with her letters; they expressed so much in a few words; a spirit of affectionate gratitude breathed through their quiet diction.

Katherine was very glad to receive it, for Bertie’s accounts of their *protegee* made her uneasy. She had at first refused to move, saying it was really of no use spending money upon her, and seemed to be sinking back into the lethargic condition from which Katherine had woke her.

Her kind protectress therefore set off early on Monday to tell Mrs. Norris she was coming, and to make her room look pretty and cheerful. By her orders the boatman’s son was despatched to meet their expected tenant on her arrival. Miss Payne having arranged a picnic for that day, at which Katherine’s company could not be dispensed with.

When they returned it was already evening; still Katherine could not refrain from visiting her friend. “She will be so strange and lonely with people she has never seen before,” she said to Bertie. “As soon as tea is over I shall go and see her.”

“It will be rather late, yet it will be a great kindness. I will go with you, and wait for you among the rocks on the beach.”

Miss Payne expressed her opinion that it was unwise to set beggars on horseback, but offered no further opposition.

The sun had not quite sunk as Katherine and her companion walked leisurely by the road which skirted the beach toward the boatman’s dwelling.

“I wish we could find some occupation that could so fill Rachel Trant’s mind as to prevent these dreadful fits of depression,” began Katherine.

“She had plenty of work, and seemed successful in her performance of it,” he returned; “but it does not seem to have kept her from a recurrence of these morbid moods. Loneliness does not appear to suit her.”

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“Sitting from morning till night, unremittingly at work, in silence, alone with memories which must be very sad, is not the best method of recovering cheerfulness, and unfortunately, Rachel is too much above her station to make many friends in it. She wants movement as well as work,” remarked Katherine.

“As you consider her so good a dressmaker, it might be well to establish her on a larger scale, and give her some of the older girls from our Home as apprentices. Looking after and teaching them would amuse as well as occupy her.”

“It is an idea worth developing!” exclaimed Katherine; and they walked on a few paces in silence.

“So De Burgh has been paying you a visit?” said Bertie at length.

“He has been paying Sandbourne a visit. He did not stay with us.”

“It is wonderful that he could tame his energies even to stay here a few days.”

“He was here only two days the last time.”

“*You* cannot have much in common with such a man.”

“Not much, certainly; still, he interests me. He has had such a narrow escape of being a *good* man.”

“Narrow escape! I should say he never was in much danger of *that* destiny.”

“Perhaps if the door of every heart were opened to us we should see more good in all than we could expect.” A few words more brought them to the boatman’s house, where they parted.

Miss Trant was at home, Mrs. Norris said. Katherine ascended the steep ladder-like stair, and having knocked at the door, entered the room. Rachel was seated in the window, which was wide open. Her elbows rested on a small table, and her chin on her clasped hands, while her large blue eyes looked steadily out over the bay, which slept blue and peaceful below; the lines of her slightly bent figure looked graceful and refined, but there was infinite sadness in her pose.

“I am very glad to see you again,” said Katherine. Rachel, who was too deep in thought to hear her enter, started up to clasp her offered hand. Her pale thin face was lit with pleasure, and her grave, almost stern eyes softened.

“And so am I. You do not know *how* glad. Do you know, I began to think I never should see you again,” and she kissed the hand she held.

“Do not!” said Katherine, bending forward to kiss her brow. “Were you so ill, then?”

“Not physically ill, except for my cough; but for all that I felt dying, and really I often wonder why you try to keep me alive. I am a trouble to you, and I do very little good. Had I not been a coward I should have left the world, where I have no particular place, long ago.”

“Well, you see, I have a sort of superstition that life is a goodly gift which must not be cast aside for a whim; and why should you despair of finding peace? There is so much that is delightful in life!”

“And so much that is tragic!”

“Ah, yes! but if we only seek for the sorrowful we destroy our own lives, without helping any one. You must let the dead past bury its dead.”

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“How if the dead past comes and crosses your path, and looks you in the face?”

“What do you mean, Rachel?”

“You will think me weak and contemptible, but I must confess to you the cause of my late prostration.”

“Yes, do; it may be a relief.”

“About a month ago,” said Rachel, sitting down by the table opposite Katherine, and again resting her elbow on it, while she half hid her face by placing her open hand over her eyes, “I was walking to Mrs. Needham’s with some work I had finished, when, turning into Lowndes Square, I came face to face with—him. It is true I had a thick veil on, and my large parcel must have partially disguised me, but he did not recognize me. He passed me with the most unconscious composure, and he was looking better, brighter, than I had ever seen him. The sight of him brought back all the torturing pangs of helpless sorrow for the sweetness, the intense happiness I can never know again; the stinging shame, the poison of crushed hopes, the profound contempt for myself, the sense of being of no value to any one on earth. I think if I could have spoken to *you*, I might have shaken off these fiends of thought; but I was alone, always alone: why should I live?”

“Rachel, you *must* put this cruel man out of your mind. He has been the destroyer of your life. Try and cast the idea of the past from you. Life is too abundant to be exhausted by one sorrow. You have years before you in which to build up a new existence and find consolation. I will not listen to another word about your former life; let us only look forward. I have a plan for you—at least Mr. Payne has suggested the idea—in which you can help us and others, and which will need all your time and energy. But I will not even talk of this business. We must try lighter and pleasanter topics. Not another word about by-gone days will I speak. You have started afresh under my auspices, and I mean you to float. Now that you are here, Rachel, you must read amusing books, and be out in the open air all day. You will be a new creature in a week. You must come and see my cottage and my nephews; they are dear little fellows. Are you fond of children?”

“I don’t think I am. I never had anything to do with them. But I would rather not go to your house, dear Miss Liddell. I feel as if I could not brave Miss Payne’s eyes.”

“That is mere morbidness. There is no reason why you should fear any one. You must discount your future rights. A few years hence, when you are a new woman, you will, I am sure, look back with wonder and pity as if reading the memoir of another. I *know* that spells of self-forgiveness come to us mercifully.”

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“When I listen to you, and hear in the tones of your voice more even than in your words that you are my friend, that you really care for me, that it will be a real joy to you to see me rise above myself, I feel that I can live and strive and be something more than a galvanized corpse. You give me strength. I wonder if I shall ever be able to prove to you what you have done for me. Stand by me, and I *will* try to put the past under my feet. I do not wish to presume on the great goodness you have shown me nor to forget the difference between us socially, but oh! let me believe you love me—even me—with the kindly affection that can forgive even while it blames.”

“Be assured of that, Rachel,” cried Katherine, her eyes moist and beautiful with the divine light of kindness and sympathy, as she stretched out her hand to clasp Rachel’s. “I have from the first been drawn to you strangely—it is something instinctive—and I have firm belief in your future, if you will but believe in yourself. You are a strong, brave woman, who can dare to look truth in the face. You will be useful and successful yet.”

Rachel held her hand tightly for a minute in silence; then she said, in a low but firm voice: “I will try to realize your belief. I should be too unworthy if I failed to do my very best. There! I have discarded the past; you shall hear of it no more.”

They were silent for a while; then a solemn old eight-day clock with a fine tone struck loudly and deliberatedly in the room below. Katherine, with a smile, counted each stroke. “Nine!” she exclaimed, when the last had sounded; “and though it is 9 P.M., let it be the first hour of your new life.” She rose, and passing her arm over Rachel’s shoulder, kissed her once more with sisterly warmth. “Mr. Payne is waiting for me, so I must leave you. I have sent you some books; I have but few here. One will amuse you, I am sure, though it is old enough—a translation of the *Memoirs of Madam d’Abrantes*. It is full of such quaint pictures of the great Napoleon’s court, and does not display much dignity or nobility, yet it is an honest sort of book.”

“Thank you. I don’t want novels now; they generally pain me. But my greatest solace is to forget myself in a book.”

Bertie Payne’s visit was a very happy one. The boys adored him, and subjects of discussion and difference of opinion never failed between Katherine and himself. She consulted him as to what school would be best for Cecil, and he advised that he should be left as a boarder at the one which he now attended, and where he had made fair progress, when Miss Payne and Katherine returned to town.

Bertie looked a new man when he bade them good-by, promising to come again soon.

Beyond sending a newspaper which recorded his victory in the Barton Towers steeple-chase De Burgh made no sign, and life ran smoothly in its ordinary grooves at Sandbourne.

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Rachel Trant revived marvellously. The change of scene, the fresh salt-air, above all the society of Katherine, who frequently visited and walked with her, all combined to give her new life—even emboldening her to look at the future. Her manner, always grave and respectful, won reluctant approval from Miss Payne. And the boys were always pleased to run to the boatman's cottage with flowers or fruit, and talk to, or rather question, their new friend. Rachel seemed always glad to see them, though she evidently shrank from returning their visits. She was never quite herself, or off guard, except when alone with Katherine. Then she spoke out of her heart, and uttered thoughts and opinions which often surprised Katherine, and set her thinking more seriously than she had ever done before. Finally, hearing from her good old landlady that some of her customers had returned to town and were inquiring for her, Rachel said it was time her holiday came to an end.

"I feel now that I can bear to live and try to be independent. Indeed my life is yours; you have given it back to me, and I will yet prove to you that I am not unworthy of your wonderful generosity," she said, the morning of the day she was to start for London, as she sat with Katherine among the rocks at the point. "The idea of an establishment such as Mr. Payne suggests is excellent. It ought to be your property, and good property—I need only be your steward—while it may be of great use to others."

"I feel quite impatient to carry out the project, and we will set about it as soon as I return to town," returned Katherine.

"Will you write to me sometimes?" asked Rachel, humbly. "I feel as if I dare not let you go: all of hope or promise that can come into my wrecked life centres in you. While you are my friend I can face the world."

"Yes, Rachel, write to me as often as you like, and I will answer your letters. Trust me: I will always be your true friend."

CHAPTER XXII.

"WARP AND WOOF."

When the rough weather of a stormy autumn obliged Katherine to keep in-doors she began to feel the monotony of existence by the sad sea waves, and to wish for the sociability of London. The end of October, then, saw Miss Payne and party re-established in Wilton Street, having left Cecil at school. With Charlie, Katherine could not part just yet. She intended to keep him till after Christmas, when he was to go to school with his brother.

Though town was empty as regarded "society," there was plenty of life and movement in the streets, and Katherine, always thankful for occupation which drew her thoughts

away from her profound regret for the barrier which existed between Errington and herself, was glad to be back in the great capital. She threw herself into the scheme of establishing Rachel Trant as a “court dressmaker” most heartily, and Bertie Payne spared time from his multifarious avocations to give important assistance. Rachel herself, too, proved to be a wise counsellor, her previous training having given her some experience in business. Katherine therefore found interesting employment in looking for a small house suited to the undertaking.

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Mr. Newton was writing busily in his private room one foggy afternoon when he was informed that Miss Liddell wished to speak to him.

“Show her in at once,” he said, cheerfully, as if pleased, and he rose to receive her. “Glad to see you, Miss Liddell, looking all the better for your sojourn by the sea-side. Why, it must be nearly six months since I saw you.”

“Yes, quite six months, Mr. Newton. I suppose you have been refreshing yourself too, after the fatigues of the season. You must try Sandbourne next year. It is a very nice little place.”

“Sandbourne? I don’t think I know it. But now what do you want, my dear young lady? I don’t suppose you come here merely for pleasure.”

“I assure you it always gives me great pleasure,” said Katherine, with a sweet, sunny smile. “You have always been my very good friend.”

“Well, a sincere one, at all events,” returned the dry old lawyer, whose aridity was not proof against the charm of his young client.

“I must not waste your time,” she resumed, drawing her chair a little nearer the table behind which he was ensconced. “I want to buy a house which I have seen, and I want you to attend to all details connected with it.”

“Oh—ah! Well, a good house would not be a bad investment; it would be very convenient to have a residence in London.”

“It is not for myself; it is a speculation.”

“A speculation? What put that into your head?”

Whereupon Katherine told him her story.

“I think it rather a mad undertaking,” was Mr. Newton’s verdict. “These projects seldom succeed. I don’t care for clever interesting young women who have no one belonging to them and cannot corroborate their stories. How do you know she was not dismissed from Blackie & Co.’s for theft?”

Katherine laughed. “I certainly do not know,” she said, “but I *feel* it is quite as impossible for her to steal as it is for myself.”

“Feel!—feel!” (impatiently). “Just so: impostors thrive on the good feelings of—of the simple.”

“You were going to say fools,” said Katherine. “Don’t let us waste time, my dear Mr. Newton,” she went on, with good-humored decision. “We shall never agree on such a topic; and I am going to buy this house, or another of the same kind if this proves not to be desirable; and I should be very sorry to employ any one but you to arrange the purchase.”

“Oh, you know your own mind, and how to threaten—eh, Miss Liddell?” he returned, with a smile. “I must know more about the tenement before I can consent to act for you.”

“It is an ordinary three-storied house, with a couple of rooms built out at the back, in a small street where there are a few shops; but it is near Westbourne Terrace, and therefore in a region of good customers. The late owner has been succeeded by a son, who seems very anxious to get rid of it. The price asked is seven hundred and fifty pounds, and I believe the taxes are under ten pounds. Do, dear Mr. Newton, look into the matter, and get it settled as soon as possible, and on the best terms you can.”

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“Hum! and the furniture? Do you undertake that too?”

“Of course. Don’t you see, I can do it all out of the money I have not been able to use. There is quite three thousand pounds on deposit in the bank. You know you wrote to me only a month ago about letting the money lie idle. I shall employ it now, for my *protegee*, Miss Trant, will be my only manager. I will pay her wages, and whatever profit after comes to me.”

“A very unknown quantity,” said the lawyer, drily. “Still, the house can’t run away, and I suppose will aways let for fifty or sixty pounds a year.”

“Fifty, I think.”

“Then I will look into the matter. Is it in habitable repair?”

“It seems so. Do your best to have the purchase completed as soon as possible, dear Mr. Newton. I want to start my modiste in good time to catch the home-coming people.”

“Believe me, it is an unwise project,” said Newton, thoughtfully.

“I know you think so, and you are right to counsel me according to your conscience; but as I am quite determined, you must not let me go to a stranger for help.”

“Very well; give me the address.”

“Seven Malden Street, Paddington. Bell & Co., house agents, in Harrow Road, have it on their books.”

“Good! I’ll get a surveyor to see to sanitary arrangements, *etc*. Now that, as usual, you have conquered again and again, tell me something of yourself. Are you tired of the little nephews yet?”

“No, indeed. I have been happier with them than I dared hope to be when I was left alone nearly a year ago, yet”—Her voice faltered and her soft dark eyes filled.

“Yes, yes,” hastily, with a man’s dread of tears; “you couldn’t get over that all at once. But you know it is a very Quixotic business taking those boys; and Mrs. Ormonde is not the woman to relieve you should any difficulty arise.”

“But when boys are well provided for there never can be a difficulty. Ah, Mr. Newton, what a wonderful magician money is! What would become of me without it? It is almost worth risking anything to get it.”

“Or, apparently, to get rid of it,” remarked Mr. Newton. “By-the-way, that was a tremendous smash of Errington’s. Did you hear anything about him?”

“Yes,” rather faintly.

“The reason I mention him is that, curiously enough, *he* was the man your uncle left everything to in that will he very fortunately destroyed. Of course I should only mention it to you: though now all is passed and gone, it is of no importance. He has behaved very well. I am told he has turned to literature. It’s a pity he did not follow his profession; but it would be rather late in the day for that. I think you must find these rooms rather stuffy and warm after the sea-breezes, for you are looking pale and fagged again.”

“I feel a headache coming on,” said Katherine, pulling herself together. “I hope you will pay me a visit someday. I should like to show you my dear little Charlie. He has a great look of my mother, especially his eyes; they are *just* like hers.”

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“If you will allow me to come some Sunday——”

“Certainly. You will sympathise with Miss Payne. She shares your deep-rooted distrust of your fellow-creatures. Yet even *she* has some faint faith in Rachel Trant.”

“That is the best symptom about the affair I have yet heard of. By-the-bye, this Miss Payne has made you comfortable? she has been a successful experiment?”

“Very successful indeed. I quite like her, and respect her; but I shall not stay longer than the time I agreed for. I want to make a home for the boys and myself.”

“What! Will Mrs. Ormonde give them up?”

“Not avowedly, but they will ultimately glide into my hands.”

“I trust you will not regret the charge you are taking on yourself.”

“I do not fear failure. These children are a great source of pleasure to me.”

A few more words, a promise on Mr. Newton’s part to hurry matters, and Katherine, bidding him adieu for the present, descended to the brougham which she usually hired for distant expeditions. Ordering the coachman to stop at Howell& James’, Katherine leaned back and reflected on the interview with Mr. Newton. No doubt he thought he had given her a good deal of curious information. If he only knew what a living lie she was! Her duplicity met her at every turn, and cried shame upon her. However, she had the pardon and permission of him against whom she had chiefly offended; that counted for much. Still, it was too hard a punishment that the ghost of her transgression should thus cry out against her, and she had done her best to rectify it. She felt profoundly depressed. It was an effort to execute the commissions intrusted to her by Miss Payne. These performed, she was leaving the shop, when a gentleman who was passing rapidly almost ran against her. He paused and raised his hat as if to apologize. It was Errington.

“Miss Liddell!” he exclaimed, a startled, pleased look animating his eyes. “I understood you were out of town. I hardly hoped to meet you again.”

Katherine flushed up, and then grew white. “I have been out of town ever since—” Since what?—that turning-point in her life when she confessed all to him?

“And I have been *in* town,” rejoined Errington. “It is not nearly so bad as some people imagine. Where are you staying?”

“Oh, I am always with Miss Payne, in Wilton Street.”

“I remember. But I am keeping you standing. May I come and see you?”

“Oh no; I would rather not,” cried Katherine, with an irresistible impulse which she regretted the next moment.

“You are always frank,” said Errington, with a kind smile, yet in a disappointed tone. “I will not intrude, then. How are your nephews, and Mrs. Ormonde? I seem to have lost sight of every one, for I have become a very busy man.”

“Yes, I know,” she returned, her color going and coming, her heart beating so fast she could hardly speak. “I must seem so rude! But I have read some of your papers in *The Age*. It must, indeed, take time and study to produce such articles.”

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“And patience on the part of a young lady to wade through them.”

“No; they always interest me, even when a little over my head. Though I do not want you to come and see me, I am always so glad to hear about you, to know you are well.”

“Then why avoid me?”

“How can I help it?”—looking at him with dewy eyes and quivering lips.

“Well, I must accept your decision. I wish—But I will not detain you.” He opened the carriage door and handed her in.

For an instant her eyes sought his with a wistful, deprecating look, then she said, “Tell him ‘home,’ please,” and she drove off.

The encounter unhinged her for the day. Why had he crossed her path, and why had she allowed herself to reject his friendly offer to come and see her? Yet it would have made her miserable to bear the quiet scrutiny of his eyes through a whole visit. He had evidently quite forgiven her, but that could not restore her self-respect or render her less keenly alive to the silent reproach of his presence. And yet it was pleasant to hear him speak, his voice was so clear, so well modulated, so intelligent. And how well he looked!—better and brighter than she had ever seen him. It was evident that he was not breaking his heart about Lady Alice. How could she have given him up?

Though nothing was more natural or probable than that they should meet when both lived in the same town, huge as it is, it was an immense surprise to Katherine, who had somehow come to the conclusion that they were never to set eyes on each other again. This impression upset her. She was constantly on the outlook for Errington wherever she drove or walked, and the composure which she had been diligently, and with a sort of sad resignation to Errington’s wishes, building up, was replaced by a feverish, restless anticipation of she knew not what.

The result was increased eagerness to see the completion of her dressmaking scheme, and she made Mr. Newton’s life a burden to him till all was accomplished.

In this she found a shrewd assistant in Mrs. Needham, who took up the cause furiously, and drove hither and thither, exhorting, entreating, commanding, and really bringing in customers, somewhat to Katherine’s surprise, as she did not expect much wool from so great a cry.

Shortly before Christmas Miss Trant’s establishment was in full working order, a couple of clever assistants had been engaged, and Rachel herself seemed to wake up to the full energy of her nature under the spur of responsibility.

The affair was not brought to a conclusion, however, without a struggle on the part of Mr. Newton against Katherine's resolution not to appear in the matter. The house was bought in Rachel Trant's name, the sale was made to her, and Miss Liddell's name never appeared. Newton declared it to be sheer madness; even Bertie Payne considered it unwise; but Katherine was immovable.

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“I am Miss Trant’s creditor,” she said. “If successful, she will pay me: if not, why, she will give up the house to me. I have full faith in her, and I wish her to be perfectly unshackled in the undertaking. As the owner of a house she will more readily obtain any credit she may need.”

“Which means,” said Mr. Newton, crossly, “that you will have to pay her debts if you ever intend to get possession of the house.”

“Well, I have made up my mind to the risk,” returned Katherine, with smiling determination; “so we will say no more about it.”

The unexpected meeting with Errington haunted Katherine for many a day, and many a night was broken by unpleasant dreams. She was filled with regret for having so hastily refused his proffered visit. Yet had he come she would have been uneasy in his presence. She longed to see him again; she came home from driving or walking each day with aching eyes and dulled heart because she had been disappointed in encountering him. Yet she dreaded to meet him, and trembled at the idea of speaking to him. She was dismayed at the restless dissatisfaction of her own mind. Was she never to find peace? never to know real enjoyment in her ill-gotten fortune? Why was it that the image of this man was perpetually before her, the sound of his voice in her ears? Then the answer of her inner consciousness came to overwhelm her with shame and confusion: “Because you love him with all the strength and fervor of a heart that has never frittered away its force in senseless flirtations or passing fancies.” This was the climax of misfortune. To know that the one of all others she most looked up to must, in spite of his kind forbearance, despise her as a cheat. Surely it was a sufficient punishment for a delicately proud woman to know that she had given her love unasked. All that remained for her was to hide her deep wounds, that by stifling the new and vivid feelings which troubled her they would die out, and so leave her in a state of monotonous repose. She would endeavor by all possible means to win forgetfulness.

When Cis came back for the Christmas holidays, therefore, he found his auntie ready to go out with Charlie and himself to circus and pantomime, Polytechnic and wax-works, to his heart’s content. It was not a brisk frosty Christmas, or she would no doubt have been with them on the ice, and the round of boyish dissipations called forth an oracular sentence from Miss Payne. “It’s just as well those boys are going back to school, Katherine. You are more foolish about them than you used to be, and if they staid on you would completely ruin them.”

Just before the holidays were over, Mrs. Ormonde visited London, or rather paused in passing through from the distinguished Christmas gathering to which, to her pride and satisfaction, she had been invited at Lady Mary Vincent’s. The little boys were indifferently glad to see her, and with the jealousy inherent in a disposition such as hers she was vexed at not being first with her own boys, yet delighted to hand over the care

and trouble of them to any one who would undertake it. These mixed feelings ruffled the bright surface of her self-content, inflated as it was by her increasing social success.

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She chose to put up at a quiet hotel in Dover Street rather than accept Katherine's and Miss Payne's joint invitation to Wilton Street.

"I know you will not mind, Katie dear," she said, as she sat at tea (to which refreshment she had invited her sister-in-law). "You see if it were your own house, quite your own, I should prefer staying with you to going anywhere else. As it is——"

"You are quite right to please yourself," put in Katherine.

"Yes, you are always kind and considerate. But, do you know, both Colonel Ormonde and I are very anxious you should establish yourself on a proper footing. Believe me, you do not take the social position you ought, living with an obscure old maid like Miss Payne"—this in a tone of strong common-sense. "The proper place for you is with us at Castleford in the autumn and winter, and a house in town with us in the spring. Then you and I might go abroad sometimes together, and leave Ormonde to his turnips and hunting. You would be sure to marry well—quite sure."

"But I am going to settle myself in a house of my own this spring," said Katherine, smiling.

Against this project Mrs. Ormonde exhausted herself in eloquent if contradictory argument: but finding she made no impression, suddenly changed the subject. "That is a very expensive school you have chosen for the boys, Katherine. 'Duke thinks it ridiculous. Sixty pounds a year for such a little fellow as Cis! and now Charlie will cost as much."

"It is not cheap, certainly; but it is, I think, worth the money. Cecil has improved marvellously, and Sandbourne agrees so well with them both."

"You will do as you think best, of course. We have the highest regard for your opinion. But you must remember that what with clothes and travelling and—oh, and doctors!—it all comes to more than three hundred a year, and at Castleford I could keep them for next to nothing, while the stingy trustees you have chosen only allow me four hundred and fifty."

"So you have only about a hundred and fifty out of the total for your personal expenses, eh?" said Katherine, laughing. "Then you have a husband behind you."

"Oh, I assure you that does not count for much. 'Duke doesn't care to spend money, and my having something of my own makes matters wonderfully smooth. I am sure you would not like to make any unhappiness between us."

"No, certainly not. I think it quite right, as my brother's widow, you should have something for yourself as long as you live."

“You really have a great sense of justice, Katherine, I must say! Living as you do, dear, you can form no idea what it costs to present an appearance when you are in a certain set.”

“I don’t suppose I ever shall, though I like nice clothes too.”

“And look so well in them!” added Mrs. Ormonde, who was always ready, when she deemed it necessary, to burn the incense of flattery on her sister-in-law’s shrine. “By-the-way, that is a very pretty, well-made costume you have on. I think you are slighter than you used to be.”

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“The effect of a good fit. I wish you would employ my dressmaker. She is very moderate.”

“Is she?”

A short discussion of prices followed, and Mrs. Ormonde declared she would call on Miss Trant that very afternoon and bespeak two dresses, for all she had were quite familiar to the eyes of her associates.

“I suppose you have heard or seen nothing of De Burgh lately?” exclaimed Mrs. Ormonde, suddenly.

“No, not for a long time.”

“He has been away—somewhere in Hungary, hunting or shooting—and then he has been staying with old Lord de Burgh. They used hardly to speak, and now he seems taken into favor. He is a curious sort of man, and he can be *so* insolent! How he will put his foot on people’s necks when he gets the old man’s title and wealth!”

“If they let him,” said Katherine, quietly.

“As he is in town, I thought he might have called on you. He was always running down to that stupid place in the summer, so I——”

“Mr. De Burgh!” said a waiter, opening the door with a burst.

“Talk of an angel!” cried Mrs. Ormonde, rising to receive him with a welcoming smile. “My sister was just saying it was a long time since she had seen you.”

Katherine felt annoyed at the thoughtless speech—if it *was* thoughtless. However, she kept a composed air, though the varying color which she never could regulate told De Burgh that she was not unmoved.

“And probably hoped it would be longer,” he replied, as he shook hands with Mrs. Ormonde, but only bowed to Miss Liddell.

“Don’t answer him,” cried the former; “such decided fishing does not deserve success.”

“I will not,” said Katherine, with a kind smile. She was too thorough a woman not to have a soft corner in her heart for the man who had professed, with so convincing an air of sincerity, to love her with all his heart.

It did not, however, seem to please or displease him, for he sat down beside the tea-table with his usual unaffected ease, and addressed his conversation to Mrs. Ormonde.

“Just heard from Carew that you were in town, and I have only escaped from Pontygarvan, where I have been playing the dutiful kinsman to my immortal relative. I don’t know which is most to be avoided, his enmity or his liking. He is an amusing old cynic at times, but a born despot. He only let me away to prosecute a scheme that he has taken up, and which I have gone pretty deeply into myself.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Mrs. Ormonde, handing him some tea. “Have you turned promoter, or—”

“Well, I am going to be my own promoter; time only will show how I’ll succeed. You must both give me your best wishes.”

“I am sure I do,” said Mrs. Ormonde.

De Burgh raised his eyes slowly to Katherine’s. She had not spoken. “Don’t *you* wish me success? No; I thought you didn’t.”

“I wish you all possible happiness,” she said, in a low tone.

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“Have you quarrelled with Katherine, or offended her, that she is so implacable?” asked Mrs. Ormonde.

“Neither, I hope. Now what are you doing in the way of amusement? Have you seen a play since you came up? The pantomimes are still on at the big theatres. But I want you to come and see *Ours* at the Prince of Wales on Thursday; it’s very good in parts. Then if you’ll sup with me after, at my rooms, I’ll get Carew and Brereton and one or two others to meet you.”

“It would be very nice!” exclaimed Mrs. Ormonde.

“Thank you,” returned Katherine. “I am, strange to say, going to a party on Thursday.”

“To a party! How extraordinary! Where, Katherine?”

“To Lady Barrington’s—a lady I knew in Florence, and who has invited me repeatedly.”

“I am sure I am very glad you are coming out of your shell at last. Where does this Lady Barrington live?”

“In Lancaster Square, not far from my abode.”

“Well, let us say Friday for *Ours*,” said De Burgh; “for I too am going to Lady Barrington’s on Thursday.”

“Then why did you invite us for that evening?” cried Mrs. Ormonde.

“I could have gone afterwards. Lady Barrington’s gatherings are always late.”

“You really know every one.”

“Oh, not every one, Mrs. Ormonde.”

“Then our ‘play’ is not to come off unless Katherine is to be of the party”—rather pettishly.

“If you like I will take you on Thursday, and Miss Liddell (if she will allow me) on Friday.”

“What nonsense! We will all go together on Friday. Katie, do you think this friend of yours would invite me? I don’t care to mope here when you are out enjoying yourself.”

“I am sure she would be very pleased to see you. I will write and ask her for an invitation as soon as I go home.” Katherine rose as she spoke.

“Do, like a good girl; and I will go and interview this dressmaker of yours. Till to-morrow, then.”

The little woman stood on tiptoe to kiss her tall sister-in-law, who left the room, followed by De Burgh.

“Haven’t I been a reasonable, well-behaved fellow not to have haunted or worried you all these months? Will you let me come and tell you how wise and staid and prudent I have become?” he said.

He spoke half in jest, but there was a wonderfully appealing look in his eyes.

“I am very glad to hear it, Mr. De Burgh. I hope you will go on and prosper.”

“And will you shut your doors against me if I call?”

“No; why should I?”

“Thanks! How heavenly it is to see you again! though you don’t look quite as bright as you did at Sandbourne. Is this your carriage? I see you have not started a turn-out of your own yet.”

“And never shall, probably.”

“Not, at all events, till you have appointed your ‘master of the horse.’ Good-by till to-morrow night.”

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He handed her carefully into the brougham, and stood looking after it as she drove away.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A WANDERER RETURNS.

It was quite an event in Katherine's quiet life to go to a party. She had never been at one in London, and anticipated it with interest. Both in Florence and Paris she had mixed in society and greatly enjoyed it. Now she felt a little curious as to the impression she might make and receive. Her nature was essentially vigorous and healthy, and threw off morbid feelings as certain chemicals repel others inimical to them. She would have enjoyed life intensely but for the perpetually recurring sense of irritation against herself for having forfeited her own self-respect by her hasty action. It would have been somewhat humiliating to have taken charity from the hands of Errington, but this was as nothing to the crushing abasement of knowing that she had cheated him. Still, no condition of mind is constant—except with monomaniacs—and Katherine was often carried away from herself and her troubles.

She was glad, on the whole, that De Burgh was to be at Lady Barrington's reception.

She was too genial, too responsive, not to find admiration very acceptable. Nor could she believe that a man like De Burgh, hard, daring, careless, could suffer much or long through his affections. It flattered her woman's vanity, too, that with her he dropped his cynical, mocking tone, and spoke with straightforward earnestness. He might have ended by interesting and flattering her till she loved him—for he had a certain amount of attraction—if her carefully resisted feeling for Errington had not created an antidote to the poison he might have introduced into her life.

Altogether she dressed with something of anticipated pleasure, and was not displeased with the result of her toilette.

Her dress was as deeply mourning as it was good taste to wear at an evening party. A few folds of gauzy white lisse softened the edge of her thick black silk corsage, a jet necklet and comb set off her snowy, velvety throat and bright golden brown hair.

"I had no idea you would turn out so effectively!" exclaimed Mrs. Ormonde, examining her with a critical eye as they took off their wraps in the ladies' cloak-room. "Your dress might have been cut a little lower, dear; with a long throat like yours it is very easy to keep within the bounds of decency. I wonder you do not buy yourself some diamonds; they are so becoming."

"I shall wait for some one to give them to me," returned Katherine, laughing.

“Quite right”—very gravely—“only if I were you I should make haste and decide on the ‘some one.’”

“Mrs. Ormonde and Miss Liddell!” shouted the waiters from landing to door, and the next moment Lady Barrington, a large woman in black velvet and a fierce white cap in which glittered an aigret of diamonds, was welcoming them with much cordiality.

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“Very happy to see any friend of yours, my dear Miss Liddell! I think I had the pleasure of meeting you, Mrs. Ormonde, at Lord Trevallan’s garden-party last June?”

“Oh yes; were *you* there?” with saucy surprise.

“Algernon,” continued Lady Barrington, motioning with her fan to a tall, thin youth. “My nephew, Mrs. Ormonde, Miss Liddell. I think Algernon had the pleasure of meeting you at Rome?” Katherine bowed and smiled. “Take Mrs. Ormonde and Miss Liddell in and find them seats near the piano. Signor Bandolini and Madam Montebello are good enough to give us some of their charming duets, and are just going to begin. I was afraid you might be late.”

So Mrs. Ormonde and Miss Liddell were ushered to places of honor, and the music began.

“I don’t see a soul I know,” whispered Mrs. Ormonde, presently. “Yet the women are well dressed and look nice enough, but the men are decidedly caddish.”

“London is a large place, with room in it for all sorts and conditions of men. But we must not talk, Ada.”

Mrs. Ormonde was silent for a while; and then opening her fan to screen her irrepressible desire to communicate her observations, resumed:

“I am sure I saw Captain Darrell in the doorway only for a minute, and he went away. I hope he will come and talk to us. You were gone when he came back from leave—to Monckton, I mean. He is rather amu—” A warning “hush-sh” interrupted her.

“What rude, ill-bred people!” she muttered, under her breath. And soon the duet—a new one, expressly composed to show off the vocal gymnastics of the signore and madame—came to an end; there was a rustle of relief, and every one burst into talk.

“How glad they are it is over!” said Mrs. Ormonde. “Look at that tall girl in pink. You see those sparkles in the roses on her corsage and in her hair; they are all diamonds. I know the white glitter. What airs she gives herself! I suppose she is an heiress, and, I dare say, not half as rich as you are.”

“Don’t be too sure. I am no millionaire,” began Katherine, when she was interrupted by a voice she knew, which said, “I had no idea it was to be such a ghastly concern as this!” and turning, she found De Burgh close behind her.

“What offends you?” she asked, smiling.

“All this trilling and shrieking. There’s tea or something going on downstairs. You had better come away before they have a fresh burst; they are carrying up a big fiddle.”

“Tea!” exclaimed Mrs. Ormonde. “Oh, do take me away to have some!”

“Here, Darrell,” said De Burgh, coolly, turning back to speak to some one who stood behind him. “Here’s Mrs. Ormonde dying for deliverance and tea. Come, do your *devoir*.”

Darrell hastened forward, smiling, delighted. With a little pucker of the brow and lifting of the eyebrows Mrs. Ormonde accepted his arm.

“Now, Miss Liddell,” said De Burgh, offering his; and not sorry to escape from the heated, crowded room, Katherine took it and accompanied him downstairs.

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“I did not think you knew Lady Barrington,” said Katherine, as he handed her an ice.

“Know her? Never heard of her till you mentioned her name the day before yesterday.”

“How did she come to ask you to her house, then?”

“Let me see. Oh, I went down to the club and asked if any one knew Lady Barrington, and who was going to her party. At last Darrell said he was a sort of relation, and that he would ask for a card. He did, and here I am.”

“But you said you were coming.”

“So I was. I made up my mind to come as soon as you said you were.”

“You are very audacious, Mr. De Burgh!” said Katherine, laughing in spite of her intention to be rather distant with him.

“Do you think so? Then I have earned the character cheaply. Are they going to squall and fiddle all night? I thought it might turn into a dance.”

“I did not imagine you would condescend to dance.”

“Why? I used to like dancing, under certain conditions. Don’t fancy I haven’t an ear for music, Miss Liddell, because I said the performance upstairs was ghastly. I am very fond of music—real sweet music. I liked *your* songs, and I should have liked a waltz with you—*im*mensely. You know I never met you in society before—” He stopped abruptly and looked at her from head to foot, with a comprehensive glance so full of the admiration he did not venture to speak that Katherine felt the color mount to her brow and even spread over her white throat, while an odd sense of uneasy distress fluttered her pulses. She only said, indifferently: “I might not prove a good partner. I have never danced much.”

“I might give you a lesson in that too, as well as in handling the ribbons. And for that there will be a grand opportunity next week. Lord De Burgh is coming up, and I shall have the run of his stables, which I will take good care shall be well filled. We’ll have out a smart pair of cobs, and you shall take them round the Park every morning, till you are fit to give all the other women whips the go-by.”

“Do you seriously believe such a scheme possible?”

“It shall be if you say yes. Do you know that you have brought me luck? You have, ’pon my soul! I am A-1 with old De Burgh, and I won a pot of money up in Yorkshire, paid a lot of debts, sold my horses. Now, don’t you think you ought to be interested in your man Friday? You remember our last meeting at Sandbourne—hey? Don’t you think I am going to succeed all along the line?”

“It is impossible to say,” returned Katherine. “You know there is a French proverb—” She stopped, not liking to repeat it as she suddenly remembered the application.

“Yes, I do know the lying Gallic invention! *Heureux au jeu, malheureux en amour*. I don’t believe it. If luck’s with you, all goes well; but then Fortune is such a fickle jade!”

“I trust you will always be fortunate, Mr. De Burgh,” said Katherine, gently.

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“I like to hear you say so. Now I don’t often let my tongue run on as it has, but if you’ll be patient and friendly, I’ll be as mild and inoffensive as a youngster fresh from school.”

“Very well,” said Katherine, smiling and confused. Here she was interrupted by the sudden approach of Mrs. Needham, her dark eyes gleaming with pleased recognition, and her high color heightened by the heat of the rooms. She was gorgeous in red satin, black lace and diamonds. “My dear Miss Liddell! I have been looking for you everywhere! I want so much to speak to you about a project I have for starting a new weekly paper, to be called *The Woman’s Weekly*. There is an empty sofa in that little room at the other side of the hall. Do come, and I will explain it all. It is likely to do a great deal of good, and to be a paying concern into the bargain. You will excuse me for running away with Miss Liddell”—to De Burgh—“but we have some matters to discuss. We shall meet you upstairs afterwards.” She swept Katherine away, while De Burgh stood scowling. Who was this audacious pirate who had cut out his convoy from under the fire of his angry eyes?

“You see, my dear,” commenced Mrs. Needham, in a low voice and speaking rapidly, “there is an immense field to be cultivated in the humble strata of the better working-class, and the paper I wish to establish will be quite different from *The Queen*, more useful and less than half-price. No stuff about fashionable marriages in print that is enough to blind an eagle, but useful receipts and work patterns, domestic information, and a story—a story is a great point—a description of any great events, and fashion plates, *etc*.” And she poured forth a torrent of what she was pleased to term “facts and figures” till Katherine felt fairly bewildered.

“It seems a great undertaking,” she replied, when she could get a word in. “I shall require a great deal of explanation before I can comprehend it. Will you not come and see me when we shall be alone, and we can discuss it quietly?”

“Certainly, my dear Miss Liddell—to-morrow. No; to-morrow I have about seven or eight engagements between two and six-thirty. Let me see. I am terribly pressed just now; I will write and fix some morning if you will come and lunch with me. If you could see your way to taking a few shares it would be a great help. Money—money—money. Without the filthy lucre nothing can be begun or ended. Now tell me how you have been. I have been coming to see you for *months*, but never get a moment to myself; but I have heard of you from Mr. Payne. What a good fellow he is! How is Miss Payne?” Katherine replied, and Mrs. Needham rushed on: “Nice party, isn’t it? There are several literary people here to-night. I did not know Lady Barrington went in for literary society, but one picks up a little of all sorts when you live abroad for a while. Here is a very interesting man. He is coming very much to the front as a political and philosophic writer. It is said he is to be the editor of *The Empire*, that new monthly which they say is to take the lead of all the magazines. I met him at Professor Kean’s last week. I don’t think he sees me—Good-evening! Don’t think you remember me—-

Mrs. Needham. Had the pleasure of meeting you at Professor Kean's last Monday. Mr. Errington, Miss Liddell!"

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“I have already the pleasure of knowing Miss Liddell,” he returned, with a grave smile and stately bow, as he took the hand Katherine hesitatingly held out.

“Oh, indeed; I was not aware of it.” Errington stood talking with Mrs. Needham, or, rather, answering her rapid questions respecting a variety of subjects, until she suddenly recognized some one to whom she was imperatively compelled to speak. With a hasty, “Will you be so good as to take Miss Liddell to her friends?” she darted away with surprising lightness and rapidity, considering her size and solidity.

“Would you like to go upstairs?” asked Errington.

“If you please.” Katherine was quivering with pain and pleasure at finding herself thus virtually alone with the man whose image haunted her in spite of her constant determined efforts to banish it from her mind.

On the first landing was a conservatory prettily lit and decorated, and larger than those ordinarily appended to London houses. “Suppose we rest here,” said Errington. “From the quiet which reigns above, I think some one is reciting and that is not an exhilarating style of amusement.”

“I should think not. I have never heard any one attempt to recite in England.”

“May you long be preserved from the infliction! There are very few who can make recitation endurable.”

After some enquiries for Colonel and Mrs. Ormonde, and a few observations on the beautiful, abundant flowers, Errington said: “Won’t you sit down? If it is not unpleasant to you, I should like to improve this occasion, as I rarely have an opportunity of seeing you.”

Katherine complied, and sat down on a settee which was behind a central group of tall feathery ferns. She was another creature from the bright and somewhat coquettish girl who was always ready to answer De Burgh or Colonel Ormonde with keen prompt wit. Silent, downcast, scarcely able to raise her eyes to Errington’s, yet too fascinated to resist his wish to continue their interview.

“I am very glad to meet you here,” began Errington in his calm, melodious voice. “It is so much better for you to mix with your kind; it has a wholesome, humanizing influence, and may I venture to say that you are inclined to be morbid?”

“Can you wonder?” said Katherine, soft and low.

“Yes, I do. There is no reason why you should not be bright and happy, and enjoy the goods the gods—”

“No,” she interrupted, playing nervously with the flowers in her bouquet; “not given by the gods! Stolen from you!” She did not raise her eyes as she spoke.

“I do beg you to put that incident out of your mind. We have arranged the question of succession, as only I had a right to do. No one else need know, and you will, I am sure, make a most excellent use of what is now really yours. Forget the past, and allow me to be your friend.”

“I am always thinking of you,” she said, almost in a whisper. “Yet it is always a trial to meet you. I think I would rather not. Tell me,” with a sudden impulse of tenderness and contrition, looking up to him with humid eyes, “are you well and happy? How have you borne the terrible change in your life?”

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“I am perfectly well and quite happy,” returned Errington, with a slight smile. “The terrible change, as you term it, has affected me very little. I find real work most exhilarating, and slight success is sweet. Since I knew that the tangle of my poor father’s affairs was satisfactorily unravelled, I have been at ease, comparatively. Life has many sides. I miss most my horses.”

“Ah, yes, you must miss them! Well, from what I hear, you seem to be making a place for yourself in literature. I am so glad!”

“Thank you. And you, may I ask, what are your plans?”

“If you are so good as to care, I am going to take a house and make a home for myself and my little nephews. Without any formal agreement, Mrs. Ormonde leaves them very much to me. They are a great interest to me. And as you are so kind in wishing me to be happy and not morbid, I will try to forget. I think I could be happier if you would promise me something.”

“What?”

“If ever—” She hesitated; her voice trembled. “If you ever want anything,” she hurried on, nervously, “anything, even to the half of my kingdom, you will deign to accept it from me?”

“I will,” said Errington, with a kind and, as Katherine imagined, a condescending smile.

“He thinks me a weak, impulsive child, who must be forgiven because she is scarcely responsible,” she said to herself.

“And this preliminary settled, you will admit me to the honor of your acquaintance?”

“Oh, Mr. Errington, do not think me ungrateful. But can you not understand that, good and generous as you are, your presence overwhelms me?”

“Then I will not intrude upon you. Gently and very gravely I accept your decree.”

They were silent for a moment; then Katherine said, “I was sure you would understand me.” As she spoke, De Burgh suddenly came round the group of ferns and stood before them with an air of displeased surprise.

“Why, Miss Liddell! I thought that desperate filibuster in red satin had carried you off. I have sought you high and low. How d’ye do, Errington? Haven’t seen you this age. Mrs. Ormonde wants to go home, Miss Liddell.”

“I suppose the recitation is over,” said Errington, coolly. “I will take Miss Liddell to Mrs. Ormonde, whom I have not seen for some time.”

De Burgh, therefore, had nothing for it but to walk after the man whom he at once decided was a dangerous rival, as indeed he would have considered any one in the rank of a gentleman.

Mrs. Ormonde was quite charmed to see Errington. She had put him rather out of her mind. It was a pleasant surprise to meet him once more in society, for she had a sort of dim idea his ruin was so complete that he must have sold his dress clothes to provide food, and could never, therefore, hold up his head in society again.

“It is quite nice to see you once more!” she exclaimed, with a sweet smile, after they had exchanged greetings. “Colonel Ormonde will be delighted to hear of you. I wish you could come down for a few days’ hunting. Do give me your address, and Duke will write to you.”

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“There is my address,” he said, taking out his card case and giving her a card; “but I fear there is little chance of my getting out of town till long after the hunting is over.”

“Oh, you must try. At all events, come and see me. I am at Thorne’s Hotel, Dover Street, and almost always at home about five. But I leave town next week.”

Here the hostess sailed up, and touching Errington’s arm, said “Sir Arthur Haynes, the great authority on international law, you know, wants to be introduced to you, Mr. Errington.”

Mrs. Ormonde took the opportunity of saying good-night, and Katherine took farewell of Errington with a bow.

“Twenty-four, Sycamore Court Temple. What a come-down for him!” said Mrs. Ormonde, looking at the card she held, when they reached the cloak-room.

“He seems cheerful enough,” said Katherine, irritated at the tone in which the observation was made; “and I thought the Temple was rather a smart place to live in.”

“I am sure I don’t know. Come, it must be late. What a stupid party! How cross De Burgh looks! I am sure he has a horrid temper.”

In the hall Captain Darrell and De Burgh awaited them. The latter was too angry to speak. He handed Katherine into the carriage, and uttering a brief good-night, stepped back to make way for Captain Darrell, who expressed his pleasure at having met Mrs. Ormonde, and begged to be allowed to call next day.

On the whole, Katherine felt comforted by the assurance of Errington’s friendly feeling toward her. How cruel it was to be obliged thus to reject his kindly advances! But it was wiser. If she met him often, what would become of her determination to steel her heart against the extraordinary feeling he had awakened? Besides, it could only be the wonderful patient benevolence of his nature which made him take any notice of her. In his own mind contempt could be the only feeling she awakened. No; the less she saw of him, the better for her.

By the time De Burgh called to escort Katherine and Mrs. Ormonde (who had dined with her) to the theatre he had conquered the extreme, though unreasonable, annoyance which had seized him on finding Errington and Katherine in apparently confidential conversation. He exerted himself therefore to be an agreeable host with success.

A play was the amusement of all others which delighted Katherine and drew her out of herself. De Burgh was diverted and Mrs. Ormonde half ashamed of the profound interest, the entire attention, with which she listened to the dialogue and awaited the *denouement*.

“I should have thought you had seen too much good acting abroad to be so delighted with this,” said Mrs. Ormonde.

“But this is excellent, and the style is so new I have to thank you, Mr. De Burgh, for a delightful evening.”

“The same to you,” he returned. “Seeing you enjoy it so much woke me up to the merits of the thing.”

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The supper was bright and lively. Three men besides himself, and a cousin, a pretty, chatty woman of the world, completed De Burgh's party. There was plenty of laughing and chaffing. Katherine felt seized by a feverish desire to shake off dull care, to forget the past, to be as other women were. There was no reason why she should not. So she laughed and talked with unusual animation, and treated her host with kindly courtesy, that set his deep eyes aglow with hope and pleasure.

"It is a great advantage to be rich," said Mrs. Ormonde, reflectively, as she leaned comfortably in the corner of the carriage which conveyed her and her sister-in-law home. She was always a little nettled when she found how completely Katherine had effaced herself from De Burgh's fickle mind. She had been highly pleased with the idea of having her husband's distinguished relative for a virtuous and despairing adorer, and his desertion had mortified her considerably.

"Yes, money is certainly a great help," returned Katherine, scarce heeding what she said.

"It certainly has been to you, Katie. Don't think me disagreeable for suggesting it, but do you suppose De Burgh would show you all this devotion if you were to lose your money?"

"Oh no! He could not afford it. He told me he must marry a rich woman."

"Did he, really? It is just like him. What audacity! I wonder you ever spoke to him again. Then you *are* going in for rank, Katherine?"

"How can you tell? I don't know myself. Good-night. I shall tell you whenever I know my own mind."

"She is as close as wax, with all her frankness," thought Mrs. Ormonde as she went up to her room, after taking an affectionate leave of her sister-in-law.

The boys at school, Katherine found time hung somewhat heavily on her hands—a condition of things only too favorable to thought and visions of what "might have been." So, with the earnest hope of finding the exhilarations which might lead, through forgetfulness, to the happiness she so eagerly craved, Katherine accepted almost all the invitations which were soon showered upon her. At the houses of acquaintances she had made abroad she made numerous new ones, who were quite ready to *fete*, the handsome, sweet-voiced, pleasant-mannered heiress, who seemed to think so little about herself.

"Just the creature to be imposed upon, my dear!" as each mother whispered to the one next her, thinking, of course, of the other's son.

But her most satisfactory hours were those spent with Rachel, when they talked of the business, and often branched off to more abstract subjects. To the past they never alluded. Katherine was glad to see that the dead, hopeless expression of Rachel Trant's eyes had changed, yet not altogether for good. A certain degree of alertness had brightened them, but with it had come a hard, steady look, as though the spirit within had a special work to do, and was steeled and "straitened till it be accomplished."

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“You are quite a clever accountant, Rachel,” said Katherine, one afternoon in early April, after they had gone through the books together. “You have been established nearly five months, and you have paid expenses and a trifle over.”

“It is not bad. Then, you see, the warehouses will give me credit for the next orders, three months’ credit, and my orders are increasing. I am sure it is of great importance to have materials for customers to choose from. Ladies like to be saved the trouble of shopping, and I can give a dress at a more moderate rate, if I provide everything, than they can buy it piecemeal. I hope to double the business this season, and pay you a good percentage. Even on credit I can venture to order a fair supply of goods.”

“Don’t try credit yet, Rachel,” said Katherine, earnestly. “I can give you a check now, and after this you can stand alone.”

“Are you quite sure you can do this without inconvenience?” asked Rachel. “If you can, I will accept it. I begin to feel sure I shall be able to develop a good business and what will prove valuable property to you. It is an ambition that has quite filled my heart, and in devoting myself to it I have found the first relief from despair—a despair that possessed my soul whenever you were out of my sight. When I am not thinking of gowns and garnitures, I am adding up all the money you have sunk in this adventure, and planning how it may ultimately pay you six per cent. over and above expenses. It does not sound a very heroic style of gratitude, but it is practical, and I believe feasible.”

“You are intensely real,” said Katherine, “and I believe you will be successful.”

After discussing a few more points connected with the undertaking they parted, and before Katherine dressed for dinner she wrote and despatched the promised check.

De Burgh had throughout this period conducted himself with prudence and discretion. He often called about tea-time, and frequently managed to meet Katherine in the evening, but he carefully maintained a frank, friendly tone, even when expressing in his natural brusque way his admiration of herself or her dress. He talked pleasantly to Miss Payne, and subscribed to many of Bertie’s charities. Katherine was getting quite used to him, though they disagreed and argued a good deal. She sometimes tried to persuade herself that De Burgh had given up his original pretentions and would be satisfied with platonics. But her inner consciousness rejected the theory. Still, De Burgh came to be recognized as a favored suitor by society, and the “mothers, the cousins, and the aunts” of eligible young men shook their heads over the mistake she was making.

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Now, after mature consideration, Katherine determined to make the will she had so long postponed, and bequeath all she possessed to Errington. It was rather a formidable undertaking to announce this intention to Mr. Newton, who would be sure to be surprised and interrogative, but she would do it. Having, therefore, made an appointment with him, she screwed up her courage and set out, accompanied by Miss Payne, who had been laid up with a cold, and was venturing out for the first time. She took advantage of Katherine's brougham to have a drive. The morning was very fine, and they started early, early enough to allow Miss Payne to leave the carriage and walk a little in the sun on "the Ladies' Mile."

As they proceeded slowly along, a well-appointed phaeton and pair of fine steppers passed them. It was occupied by two gentlemen, one old, gray, bent, and closely wrapped up; the other vigorous, dark, erect, held the reins. He lifted his hat as he passed Katherine and her companion with a swift, pleased smile.

"Who are those women?" asked the old gentleman, in a thick growl.

"Miss Liddell and her companion."

"By George! she looks like a gentlewoman. Turn, and let us pass them again."

De Burgh obeyed, and slackened speed as he went by. At the sound of the horses' tramp Katherine turned her head and gave De Burgh a bright smile and gracious bow.

"She is wonderfully good-looking for an heiress," remarked Lord de Burgh, who was, of course, the wrapped-up old gentleman. "I should say something for you if you could show such a woman with sixty or seventy thousand behind her as your wife. Why don't you go in and win? Don't let the grass grow under your feet."

"It is easier said than done. Miss Liddell is not an ordinary sort of young lady; she is not to be hurried. But I do not despair, by any means, of winning her yet. If I press my suit too soon, I may lose my chance. Trust me, it won't be my fault if I fail."

"I see you are in earnest," said the old man, "and I believe you'll win."

De Burgh nodded, and whipped up his horses.

"That must be the old lord," said Miss Payne, as the phaeton passed out of sight. "Mr. De Burgh seems in high favor. I cannot help liking him myself. There is no nonsense about him, and he is quite a gentleman in spite of his *brusquerie*."

"Yes, I think he is," said Katherine, thoughtfully, and walked on a little while in silence. Then Miss Payne said she felt tired; so they got into the carriage again and drove to Mr. Newton's office. There Katherine alighted, and desired the driver to take Miss Payne home and return for herself.

“And what is your business to-day?” asked Mr. Newton, when, after a cordial greeting, his fair client had taken a chair beside his knee-hole table.

“A rather serious matter, I assure you. I want to make my will.”

“Very right, very right; it will not bring you any nearer your last hour and it ought to be done.”

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The lawyer drew a sheet of paper to him, and prepared to “take instructions.”

“I should like to leave several small legacies,” began Katherine, “and have put down the names of those I wish to remember, with the amounts each is to receive. If you read over this paper” (handing it to him) “we can discuss——”

She was interrupted by a tap at the door which faced her, but was on Newton’s left. A high screen protected the old lawyer from draughts, and prevented him from seeing who entered until the visitor stood before him.

“Come in,” said Newton, peevishly; and as a clerk presented himself, added, “What do you want?”

“Beg pardon, sir. A gentleman downstairs wants to see you so very particularly that he insisted on my coming up.”

“Well, say I can’t. I am particularly engaged. He must wait.”

While he spoke Katherine saw a man cross the threshold, a tall, gaunt man, slightly stooped. His clothes hung loosely on him, but they were new and good. His hair was iron gray, and thin on his craggy temples. Something about his watchful, stern eyes, his close-shut mouth, and strong, clean-shaven jaw seemed not unfamiliar to Katherine, and she was strangely struck and interested in his aspect. Mr. Newton’s last words evidently reached his ear, for he answered, in deep, harsh tones, “No, Newton, I will *not* wait!” and walked in, pausing exactly opposite the lawyer, who grew grayly pale, and starting from his seat, leaned both hands on the table, while he trembled visibly. “My God!” he exclaimed, hoarsely; “George Liddell!”

“Ay, George Liddell! I thought you would know me.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

A TRAVELLER’S STORY.

When these startling sentences penetrated to Katherine’s comprehension she saw as with a flash their far-reaching consequences. Her uncle’s will suppressed, his son and natural heir would take everything. And her dear boys—how would they fare?

She sat with wide-dilated eyes, gazing at the hard, displeased face of this unwelcome intruder. There were a few moments of profound silence; the old lawyer’s hands, which relaxed their grasp of his chair as he looked with startled amazement at his late client’s son, visibly trembled.

Liddell was the first to speak. “So you thought I was dead and out of the way,” he said, with a sneer; “that nothing would happen to disturb the fortunate possessor of my father’s money. I was dead and done for, and a good riddance.”

“But how—how is it that you are alive!” stammered Mr. Newton.

“Oh, that I can easily account for.” And he looked round for a chair.

“Yes, pray sit down,” said Mr. Newton, recovering himself.

Here Katherine, with the unconscious tact of a sensitive woman, feeling how terrible it must be to find one’s continued existence a source of regret to others, rose and held out her hand. “Let me, your kinswoman,” she said, “welcome you back to life and home. I hope there are many happy years before you.”

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Liddell was greatly surprised. He mechanically took the hand offered to him, and looking earnestly into her face, exclaimed, “Who are you?”

“Katherine Liddell, your uncle Frederic’s daughter.”

He dropped—indeed, almost threw—her hand from him. “What!” he cried, “are *you* the supplanter, who took all without an inquiry, without an effort to find out if I were dead or alive?”

“Sit down—sit down—sit down,” repeated Newton, still confused. “Let us talk over everything. As to trying to find you, we never dreamed of finding you, considering that twelve, fourteen years ago we had an account of your death from an eye-witness.”

“Cowardly liar! It was worth a Jew’s ransom to see him turn white and drop into a chair when I confronted him the day before yesterday.”

“Why did you not communicate with me on hearing of your father’s death?”

“When do you think I heard of it? Do you fancy I sat down in the midst of my busy day to pore over the births, deaths, and marriages in a paper, like a gossiping woman? Kith and kin were dead to me long ago. What did I care for English papers? What had my life or the life of my poor mother been that I should give those I had left behind a thought?” He paused, and taking a chair, looked very straight at Katherine. “Now I shall tell you my story, once for all, to show you that there is no use in disputing my rights. You know”—addressing Newton—“how my life was made a burden to me, and that I ran away to sea, ready to throw myself into it rather than return to my miserable home. After several voyages I found myself at Sydney. A young fellow who had been my mate on the voyage out, an active, clever chap, proposed that we should start for the gold fields; so we started. It was a desperate long tramp, but we reached them at last. Life was hard and rough, and for a time we worked and worked, and got nothing. At last we found a pocket, just as we were going to give up, and having secured a fair lot of gold, we divided our gains and determined to leave the camp, which was not too safe for a successful digger, before the rest knew of our treasure-trove. We decided to trudge it to the nearest place where we could buy horses, and then to make our way to Sydney as fast as we could. Somehow it must have got out that we *had* gold, for as the dusk of evening was closing round us on the second day of our march we were attacked by some men on horseback—bush-rangers, I suppose. We showed fight, and I was hit in the shoulder. At the same time I stumbled over a stump, and pitched on to my head, which stunned me. Just then, it seems, the sound of horses approaching frightened the scoundrels, and they made off. My mate, not knowing whether the new-comers were friends or foes, he says, got away as fast as he could. His story is that as soon as all was still he crept back, and finding me apparently quite dead, went on to report the catastrophe at the first road-side inn he came to. *I* believe that, thinking me dead, he took all my gold, and said precious little about me.”

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“His story to me,” interrupted Mr. Newton, “was that he got assistance and buried your remains as decently as he could.”

“What induced him to apply to you at all?”

“I do not know. I fancy it was to hand over a few small nuggets, which he said was your share of the findings, and which he took from your waistband before committing you to the grave. As he seemed frank and straightforward and quite poor, I confess I believed him, and even requested Mr. Liddell to give him some small present. He said he was going afloat again, and would sail in a few days. He had an old clasp-knife which I myself had given you, and with it a small pocket-book in which your name and my address were written in your own hand. These were tolerably convincing proofs that he at least knew you. Moreover, there seemed no need whatever that he should have made any attempt to communicate with your people. He might have held his tongue, and no question would have been raised respecting you.”

“You are right,” returned Liddell, bitterly.

“And how did you escape?” asked Katherine, with eager interest.

“He—this Tom Dunford—*did* go to the next inn and told of the attack; he even guided some men to the spot, and left *them* to bury me, because he was obliged to hurry on to Sydney; but I believe he returned, before going to the inn, and robbed me. Anyhow I was not killed by the bullet, but stunned by the fall. Some of the fellows who came with Tom fancied I did not seem quite dead. Finally I recovered, and instead of digging for gold myself, got others to dig for me. I set up an inn and a store, with the help of an American whose daughter I married, and now I am rich enough to be a formidable foe. I have a little girl, and when my wife died I determined to realize everything, to come to England, and have the child brought up as an English lady. On the voyage home I fell in with a man—a fellow of the rolling-stone order—to whom I used to talk now and again. He turned out to be the brother of one of your clerks, and from him I heard that my father had died intestate, that my cousin had taken possession of everything, and that I was looked upon as dead. Did you never attempt to prove the truth of Tom Dunford’s story?”

“We did. I communicated with the police of Sydney, and they found that there had been a fight between bush-rangers and diggers returning from Woollamaroo at the time and place specified; moreover, that one of the diggers was killed, while the other escaped, but further nothing was known. The man who kept the inn mentioned by Dunford had made money and moved off, so the track was broken. Then all these years you made no sign. Did you not see the advertisements I put in an Australian paper?”

“No; I was far away from any town, and rarely saw any but the American papers which came to my master. Well, here I am, determined to have every inch of my rights, let

who will stand in my way; and *you*"—looking fiercely into Newton's eyes—"shall be my first witness."

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“I cannot deny that I recognize you,” said Newton, reluctantly.

Liddell laughed scornfully. “And you?” turning to Katherine.

“I have no doubt you are my cousin George.”

“Right! As to that fellow Tom—he would never have hurt me, but I am sure he robbed me, especially if he thought I was dead. His game was to hold himself harmless whether I lived or died, only he ought not to have committed himself to seeing me buried. I found him out in Liverpool, and gave him a fright, for he really believed me dead. Now, cousin, I hope you understand that I mean to take every farthing of my father’s fortune. He never did me much good in my life, nor my poor mother either, and I am determined to get all I can out of what he has left behind him. But I never dreamed he could pass away without taking care that nothing should come to me. It is strange that your mother and my uncle should make no fresh attempt to discover me.”

“We had looked upon you as dead for years, and my father had died before the news of your supposed murder reached us.” Katherine could hardly steady her voice; she was burning to get away. “I beg you will not resent the fact of my most unconscious usurpation. I would not do anything unjust.” She stopped, remembering what she *had* done. Surely the punishment was coming quick upon her.

“Ay,” said George Liddell, looking sternly at her. “It is a bitter pill for a fine lady like you to swallow, to find a ragged outcast like me thrusting you from the place you have no right to; where my poor little wild untutored girl will take her stand in spite of you all.”

“From what I have heard, I do not think my father or mother ever treated you as an outcast,” said Katherine, with quiet dignity; adding, as she rose to leave them, “You seem so irritated against me I will leave you with Mr. Newton, who will, I know, act as a true friend to both of us.”

Mr. Newton, with a grave and troubled face, hastened after to see her to her carriage. “This is an awful blow!” he said in a low voice.

“It is, no doubt. Do you think, as he is already rich, that he might do something for the boys? Then I should not care.”

“The boys!”—impatiently. “You need not trouble about them when he has the power to *rob* you even of the trifle you inherit from your father by demanding the arrears of income since your uncle’s death, as he has the right to do. Why, he can beggar you!”

“Indeed! He looks like a hard man; he is like his father.”

“Well, trust me, I will do my best for you.”

“I know you will,” returned Katherine, pressing the old lawyer’s hand as he leaned against the carriage door.

“Good-by! God bless you!” he returned; and Katherine was carried away from him. Slowly and sadly the old man ascended to his office again to confront the angry claimant, who awaited him impatiently.

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Meantime Katherine was striving to think clearly, to rouse herself from the stunned, bewildered condition into which the appearance of George Liddell had thrown her, and which Mr. Newton's words increased. What was to become of Cis and Charlie if she were beggared? She could not face the prospect. There was still a way of escape left, a glimpse of which had been given to her as she listened to her cousin's vindictive utterances. If she could prevail on Errington to produce the will and assert his right, he would provide for those poor innocent boys, and never ask *her* for any of the money she had spent. Maybe he would share with George himself. She must see Errington at once, and with the strictest secrecy. Her thoughts cleared as, bit by bit, her plan unfolded itself in her busy brain. Then she made up her mind. Touching the check-string, she desired the driver to stop at a small fancyware and stationer's shop near Miss Payne's house. Arrived there, she dismissed the carriage, saying she would walk home.

"Give me paper and an envelope: I want to write a few lines," she said to the smiling shopwoman, who knew her to be one of their best customers.

Having traced a few words entreating Errington to see her early next day—should he happen to be out or engaged—she hailed a hansome, and went as quickly as she could to his lodgings in the Temple.

It was quite different, this second visit, from the first. He now knew all, and in spite of her fears and profound uneasiness she felt a thrill of pleasure at the idea of the necessity for taking counsel with him, the prospect of half an hour's undisturbed communication, of hearing his voice, and feeling his kind forgiving glance. Still it was an awful trial too—to tell him the upshot of her dishonesty, the confusion she had wrought by her deviation into a crooked path. She was trembling from head to foot by the time she reached Errington's abode.

A severe-looking woman, a caretaker apparently, was on the stair as Katherine ascended, feeling dreadfully puzzled what to do, as she feared having to knock in vain and go away without leaving her note.

"Can you tell me if Mr. Errington is at home?" she asked, timidly, quite frightened at the sound of her own voice in so strange a place.

"I am sure I don't know, miss. I dare say he's gone out. He is up the next flight."

"May I ask you to inquire if he is in? If not, would you be so kind as to leave this note?"

The woman took it with a rather discontented suspicious air, but finding it was accompanied by a coin of the realm, went on her errand with great alacrity. Katherine followed slowly.

“You’re to walk up at once; he’s in,” said the emissary, meeting her at the top of the stair.

At the door stood Errington, her note in his hand, and a serious, uneasy expression on his countenance. Katherine was very white; her eyes were dilated with a look of fear and distress.

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“Pray come in,” said Errington; and he closed the door behind her. “I fear you are in some difficulty. You can speak without reserve; I am quite alone.”

Katherine was aware of passing through a small room with doors right and left, and possessing only a couple of chairs and a small table; through this Errington led her to his sitting-room, which was almost lined with books, and comfortably furnished. He placed a chair for her, and returned to his own seat by a table at which he had been writing.

“The last time I came it was in the hope of assisting *you* by my confession; now I have come to beg for your help—” She stopped abruptly. “My uncle’s son George, who was believed to have been killed by bush-rangers in Australia more than fourteen years ago, has returned, alive and well.”

“But can he prove his identity?”

“I was with Mr. Newton when he came into the office, and the moment Mr. Newton saw him he started up, exclaiming, ‘George Liddell!’ and I—I saw the likeness to his father.”

“Did Newton know him formerly?”

“Yes; he seems to have been almost his only friend.”

“How was it he did not put in an appearance and assert his rights before?”

“I will tell you all.” And she went on to describe the interview which had just taken place, the curious vindictive spirit which her cousin displayed, his very recent knowledge of his father’s death, and Mr. Newton’s words of warning, “He has the power to rob you even of the trifle you inherit from your father, by demanding the arrears of income since your uncle’s death; he can beggar you.”

“No doubt he can, but surely he will not!” exclaimed Errington.

“It seems to me that if he can he will. To give him up that which is his is quite right, and will not cost me a pang; but to be penniless, to send back my poor dear little boys, to be considered and treated as burdens by their mother and Colonel Ormonde—oh, I cannot bear it! I know now Charlie would be crushed and Cecil would be hardened. It is for this I come to you for help. Mr. Errington, I implore you to produce the will which puts this cruelty out of George Liddell’s power. Surely you might say that not liking to disinherit me, you suppressed it? This is true, you know.”

“The will!” exclaimed Errington, starting up and pacing the room in great agitation. “My God! I have destroyed it. Thinking it safer for you that it should be out of the way, I destroyed it, and by so doing I have given you, bound hand and foot, into the power of

this man. Can you forgive me?—can you ever forgive me?" He took and wrung her hand, holding it for a moment, while he looked imploringly into her eyes.

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“Oh yes, I do heartily forgive you. You only did it to save me from any chance of discovery. If only George Liddell will be satisfied not to claim the money I have spent, I may still be able to keep the boys, for I have nearly a hundred and fifty pounds a year quite my own,” cried Katherine, loosing her hand. “Do not distress yourself, Mr. Errington. I know Mr. Newton will do his best for me, and perhaps my cousin will not exact the arrears. He says he is rich, and if I give him no trouble——” she paused, for she could not command her voice, while the tears were already glittering in her eyes. Another word and they would have been rolling down her cheeks.

“Don’t cry, for God’s sake!” said Errington, in a low tone, resuming his seat. “What can be done to soften this fellow? Ah! Miss Liddell, we are quits now. If you robbed me, I have ruined you.”

“From what different motives!” said Katherine, recovering her self-control. “*I* am still the wrong-doer.”

How heavenly sweet it was to be consoled and sympathized with by him! But she dared not stay. It was terribly bold of her to have come to his rooms, only he would never misjudge her, and she was so little known she scarcely feared recognition by any one she might meet.

“Could I assist Mr. Newton at all in dealing with this kinsman of yours?” resumed Errington, gazing at her with a troubled look.

“I fear you could not. How are you to know anything of my troubles? No one dreams that you have any knowledge of my affairs; that you and you only are aware what an impostor I am.”

“You are expiating your offence bitterly. But when the story of this George Liddell comes out, why should I not, as the son of his father’s old friend, make his acquaintance, and try to persuade him to forego his full rights?”

“You might try,” said Katherine, dejectedly. “Now I have trespassed long enough. I must go. I have to explain matters to Miss Payne, and I feel curiously dazed. Oh, if I can keep the boys!”

“If any effort of mine can help you, it is my duty as well as my sincere pleasure to do all I can.”

“And if the will existed would you have acted on it?”

“Most certainly—in your defence.”

“Ah!” cried Katherine, her eyes lighting up, her tremulous lips parting in a smile. “Then you would have had some of the money too.”

“Then you quite forgive me?” again rising, and coming over to stand beside her.

“You must feel I do, Mr. Errington. Now I will say good-by. If you can help me with George, I shall be most grateful.”

“Promise that you will look on me as one of your most devoted friends. He took her hand again.

“Can you indeed feel friendship for one you cannot respect?” she returned, in a low tone, with one of the quick, vivid blushes which usually rose to her cheek when she was much moved.

“But I do respect you. Why should I not? A generous, impulsive woman like you cannot be judged by the cold maxims of exact justice; you must be tried by the higher rules of equity.”

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“You comfort me,” said Katherine, with indescribably sweet graceful humility. “I thank you heartily, and will say good-by.”

“I will come and see you into a cab,” returned Errington, feeling himself anxious that no one should recognize her, and not knowing when their *tete-a-tete* might be interrupted.

They went out together, and walked a little way in silence. “You will let me come and see you, to hear—” began Errington, when Katherine interrupted him.

“Not just now. I think we had better not seem to know anything of each other, or perhaps George Liddell may suspect you of being my friend.”

“I see. But at least you will keep me informed of how things go on. Remember how tormented I am with remorse for my hasty act.”

“You need not be. But I will write. There—there is a cab.”

Errington hailed it, handed her in carefully, and they said good-by with a sudden sense of intimacy which months of ordinary communication would not have produced.

It was a very serious undertaking to break the intelligence to Miss Payne, and poor Katherine felt quite exhausted before her exclamations, questions, and wonderings were half over.

On one or two points Miss Payne at once made up her mind, nor had she ever quite altered her opinion: This man representing himself as George Liddell was an impostor who had known the real “Simon Pure,” and got himself up accordingly as soon as he heard that the late John Liddell had died intestate; that Mr. Newton was a weak-minded, credulous idiot to acknowledge this impostor at first sight, *if* he were not a double-dealing traitor ready to play into the hands of the new claimant. He ought to have thrown the onus of proof on *him*, instead of acknowledging his identity by that childish exclamation. Don’t tell *her* that he was startled out of prudence and precaution. A spirit from above or below would not have thrown her (Miss Payne) off her guard where property was concerned, and what was the use of men’s superior strength and courage if they could not hold their tongues in presence of an unexpected apparition?

She was, however, profoundly disturbed, and sent at once for her brother.

It was evening before he arrived in Wilton Street, having gone out before Miss Payne’s note reached him. Like Errington, he was at first incredulous, and when he had gathered the facts of the case, absolutely overcome. In fact, he showed more emotion than Errington, yet it did not impress Katherine so much as Errington’s deep, suppressed feeling.

“But what are you to do?” he said, raising his head, which he had bowed on his hand in a kind of despair.

“It is just the question I have been asking myself,” said Katherine, quietly. “For even if dear old Mr. Newton succeeds in softening George Liddell, and he forgives me the outlay of what was certainly his money, the little that belongs to myself I shall want for my nephews.”

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“And pray is their mother to contribute nothing toward the maintenance of her children?” asked Miss Payne, severely.

“Poor Ada! she has nothing of her own; it will be desperately hard on her;” and Katherine sighed deeply. Her hearers little knew the remorse that afflicted her as she reflected on the false position into which she had drawn her sister-in-law. What a rage Colonel Ormonde would be in! How unwisely audacious it was in any mere mortal to play Providence for herself or her fellows! But Miss Payne was speaking:

“I don’t see the hardship; she has a husband behind her—a rich man too.”

“For herself it is all well enough, but it must be very hard to think that one’s children are a burden on a reluctant husband; besides, the boys will feel it cruelly. Oh, if I can only keep them with me!”

“I understand you,” cried Bertie. “Would to God you could lay your burden at His feet who alone can help in time of need. If you could——”

He was interrupted by Francois, who brought a letter just arrived by the last post.

“It is from Mr. Newton,” exclaimed Katherine, opening it eagerly. And having read it rapidly, she added, “You would like to hear what he says.”

“’MY DEAR MISS LIDDELL,—As I cannot see you early to-morrow I will send you a report. I had a long argument with your cousin after you left to-day, and although he is still in an unreasonable state of irritation against you and myself and every one, I do not despair of bringing him to a better and a juster frame of mind. For the present it would be as well you did not meet. I should advise your taking steps at once to remove your nephews from Sandbourne, and also, while you have money pay the quarter in advance, as you do not know how matters may turn. It was a most fortunate circumstance that the house occupied by Miss Trant was purchased in her name, as Mr. Liddell cannot touch that, and if she is at all the woman you suppose her to be, she will pay you interest for your money. If you could only persuade your cousin to let you see and make friends with this little daughter of his—*there* lies the road to his heart.

“’Meanwhile say as little as possible to any one about this sudden change in your fortunes. To Miss Payne you must, of course, explain matters; but she is a sensible, prudent woman.

“’With sincere sympathy, believe me yours most truly,
“‘W. NEWTON.’”

“There is a gleam of hope, then,” exclaimed Bertie.

“I don’t know what you mean about hope. At best a drop from about two thousand a year to a hundred and fifty is not a subject for congratulation.—Well, Katherine, you are most welcome to stay here as my guest till you find something to do, for find something you must.”

“I knew you would be kind and true,” said Katherine, her voice a little tremulous, “and believe me I will not sit with folded hands.”

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CHAPTER XXV.

"BREAD CAST ON THE WATERS."

There were indeed long and heavy days for Katherine, few though they were, before Mr. Newton thought it well to communicate the intelligence to Colonel and Mrs. Ormonde. He wished to be able to extract some more favorable terms from Liddell, so that his favorite client might fulfil her ardent desire to keep her nephews still with her, and assist in their maintenance and education. This was, in the shrewd old lawyer's estimation, a most Quixotic project, but he saw it was the only idea which enabled her to bear the extreme distress caused by the prospect of returning the poor children on their mother's hands.

A period of uncertainty is always trying, and the reflection that the present crisis was the result of her unfortunate infringement of the unalterable law of right and wrong overwhelmed her with a sense of guilt. Had she not meddled with the matter, no doubt such a man as Errington would, were the case properly represented to him, have given some portion of the wealth bequeathed him to the family of the testator. But how could she have foreseen? True; but she might have resisted the temptation to deviate from the straight path. "She might!" What an abyss of endless regret yawns at the sound of those words, used in the sense of too late!

This was a hard worldly trouble over which she could not weep. Over and over again she told herself that nothing should part her from the boys, that she would devote her life to repair as far as possible the injury she had done them. And Ada, would she also suffer for her (Katherine's) sins? But while brooding constantly on these miserable thoughts she kept a brave front, quiet and steady, though Miss Payne saw that her composure hid a good deal of suffering.

It was more, however, than Katherine's resolution could accomplish to keep a few evening engagements which she had made. "I should feel too great an impostor," she said. "How thankful I shall be when the murder is out and the nine days' wonder over! Have you any commissions, dear Miss Payne? I want an object to take me out, and I feel I must not mope in-doors."

"No, I cannot say I have any shopping to do, and I am obliged to go into the City myself. Take a steady round of Kensington Gardens; it is quite mild and bright to-day. I shall not return till six, I am afraid."

So Katherine went out alone immediately after luncheon, before the world and his wife had time to get abroad. She had made a circuit of the ornamental water, and was returning by the footpath near the sunk fence which separates the Gardens from the Park, when she recognized De Burgh coming toward her. He had been in her thoughts

at the moment; for, feeling that it was quite likely he had been considered a suitor, she was anxious to give him an opportunity of making an honorable retreat before society found out that the sceptre of wealth had slipped from her hand.

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“Pray is this the way you cure a cold?” he asked, abruptly. “Last night Lady Mary Vincent informed me that you had staid at home to nurse a cold. This morning I call to enquire for the interesting invalid, and find she is out in the cool February air.”

“It is very mild, and it is at night the air is dangerous,” returned Katherine, smiling.

“Now I look at you, I don’t think you look so blooming as usual. May I go back with you and pay my visit of condolence, in spite of having left my card?”

“Yes,” said Katherine, with sudden decision. “I want to speak to you.”

“Indeed!”—with a keen, eager look. “This is something new. May I ask—”

“No; not until we are in Miss Payne’s drawing-room.”

“You alarm me. Could it be possible that you, peerless as you are, have got into a scrape?”

“Well, I think I can say I have,” said Katherine, smiling.

“Great heavens! this is delightful.”

“Let us talk of something else.”

“By all means. Will you hear some gossip? I don’t often retail any, but I fancy you’ll be amused and interested to know that Lady Alice Mordaunt is really going to marry that brewer fellow. You remember I told you what I thought was going on last autumn.”

“Is it possible?” cried Katherine. “Imagine her so soon forgetting Mr. Errington!”

“And why should not that immaculate individual be exempt from the usual fate of man?”

“I don’t know—except that he is not an ordinary man.”

“No; certainly not. He is an extraordinary fellow; but I must say he has shown great staying power in his late difficulties. They tell me he has been revenging himself by writing awful problems, political and critical, which require a forty-horse intellectual power to understand.” And De Burgh talked on, seeing that his companion was disinclined to speak until they reached Miss Payne’s house.

Katherine took off her hat and warm cloak with some deliberation, thinking how best to approach her subject. Pushing back her hair, which had become somewhat disordered from its own weight, she sat down on an ottoman, and raising her eyes to De Burgh, who stood on the hearth-rug, said, slowly, “I have a secret to tell you which you must keep for a few weeks.”

“For an eternity, if you will trust me,” he returned, in low, earnest tones, his dark eyes fixed upon her, as if trying to read her heart.

“Well, then, my uncle’s son and heir, whom we believed to be dead, has suddenly reappeared, and of course takes the fortune I have been, let us *say*, enjoying.”

De Burgh did not reply at once; his eyes continued to search her face as if to discover some hidden meaning.

“Do you mean me to take you seriously, Miss Liddell?”

“Quite. Moreover, I fear my cousin means to demand the arrears of income—income which I have spent.”

“But the fellow must be an impostor. Your man of business, Newton, will never yield to his demands. He must prove his case.”

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“I think he has proved it. Mr. Newton recognized him at the first glance; and he bears a strong resemblance to his father. I feel he is the man he asserts himself to be.”

“Do you intend to give up without a struggle? What account does this intruder give of himself?”

Katherine gave him a brief sketch of the story, speaking with firmness and composure.

“What an infernal shame!” cried De Burgh, when she ceased speaking. “I wish I had had a chance of sending a bullet through his head, and as sure as there is a devil down below I’d have verified the report of his death! Why, what is to be done?”

“I still faintly hope Mr. Newton may persuade him to forego his first demand for the restoration of those moneys I have spent. If so, I am not quite penniless, and can hope to— At all events, I thought it but right to give you early information, as—”

“Why?” interrupted De Burgh (for she hesitated), throwing himself on the ottoman and leaning against the arm which divided the seats, till his long dark mustaches nearly touched the coils of her hair. “Why?” he repeated, as she did not answer immediately. “I know well enough. It is your loyalty that makes you wish to open a way of escape to the friend who is credited with seeking your fortune. I see it all.”

“You can assign any motive you like, Mr. De Burgh, but I thought—I wished—I believed it better to let you know; for I shall always consider you my friend, even if we do not meet,” said Katherine, a good deal unhinged by the excitement and distress he displayed.

“Meet? why, of course we shall meet! Do you think anything in heaven or earth would make me give up the attempt, hopeless as it may seem, to win you? I know you don’t care a rap for me now, but I cannot, dare not despair. I’ve too much at stake. There is the awful sting of this misfortune. Even if you, by some blessed intervention of Providence, were ready to marry me, I don’t see how I could drag you into such a sea of trouble. Besides, there’s old De Burgh; he must be kept in good-humor. By Heaven! this miserable want of money is the most utter degradation—irresistible, enslaving. I feel like a beaten cur. I am tied hand and foot. Had I not been such a reckless idiot, why, your misfortunes might have been my best chance. I dare say that sounds shabby enough, but I like to let you see what I am, good and bad; besides, I am ready to do *anything*, right or wrong, to win you.”

“Ah, Mr. De Burgh, no crookedness ever succeeds. And then I do not deserve that you should think so much or care so much for me, for I do not wish to marry you or any one. My plan of life is framed on quite different lines. Do put me out of your mind, and think of your own fortunes. Do not vex Lord De Burgh; but oh! pray give up racing and gambling. You know I really do like you, not exactly in the way you wish, but it adds

greatly to my troubles (for I am very sorry to lose my fortune, I assure you) to see you so—so disturbed."

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“If you look at me so kindly with those sweet wet eyes I shall lose my head,” cried De Burgh, who was already beside himself, for the gulf which had suddenly yawned between him and the woman he coveted seemed to grow wider as he looked at it. “I am the most unlucky devil in existence, and I have brought *you* ill luck. I should have kept away from you, for you are a hundred thousand times too good for me; but as I *have* thrown myself headlong into the delicious pain of loving you, won’t you give me a chance? Promise to wait for me: a week, a day, may see me wealthy, and I swear I will strive to be worthy too: why were those bush-rangers such infernally bad-shots?—and I can be no use to you whatever?”

“But I have many kind friends, Mr. De Burgh. You must not distress yourself about me. I am not frightened, I assure you. Now I have told you everything, don’t you think you would better go?” She rose as she spoke, and held out her hand.

“Better for you, yes, but not for me. Look here, Katherine, don’t banish me. I am obliged to go with old De Burgh to Paris. He is making for Cannes again, and asked me to come so far. Of course he has a chain round my neck. I must obey orders like his bond-slave, but when I come back—don’t banish me. I swear I’ll be an unobtrusive friend, and I may be of use. Don’t send me quite away; in short, I won’t take a dismissal. What is it you object to? What absurd stories have been told you to set you against me? Other women have liked me well enough.”

“I have no doubt you deserve to be loved, Mr. De Burgh, but there are feelings that, like the wind, blow where they list; we cannot tell whence they come or whither they go. I am sorry I do not love you, but—I am very tired. If you care to come and see me when you come back, come *if* I have any place in which to receive you.”

“If I write, will you answer my letters?”

“Oh no; don’t write; I would rather you did not.”

“I am a brute to keep you when you look so white; I’ll go. Good-by for the present—only for the present, you dear, sweet woman!” He kissed her hand twice and went quickly out of the room.

Katherine heaved a sigh of relief. The degree of liking she had for De Burgh made her feel greatly distressed at having been obliged to give him pain. Yet she was not by any means disposed to trust him; his restless eagerness to gratify every whim and desire as it came to him, the kind of harshness which made him so indifferent to the feelings and opinions of those who opposed him—this was very repellent to Katherine’s more considerate and sympathetic nature. Besides, and above all, De Burgh was not Errington; and it needs no more to explain why the former, who had no reason hitherto to complain of the coldness of women, found the only one he had ever loved with a high order of affection untouched by his wooing.

The day after this interview Katherine, accompanied by Miss Payne, went down to Sandbourne to interview the principal of the boys' school, to explain the state of affairs, to give notice that she should be obliged to remove them, and to pay in advance for the time they were to remain.

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The visit was full of both pain and pleasure. The genuine delight of the children on seeing her unexpectedly, their joy at being permitted to go out to walk with her, their innocent talk, and the castles in the air which they erected in the firm conviction that they were to have horses and dogs, man-servants and maid-servants, all the days of their lives, touched her heart. The principal gave a good account of both. Cecil was, he said, erratic and excitable in no common degree, but though troublesome, he was truthful and straightforward, while Charlie promised to develop qualities of no common order. He entered with a very friendly spirit into the anxiety of the young aunt, whose motherly tenderness for her nephews touched him greatly. He gave her some valuable advice, and the address of two schools regulated to suit parents of small means, and which he could safely recommend. By his suggestion nothing was said for the present to Cis or Charlie regarding the impending change, lest they should be unsettled.

“And shall we come to stay at Miss Payne’s for the Easter holidays?” cried the boys in chorus, as Katherine took leave of them the next day.

“I hope so, dears, but I am not sure.”

“Then will you come down to Sandbourne? That would be jolly.”

“I cannot promise, Cecil. We will see.”

“But, auntie, we’ll not have to go to Castleford?”

“Why? Would you not like to go?”

“No. Would you, Charlie? I don’t like being there nearly so much as at school. I don’t like having dinner by ourselves, and yet I don’t care to dine with Colonel Ormonde; he is always in a wax.”

“He does not mean to be cross,” said Katherine, her heart sinking within her. Should she be obliged to hand over the poor little helpless fellows to the reluctant guardianship of their irritable step-father? This would indeed be a pang. Was it for this she had broken the law, and marred the harmony of her own moral nature?

“Well, my own dear, I will do the best I can for you, you may be quite sure. Now you must let me go; I will come again as soon as I can.” Cis kissed her heartily, and scampered away to take his place in the class-room, quite content with his school life. Charlie threw his arms around his auntie’s neck, and clung to her lovingly. But he too was called away, and nothing remained for Katherine and her companion but to make their way to the station and return to town.

This visit cost Katherine more than any other outcome of George Liddell’s reappearance. Her quick imagination depicted what the boys’ lives would be under the jurisdiction of their mother and her husband—the worries, the suppression, the sense of

being always naughty and in the wrong, the different yet equally pernicious effect such treatment would have on the brothers.

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“This is the worst part of the business to you,” said Miss Payne, when they had reached home and sat down to a late tea together. “You look like a ghost, or as if you had seen one. You will make yourself ill, and really there is no need to do anything of the kind. Those children have a mother who is very well off. I always thought it frightfully imprudent of you to take those boys even when you had plenty of money. Now, of course, when it is impossible for you to keep them, it is a bitter wrench to part, but—”

“But I am not sure that we must part,” interrupted Katherine, eagerly. “Should my cousin be induced to forego his claims upon me for the income I have expended, and I can find some means of maintaining myself, I could still provide for their school expenses and keep them with me.”

“Maintain yourself, my dear Katherine; it is easier said than done. You are quite infatuated about those nephews of yours, and I dare say they will give you small thanks.”

“I know it is not easy for an untrained woman like myself to find remunerative work, but I shall try. Here is a note from Mr. Newton asking me to call on him to-morrow. Let us hope he will have some good news, though I cannot help fearing he would have told me in this if he had.”

It was with a sickening sensation of uneasy hope shot with dark streaks of fear that Katherine started to keep her appointment with Mr. Newton. Eager to begin her economy at once, Katherine took an omnibus instead of indulging in a brougham or a cab. She could not help smiling at her own sense of helpless discomfort when a fat woman almost sat down upon her, and the conductor told her to look sharp when the vehicle stopped to let her alight; as she reflected that barely three years ago she considered an omnibus rather a luxury, and that it was a matter of careful calculation how many pennies might be saved by walking to certain points whence one could travel at a reduced fare. How easily are luxurious and self-indulgent habits formed! Well, she had done with them forever now; nor would anything seem a hardship were she but permitted to repair in some measure the evil she had wrought.

She found Mr. Newton awaiting her with evident impatience. “Well, my dear Miss Liddell,” he said, “I have been most anxious to see you, though I have not much that is cheering to communicate. I have had several interviews with your cousin, but he seems still unaccountably hard and vindictive. However, as I am, of course, *your* adviser, he has been obliged to seek another solicitor, and I am happy to say he has fallen into good hands, and that by a sort of lucky chance.”

“How?” asked Katherine, who was looking pale and feeling in the depths.

“Well, a few days ago a gentleman called here to ask me for the address of a former client of whom I have heard nothing for years. I think you know or have met this gentleman—Mr. Errington.”

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“I do,” cried Katherine, now all attention.

“While we were speaking Mr. Liddell was announced. Errington looked at him hard, and then asked politely if he were the son of the late Mr. John Liddell, who had been a great friend of his (Errington’s) father. Your cousin seemed to know the name, and, moreover, very pleased at being spoken to and remembered. Mr. Errington offered to call, and now I find he has recommended his own solicitors, Messrs. Compton & Barnes, to George Liddell. I had an interview with the head of the firm yesterday, and he has evidently advised that the strictly legal claims against you should not be pressed. I cannot help thinking that Mr. Errington has interested himself on your side.”

“Indeed!” cried Katherine, life and warmth coming back to her heart at his words.

“Yes, I do. Compton appears to have the highest possible opinion of Errington as a man of integrity and intelligence. He, Compton says, believes that if Liddell could be persuaded such a line of conduct toward you would injure him socially, he would not seek to enforce his rights, for he is evidently anxious to make a position in the respectable world. As you make no opposition to his claims he ought to show you consideration. This accidental encounter between Errington and your cousin will, I am sure, prove a fortunate circumstance.”

In her own mind Katherine could not help doubting its accidental character. How infinitely good and forgiving Errington was! While she thought, Mr. Newton mused.

“I suppose you have a tolerable balance at the bank?” he said, abruptly.

“Yes. I have never spent a year’s income in a year. Just lately, except for buying that house, I have spent very little.”

“That house! Oh—ah! I shall be curious to see how Miss Trant will behave. If she is true to her word; if she looks upon your loan to her as a loan—an investment on your side—you may gain an addition to your income through what was an act of pure benevolence. When you go home, my dear young lady, look at your bank-book, and let me know exactly how you stand. We might offer this cormorant of a cousin a portion of your savings to finish the business. Indeed I should advise you to draw a good large check at once so as to provide yourself with ready money.”

“Would it be quite—quite honest to do so?” asked Katherine, anxiously.

“Pray do you impugn my integrity?”

“No! But suppose George Liddell found I had drawn a large check—perhaps the very day before I propose through you to hand over what remains to me—he would think me a cheat?”

“And pray why should he know anything about your bank-book? or what consideration do you owe him? He is behaving very harshly and badly to you. We will state what is in the bank after you have drawn your check, and offer him half—which is a great deal too much for him. Yet I should like him to be your friend, if possible. Could you get hold of that little girl of his? Affection for her seems to be the only human thing about him.”

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“I think I should rather have nothing to do with him,” murmured Katherine.

“Well, well, we will see. Now, though we have not succeeded in coming to any settlement with Liddell, I believe we ought not to leave Mrs. Ormonde any longer in ignorance respecting the change which has taken place.”

“No, I am sure they ought to know. I have been troubling myself about both the Colonel and Mrs. Ormonde,” said Katherine. “This is what I dread most.” And she sighed.

“I do not see why you need. I am sure you acted with noble liberality to Mrs. Ormonde and her boys when you thought you were the rightful owner of the property.”

“The rightful owner,” repeated Katherine, with a thrill of pain. “It has been an unfortunate ownership to me.”

“It has—it has indeed, my dear young lady, but we must see how to help you at this juncture. If Miss Trant behaves as she ought, we must put a little more capital in that concern if it is as thriving as you believe. It may turn out very useful to you.”

“I have not seen her since my cousin came to life again, for I could not see her and keep back my strange story. May I tell her now?”

“Certainly. It was from Colonel and Mrs. Ormonde I wished to keep back the disastrous news till some agreement should be come to.”

“You must not call my cousin’s return to life and country disastrous,” said Katherine, smiling. “I am sure, if he will only give me the chance of keeping my boys with me, I am quite ready to welcome him to both. Now I shall leave you, for I want to send away my letter to Ada this evening, and it is a difficult letter to write.”

“I have no doubt you will state your case clearly and well,” returned Mr. Newton, rising to shake hands with her. “Let me hear what Mrs. Ormonde says in reply; and see your protegee, Miss Trant. I am anxious to learn her views.”

“I am quite sure I know what they will be,” said Katherine.

“Don’t be too sure. Human nature is a very crooked thing—more crooked than a true heart like yours can imagine,” continued the old man, holding her hand kindly.

“Ah, Mr. Newton,” she cried, with an irresistible outburst of penitence, “you little know what crooked things I can imagine.”

“Can’t I?” he said laughing at what he fancied was her little joke, and glad to see her bearing her troubles so lightly. “You’ll come all right yet, my dear; you have the right spirit. Is your carriage waiting?”

“Not here; but in Holborn I have several at my command,” she returned. “Good-by; no, you must not come downstairs; it is damp and chilly.”

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On reaching her home, the home she must so soon resign, Katherine sent a note to Rachel Trant asking if she had a spare hour that evening, as she, Katherine, had something to tell her, and preferred going to her house. Then she sat down to write a full and detailed account of what had taken place to her sister-in-law. It was dusk before she had finished and she herself felt considerably exhausted. Miss Payne had gone out to dine with one of her former girls, now the wife of a rackety horsy man, whose conduct made her often look back with a sigh of regret to the tranquil days passed under the guardianship of the prudent spinster; so having partaken of tea at their usual dinner-time she sat and mused awhile on the one subject from which she could derive comfort—Errington and his wonderful kindness to her. If he took the matter in hand she thought herself safe. Her confidence in him was unbounded. Ah! why had she placed such a gulf between them? How she had destroyed her own life! There was but one tie between her and the world, little Charlie and Cis, and perhaps she had been their greatest enemy. She almost wished she could love De Burgh. He was undoubtedly in earnest; he interested her; he—But no. Between her and any possible husband she had reared the insurmountable barrier of a secret not to be shared by any save one, from whom, somehow, instead of dividing her, had bound her indissolubly; at least she felt it to be so.

It was near the hour she had fixed to call on Rachel, so she roused herself, and asking the amiable Francois to accompany her, started for Malden Street.

Rachel Trant had made a back parlor, designated the “trying-on” room, bright and cosy, with a shaded lamp, a red fire, a couple of easy-chairs at either side of it, and a gay cloth over the small round table erst strewn with fashion books, measuring tapes, pins, patterns and pin-cushions.

“How very good of you to come to me!” cried Miss Trant, hastening to divest her friend of bonnet and cloak. “I am very curious to hear the story you have to tell.” Then, as Katherine sat down where the lamp-light fell upon her face, she added, “But you are not looking well, Miss Liddell; your eyes look heavy; your mouth is sad.”

“I am troubled, more than sad,” said Katherine; “the why and wherefore I have come to tell you.”

“Yes; tell me everything.” And Rachel took a low seat opposite her guest; her usually pale face was slightly flushed, her large blue eyes darkened with the pleasure of seeing the friend she loved so warmly and the interest with which she awaited her disclosure, and as Katherine looked at her she realized how pretty and attractive she must have been before the fresh grace of her girlhood had been withered by the cruel fires of passion and despair. “I am listening,” said Rachel, gently, to recall her visitor, whose thoughts were evidently far away.

“Yes; I had forgotten.” And Katherine began her story.

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Rachel Trant listened with rapt, intense attention, nor did she interrupt the narrative by a single question.

When Katherine ceased to speak she remained silent for a second or two longer: then she asked, “Are you convinced of the truth of this man’s story?”

“I am, for Mr. Newton does not seem to have a doubt. Oh! he is my uncle John’s only son—only child, indeed—and he is like him. I always fancied from the little my uncle said about George that he was naturally kind and sympathetic, but he has had a hard life, and it has made him hard. The loss of his mother was a terrible misfortune.”

“Was he young when she died?”

“He was about fourteen, I think; but he lost her by a worse misfortune than death. She was driven away by my uncle’s severity and harshness; she left him for another.”

“What! left her son?”

“Yes—it seems incredible—nor does my cousin resent her desertion. On the contrary, all the affection and softness in him appears to centre round his daughter and the memory of his mother.”

“Then,” said Rachel, “if this man persists in demanding his rights, you will be beggared, and those dear boys must go back to their mother. They will not be too welcome.”

“Oh no! no! I feel that only too keenly.”

“But you will not be penniless nor homeless,” cried Rachel. “He cannot touch this house. You made it over to me, and I will use it for you. There are two nice rooms I can arrange for you upstairs. I am doing well, and if I had but a little more capital, I should not fear; I should not doubt making a great success. My dear, dearest Miss Liddell, I may be of use to you, after all. Tell me, is this Mr. Newton truly interested in you—-anxious to help you?”

“I am sure he is; he is very unhappy about me.”

“Do you think he would let me call on him? I want to tell him the plans that are coming into my head. I can explain all the business part to him. If I can get through this year without debt, I am pretty sure of providing you with an income—an increasing income. This is a joy I never anticipated. And then you can keep your little nephews, and be a real mother to them. I don’t want to trouble you with the business details of my plan; you would not understand them. But Mr. Newton will. Pray write a line asking him to see me, to name his own time. Stay; here are paper and pen and ink; ask him to write to me. He knows—he knows my story. At least—” She stopped, coloring crimson.

“He knows all it is needful for me to tell,” said Katherine, gravely. “Yes, Rachel, it is better to explain all to him. He is kind and wise, and I am strangely stupefied by this extraordinary overturn of my fortunes. I shall be glad of your help, but do not neglect your own future, dear Rachel.”

“I shall not: I shall make enough for us both. You have indeed given me something to live for.”

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CHAPTER XXVI.

COLONEL AND MRS. ORMONDE.

The moral effect of feeling in touch with some loyal, tender, sympathizing fellow-creature is immense. It gives faith in one's self—a belief in the possibilities for good hidden in the future; above all, relief from that most paralyzing of mental conditions, a sense of isolation.

Katherine walked back alone in the dark. The sooner she accustomed herself to habits of independence the better; for the future she must learn to stand alone, to take care of herself, unassisted by maid or flunky. It made her a little nervous; for although in the old impecunious days she went on all necessary errands in the morning alone, she rarely left the house after sundown even with a companion. They were very monotonous days, those which seemed to have fled away so far into the soft misty gloom of the past. Yet how full of fragrance was their memory! The castle-building, the vague bright hopes, the joy of helping the dear mother, the utter absolute trust in her, the struggle with the necessities of life—all were more or less sweet; and now to what an end she had brought the simple drama of her youth! Had she resisted that strange prompting which kept her silent when Mr. Newton began to look for the will, how different everything might have been! Errington might be well off too, and she might never have seen him.

With the thought of him came the sudden overpowering wish to hear his voice—clear, deliberate, convincing—which sometimes seized her in spite of every effort to banish it from her mind, and of which she was utterly, profoundly ashamed, the recurrence of which was infinitely painful. She must fill her heart with other thoughts, other objects. "Life is serious enough (the life which lies before me especially) to crowd out these follies. Why do I increase its gloom with imaginary troubles?"

Miss Payne, returning from her dinner, found Katherine sitting up for her, apparently occupied with a book, and in the little confidential talk which ensued Katherine told her of Rachel Trant's intention of consulting Mr. Newton respecting her plans for increasing her business with a view to assisting her benefactress.

Miss Payne received this communication in silence; but after a moment's thought observed, in a grave, approving tone; "You have not been deceived in her, then. I really believe Rachel Trant is a young woman of principle and integrity."

"Yes, I have always thought so." Then, after a pause, she resumed: "I wonder what reply I shall have from Ada to-morrow—no, the day after to-morrow."

“Do not worry yourself about it. She will make herself disagreeable, of course; but it is just a trouble to be got through with. Go to bed, my dear; try to sleep and to forget. You are looking fagged and worn.”

But Katherine could not help dwelling upon the picture her imagination presented of the morrow’s breakfast-time at Castleford; of the dismay with which her letter would be read; of Ada’s tears and Colonel Ormonde’s rage; of the torrent of advice which would be poured upon her. Then what decision would Colonel Ormonde come to about the boys? He would banish them to some cheap out-of-the-way school. It was impossible to say what he would do.

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Naturally she did not sleep well or continuously, disturbed as she was by such thoughts—such uneasy anticipations—and her eyes showed the results of a bad night when she met Miss Payne in the morning.

About eleven o'clock Katherine came quickly into Miss Payne's particular sitting-room, where she made up her accounts and studied her bank-book.

"What is it?" asked that lady, looking up, and perceiving that Katherine was agitated.

"A telegram from Ada. They will be here about five this afternoon."

"Well, never mind. There is nothing in that to scare you."

"I am not scared, but I wish that interview was over."

"Yes; I shall be glad when it is; though I shall not obtrude on his Royal Highness. (I suppose he is coming as well as she.) I shall be in the house, so you can send for me if you want me."

"Thank you, Miss Payne; you are very good to me. I feel that I ought not to stay here crowding up your house."

"Nonsense! I am not in such a hurry to find a new inmate. I shall not like any one as well as you. I wish I could give up and live in a neat little cottage, but I cannot. Indeed, if you think I may, I should like to mention this deplorable change in your fortunes to Mrs. Needham. She knows every one, and can bring all sorts of people together if she likes."

"By all means, Miss Payne. There is no reason why you should not."

And after a little more conversation Katherine went back to her occupation of arranging her belongings and wardrobe, that when the moment of parting came she might be quite ready to go.

To wait patiently for that which you know will be painful is torture of no mean order. It was somewhat curtailed for Katherine on that memorable day, for Colonel and Mrs. Ormonde arrived half an hour sooner than she expected.

They had driven direct from the station to Wilton Street, and Katherine saw at a glance that both were greatly disturbed.

"Katherine, what is the meaning of your dreadful letter?" cried Mrs. Ormonde, without any previous greeting, while the Colonel barked a gruff "How d'ye do?"

“My letter, Ada, I am sorry to say, meant what it said,” returned Katherine, sadly. “Do sit down, and let us discuss what is best to be done.”

“What can be done?” exclaimed Mrs. Ormonde, bursting into tears.

“For God’s sake, don’t let us have tears and nonsense,” said Colonel Ormonde, roughly. “Tell me, Katherine, is it possible Newton means to give in to this impostor? Why does he not demand proper proof, and throw the whole business into chancery?”

“I am sure Mr. Newton could not doubt George Liddell’s story. He could not go back from his own involuntary recognition, nor could I pretend to doubt what I believe is true.”

“Pooh! that is high-flown bosh. You need not say what you do or do not believe. All you have to do is to throw the onus of proof on this fellow.”

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“It is all too dreadful,” said Mrs. Ormonde, in tearful tones. “To think that you will allow yourself to be robbed, and permit the dear boys to be reduced to beggary, for a mere crochet—it is too bad. I never will believe this horrid man is the person he represents himself to be; never.”

“I wish you would go and speak to Mr. Newton. He would explain the folly of resisting.”

“And how do you know that he is not bribed?” returned Mrs. Ormonde, with a little sob. “Every one knows what dreadful wretches lawyers are. And though I dare say you meant well, Katherine, but having induced us to believe you would provide for the boys, it is a little hard—indeed very hard—on Colonel Ormonde to have them thrown back on his hands, and it is really your duty to do something to relieve us.”

“Back on my hands!” echoed the Colonel. “I’ll not take them back. Why should I? I have been completely swindled in the whole business. I am the last man to support another fellow’s brats. Why didn’t that old lawyer of yours ascertain whether your uncle’s son was dead or alive before he let you pounce upon the property and play Lady Bountiful with what did not belong to you?” And Colonel Ormonde paced the room in a fury, all chivalrous tradition melting away in the fierce heat of disappointed greed.

“You have no right to find fault with me,” cried Katherine, stung to self-assertion. “I did well and generously by your children and yourself, Ada (I must say so, as you seem to forget it). There is more cause to sympathize with me in the reverse that has befallen me than to throw the blame of what is inevitable on one who is a greater sufferer than yourselves. Do you not know that the worst pang my bitterest enemy—had I one—could inflict is to feel I must give up the boys? Matters are still unsettled, but if my cousin can be induced to deal mercifully with me, and not absorb my little all to liquidate what is legally due to him, I will gladly keep Cis and Charlie, and give them what I have, rather than throw them on Colonel Ormonde’s charity. I am deeply sorry for your disappointment, but I have done nothing to irritate Colonel Ormonde into forgetting what is due to a lady and his wife’s benefactress.” Katherine was thoroughly roused, and stood, head erect, with glowing eyes, and soft red lips curling with disdain.

“I always said she was violent; didn’t’ I, Duke?” sobbed Mrs. Ormonde. “Katherine, you do amaze me.”

“There is no denying she is a plucky one,” he returned, with a gruff laugh. “I too deny that you should consider it a misfortune for the boys to come under my care. I owe a duty to my own son, and am not going to play the generous step-father to his hurt. If you can’t come to advantageous terms with this—this impostor, as I verily believe he is. I’ll send the boys to the Bluecoat School or some such institution. They have turned out very good men before this.”

“I am sure we could expect no more from Colonel Ormonde, and when you think that I shall be entirely dependent on him for”—sob—“my very gowns”—sob—“and—and little outings—and” a total break down.

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“If I am penniless,” said Katherine, controlling her inclination to scream aloud with agony, “I must accept your offer—any offer that will provide for my nephews. If not, I will devote myself and what I have to them. I really wish you would go and see Mr. Newton; he will make you understand matters better than I can; and as you have come in such a spirit, I should be glad if you would leave me. I cannot look on you as friends, considering how you have spoken.”

“By George!” interrupted the Colonel, much astonished. “This is giving us the turn-out.”

“What ingratitude!” cried his wife, with pious indignation, as she rose and tied on her veil.

Her further utterance was arrested, for the door was thrown open, and Francois announced, “Mr. Errington.”

A great stillness fell upon them as Errington walked in, cool, collected, well dressed, as usual.

“Very glad to meet you here, Mrs. Ormonde,” he said, when he had shaken hands with Katherine. “Miss Liddell has need of all her friends at such a crisis. How do, Colonel; you look the incarnation of healthy country life.”

“Ah—ah; I’m very well, thank you,” somewhat confusedly. “Just been trying to persuade Miss Liddell here to dispute this preposterous claim. I don’t believe this man is the real thing.”

“I am afraid he is,” gravely; “I know him, for John Liddell was a friend of my father’s in early life, and I feel satisfied this man is his son.”

“You do. Well, I shall speak to my own lawyers and Newton about it: one can’t give up everything at the first demand to stand and deliver.”

“No; neither is it wise to throw good money after bad. We were just going to Mr. Newton’s, so I’ll say good-morning. Till to-morrow, Katherine. I’ll report what Newton says.”

“Good-morning, Mr. Errington,” said Mrs. Ormonde, pulling herself together, and her veil down. “This is a terrible business! I feel it as acutely as if it were myself—I mean my own case. I am sure it is so good of you to come and see Katherine. I hope you will give us a few days at Castleford.” So murmuring and with a painful smile, she hastened downstairs after her husband.

Then Errington closed the door and returned to where Katherine stood, white and trembling, in the middle of the room. “I am afraid your kinsfolk have been but Job’s comforters,” he said, looking earnestly into her eyes, his own so grave and

compassionate that her heart grew calmer under their gaze. “You are greatly disturbed.”

“They have been very cruel,” she murmured. “Yet, not knowing all you do, they could not know how cruel. They are so angry because what I tried to do for the boys proved a failure. They little dream how guilty I feel for having created this confusion. If I am obliged to give up Cis and Charlie to—to Colonel Ormonde, their lot will be a miserable one!” She spoke brokenly, and her eyes brimmed over, the drops hanging on her long lashes.

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“Sit down, Miss Liddell. I am deeply grieved to see you so depressed. I have ventured to call because I have a pin’s point of hope for you, which I trust will excuse me for presenting myself, as I know you would rather not see me.”

“To-day I am glad to see you. I should always be glad to see you but—but for my own conscience. Do not misunderstand me.” With a sudden impulse she stretched out her fair soft hand to him. He took and held it, wondering to find that although so cold when first he touched it, it grew quickly warm in his grasp.

“Thank you,” he said, gently, and still held her hand; “you give me infinite pleasure. Now”—releasing her—“for my excuse. Among my poor father’s papers were a few letters of very old date from John Liddell, in which was occasional mention of his boy. It struck me these might be a *modus operandi*, and enable me approach a difficult subject. I contrived to meet your cousin at Mr. Newton’s, and he permitted me to call. I gave him the letters, and we became—not friends—but friendly at least.” Here his face brightened. “We began to talk of you, and I saw that he was bitter and vindictive against you to an extraordinary degree. He grew communicative, and I was able to represent to him the cruelty and unreasonableness of his conduct. At last—only to-day—he suddenly exclaimed, ’How much of my money has that nice young lady made away with?’ I could not, of course, give him any particulars, but having learned from himself that he had amassed a good deal of money himself, and that with the addition of *your* fortune (I cannot help calling it yours) he would really be a man of wealth, I ventured to suggest that he should not demand the refunding of what you had used while in possession of the property, and showed him what a bad impression it would create in the minds of those among whom he evidently wishes to make a place for himself. He thought for a few moments, and then said he would consider the matter and consult his legal advisers before coming to a decision, adding that he did not understand how it was that they as well as myself were on your side. Then I left him, and I feel a strong impression that he will lay aside his worst intentions. I only trust he will spare whatever balance may stand to your credit with your banker.”

“You have indeed done me a great service,” cried Katherine, “If George Liddell does as you suggest I shall not be afraid to face the future. I shall surely be able to find some employment myself; then I need not importune Colonel Ormonde for my nephews.”

“He will surely not leave them without means,” cried Errington.

“I am not sure. They have no legal claim upon him, and he is very angry with me for causing such confusion, though—”

—“Though,” interrupted Errington, “your only error was over-generosity.”

“My *only* error, Mr. Errington!”—casting down her eyes and interlacing her fingers nervously. “If he only knew!”

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“But he does not; he never shall!” exclaimed Errington, with animation, drawing unconsciously nearer. “That is a secret between you and me. None shall ever know our secret. All I ask is that you will forgive me for my unfortunate precipitancy in destroying the means of saving you, which you had placed in my hands—that you will forgive me, and let me be your friend. It is so painful to see you shrink from me as you do.”

“Can you wonder, guilty as I feel myself to be? But if you so far overlook my evil deeds as to think me worth your friendship, I am glad and grateful to accept it. As to forgiveness, what have I to forgive?—your haste to save me from the possibility of discovery?”

“Then,” said Errington, who had gazed for a moment in silence on his companion, whose face was slightly turned from him, every line of her pliant figure, from the graceful drooping head to the point of her shoe peeping from under her soft gray dress, expressed a sort of pathetic humility, “will you give me some idea of your plans, if you have any?”

“They are very vague. I have a small income apart from my uncle’s property. I earnestly hope it will be enough to educate the boys. Then I must try to find employment—something that will enable me to provide for myself. Miss Payne is already looking out for me. That is all I can think of.”

“It is a tremendous undertaking for a young girl like you,” said Errington, looking down in deep thought. “But I think I understand that the cruelest trial of all would be to part with the boys. Still it is not wise to allow Mrs. Ormonde to thrust her sons on you, though I never can believe that Ormonde could act so dastardly a part as to refuse to do his part in maintaining them. There, again, the fear of what society would say will do more than a sense of justice or honor. I don’t believe Ormonde will dare refuse to contribute his quota to the support of his wife’s sons.”

“Perhaps not. I wish I could do without it. But though Ada was harsh and unreasonable to-day, I am sorry for her. It must be dreadful to be tied to a man who looks on you as a burden.”

“She will manage him. Their natures are admirably suited. Neither is too exalted. And Mrs. Ormonde has established herself very firmly as mistress of Castleford and the Colonel.”

“I hope so.” There was a short silence. Then Errington said, in a low tone, looking kindly into her face, “I trust you do not feel too despondent as regards the future.”

“Far from it,” returned Katherine, with a brief bright smile. “If only I can bring up my dear boys without too great privations, and fit them to work their way in life! From my short

experience I should say that riches can buy little true happiness. Extreme poverty is terrible and degrading. Nor can money alone confer any true joys."

"So I have found," said Errington, thoughtfully; "and I can see that to you too the finery and distractions which wealth gathers together are mere dust heaps."

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There was a pause, broken by the appearance of Miss Payne, who had only just discovered that Colonel and Mrs. Ormonde had left, and was not aware that Katherine had another visitor. After a little further and somewhat desultory conversation Errington took leave; nor was Katherine sorry, for the presence of Miss Payne seemed to have set them as far apart as ever, and how near they had drawn for a few moments!

“So that is Mr. Errington!” said Miss Payne, when the door had closed upon him. “He has never been here before?” The tone was interrogative.

“Mr. Errington has some acquaintance with George Liddell,” returned Katherine, “and has very kindly done his best to dissuade him from claiming the money I have expended.”

“How very good of him! I am sure I trust he will succeed!” exclaimed Miss Payne. “Now tell me how did Colonel Ormonde and your sister-in-law behave?”

Whereupon Katherine recounted all that had been said. Many and cynical were Miss Payne’s remarks on the occasion, but Katherine scarcely heard her. That Errington should take so deep an interest in her, should persist in wishing to be her friend, was infinitely sweet and consoling. He was transparently true, and she did not doubt for a moment that he was sincere in all he said. Still she could not forget the sense of humiliation his presence always inflicted. It was always delightful to speak to him, and to hear him speak. What would she not give to be able to stand upright before him and dare to assert herself? How silent and dull and commonplace she must appear! not a bit natural or—She would think no more of him. Why was his face ever before her eyes? She would not be haunted in that way.

Here Bertie Payne’s entrance created a diversion, which was most welcome. He was looking white and ill, as though suffering from some mental strain, Katherine observed, and then remembered that he had been very silent and grave of late; but he replied cheerfully to her inquiries, and exerted himself to do the agreeable during dinner, for which he staid.

Katherine almost hoped for a summons from Mr. Newton next day, also for some communication from Mrs. Ormonde, but none reached her. Still she possessed her soul in patience, fortified by the recollection of her interview with her new friend.

It was wet, and Katherine did not venture out, having a slight cold. She tried to read, to write, to play, but she could not give her attention to anything. It was an anxious crisis of her fate, and the sense of her isolation pressed upon her more heavily than ever. She really had no family ties. Friends were kind, but she had no claim on them or they on her. Colonel and Mrs. Ormonde had ceased to exist for her. How would her future life be colored? From consecutive thought she passed to vague reverie, from which she was glad to be roused by the return of Miss Payne, who never staid in for any weather.

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“Where do you think I have been?” asked Miss Payne, untying her bonnet strings as she sat down.

“How can I guess? Your wanderings are various.”

“I went to see Mrs. Needham, and I am very glad I did. I found her just bursting with curiosity. All sorts of reports have got about respecting your cousin and your loss of fortune, and she was enchanted to get the whole truth from me. Besides, she has just been applied to by the friends of a girl only sixteen to find a proper chaperon. She is full of enthusiasm about us both, and begged me, and you too, to dine with her the day after to-morrow to meet a Miss Bradley, the relative or friend of the sixteen-year-old. We are to look at each other, and are supposed to be in total ignorance of each other’s identity. Mrs. Needham delights in small plots and transparent mysteries.”

“And why am I to go?” asked Katherine, carelessly.

“To make a fourth, and talk to the hostess while I discourse with Miss Bradley.”

“Very well; I will come.”

“Any further news to-day?”

“Not a word; not a line.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

A DINNER AT MRS. NEEDHAM’S.

Mrs. Needham was a very important at personage in her own estimation, and very popular with a large circle of acquaintances. Most of them thought she was a widow, and only a few old friends were aware that away in a distant colony Needham masculine was hiding his diminished head from creditors of various kinds and penalties of many descriptions, not in penitence, but with as much of enjoyment as could be extracted from the simple materials of antipodean life. Having taken with him all the cash he could lay hands upon, his deserted wife was left to do battle alone on a small income which was her own, and fortunately secured to her on her marriage.

She was much too energetic to sit still when she might work and earn money. The editor of a provincial paper, a friend of early days, gave her space in his columns for a weekly letter, and an introduction to a London *confrere*. On this slender foundation she built her humble fortunes. There were, in truth, few happier women in London. Brimful of interest in all the undertakings (and their name was legion) in which she was concerned, kind and unselfish, though quite free from sentiment, her life was full of movement and color. She had an enormous capacity for absorbing the marvellous,

quite uninfluenced by the natural shrewdness with which she acted in all ordinary matters. In a bright surface way she was clever and full of ideas—ideas which others took up and fructified—from which Mrs. Needham herself derived no benefit beyond the pleasure of imparting them. She was constantly taken in by barefaced impostors, yet at times, and in an accidental way, hit on wonderfully accurate estimates of persons whom the general public credited with widely different qualities.

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She had a nice little old-fashioned house in Kensington, with a pretty garden, just large enough to allow of visitors being well wet in rainy weather between the garden gate and the hall door. This diminutive mansion was crammed with curios, specimens of china, of carved wood, of Japanese lacquer—these much rarer than at present. It was a pleasant abode withal; a kindly, generous, happy-go-lucky spirit pervaded it. Few coming to seek help there were sent empty away, and the owner's earnest consideration was ready for all who sought her advice. It was real joy to her to entertain her friends in an easy, unceremonious way, and her friends were equally pleased to accept her hospitality.

On the present occasion Mrs. Needham was deeply interested in her expected guests. Katherine Liddell had pleased her from the first, practical and unsentimental as she was. She was disposed to weave a little romance round the bright sympathetic girl, who listened so graciously to her schemes and projects, whose brightness had under it a strain of tender sadness, which gave an indescribable subtle charm to her manner. Miss Payne she had known more or less for a considerable time, and regarded as a worthy, useful woman; while her third guest was the only child of the wealthy publisher George Bradley, the owner of that new and flourishing publication, *The Piccadilly Review*, wherein those brilliant articles on "Our Colonial System," "Modern European Politics," *etc*., supposed to be from the pen of Miles Errington, appeared.

"A *partie carree* of ladies does not seem to promise much," said Mrs. Needham, when she had greeted Miss Payne and "her young friend," into which position Katherine had sunk; "but unless I could have three or four men it is better to have none; besides we want to talk of business, and men under such circumstances always exclude us, so I don't see why we should admit them. Miss Bradley—Miss Payne, Miss Liddell, of whom you have heard me speak."

Miss Bradley rose from the sofa, where she was half reclining beside a bright wood fire, a tall stately figure in a long pale blue plush dress, cut low in front, and tied loosely with a knot of blue satin ribbon, nestling among the rich yellow white lace which fell from the edge of the bodice. She was extremely fair, even colorless, with abundant but somewhat sandy hair. Her features were regular and marked, a well-shaped head was gracefully set on a firm white column-like throat, and her eyes were clear and cold when in repose, but darkened and lit up when speaking of whatever roused and interested her. Indeed, she looked strong and stern when silent.

"I am very pleased to meet you," she said, in a full, pleasant voice. "I have often heard of you from Mrs. Needham, and I think you know a friend of mine—Mr. Errington."

"Yes; I know him," returned Katherine, feeling her face aflame.

“I have heard of you too,” continued Miss Bradley, addressing Miss Payne, “from several mutual friends, though we have never happened to meet before. I think you had just left Rome with Miss Jennings when I arrived there some four years ago.”

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“I had; and remember you were expected there.”

“Miss Jennings married a relation of mine, and I see her very often, at least often for London. She really looks younger, if possible, than formerly,” *etc*., *etc*., and their talk flowed in the Jennings channel for a few minutes.

Meantime Mrs. Needham, passing her arm through Katherine’s, led her away to a very diminutive back room, draped and carpeted with Oriental stuffs, then beginning to be the fashion, and crammed with all imaginable ornaments and specimens, from bits of rare “Capo di monti” to funny sixpenny toys. “I have just found such a treasure,” she exclaimed; “a real saucer of old Chelsea, and only a small bit out of this side. Isn’t Angela Bradley handsome? She is a very remarkable girl, or perhaps I ought to say woman. She speaks four or five languages, and plays divinely; then she is a capital critic. It was she who advised her father to publish that very singular book, *The Gorgon’s Head*; every publisher in London had refused it. He took it, and has cleared —oh, I’d be afraid to say how much money by it.”

“I hope the writer got a fair share,” said Katherine, smiling.

“Hum! ah, that’s another matter; but I dare say Bradley will treat him quite as fairly as any one else. She will have a big fortune one of these days. Her father perfectly adores her.”

“I wish I could write,” said Katherine, with a sigh. “It must be a charming way to earn money.”

“Why don’t you try? You seem to me to have plenty of brains; and I suppose you will have to do something. I was so sorry—” Mrs. Needham was beginning, when dinner was announced, and her sympathetic utterances were cut short.

The repast was admirable, erring perhaps on the side of plenteousness, and well served by two smart young women in black, with pink ribbons in their caps. Nor was there any lack of bright talk a good deal beyond the average. Miss Bradley was an admirable listener, and often by well-put questions or suggestions kept the ball rolling. Dinner was soon over, and coffee was served in the drawing-room.

“Now, Miss Payne, I should like to consult with you,” said Miss Bradley, putting her cup on the mantel-piece, and resuming her seat on the sofa, where she invited Miss Payne by a gesture to sit beside her, “about the daughter of an old friend of mine, who does not want her to join him in India, as she is rather delicate, and he cannot retire for a couple of years. It is time she left school, and the question is, where shall she go?”

While Miss Bradley thus attacked the subject uppermost in her mind, Mrs. Needham settled herself in an arm-chair as far as she could from the speakers, and asked Katherine to sit down beside her.

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“Let them discuss their business without us,” she said, “and I want to talk to you. Here, these are some rather interesting photographs. They are all actors or singers on this side; you’ll observe the shape of the heads, the contour generally; these are politicians, and have quite a different aspect. Remarkable, isn’t it? But I was just saying when we went down to dinner that I was awfully sorry to hear of all your troubles—of course we must not regret that the man is alive; though if he is a cross-grained creature, as he seems to be, life won’t be much good to him—and I shall be greatly interested if you care to tell me what your plans are.”

“I really have none. There are several things I could do pretty well. I could teach music and languages, but it is so difficult to find pupils. Then I am still in great uncertainty as to what my cousin may do.”

“He is a greedy savage,” said Mrs. Needham, emphatically; “but he will not dare to demand the arrears. He would raise a howl of execration by such conduct. Now, as you have nothing settled, and if Angela Bradley and Miss Payne make it up, you will have to leave where you are. Suppose you come to me?”

“To you? My dear Mrs. Needham, it would be delightful.”

“Would it? It is not a very magnificent appointment, I assure you. You see, I have so much to do that I really *must* have help. I had a girl for three or four months. I gave her twenty-five pounds a year, and thought she would be a great comfort, but she made a mess of my room and my papers, and could not write a decent letter; besides, she was discontented, so she left me, and I have been in a horrid muddle for the last fortnight. Now if you like to come to me, while you are looking out for something better, I am sure I shall be charmed, and will do all I can to push you. It’s a miserable sort of engagement, but there it is; only I’ll want you to come as soon as you can, for there are heaps to do.”

“Indeed I am delighted to be your help, or secretary, or whatever you choose to call me, and as for looking for something better, if I can only save enough to provide for the boys, I would rather work with you for twenty-five pounds a year than any one else for —”

“For five hundred?” put in Mrs. Needham, with an indulgent smile, as she paused.

“No, no. Five hundred a year is not to be lightly rejected,” returned Katherine, laughing. “But as I greatly doubt that I could ever be worth five hundred a year to any one, I gladly accept twenty-five.”

“Remember, I do not expect you to stay an hour after you find something better. Now do me tell how matters stand with you.”

Katherine therefore unbosomed herself, and among other things told how well and faithfully Rachel Trant had behaved toward her, of the fatherly kindness shown her by her old lawyer, and wound up by declaring that the world could not be so bad a place as it is reckoned, seeing that in her reverse of fortune she had found so much consideration. "Of course," she concluded, "there are heaps of people who, once I drop from the ranks of those who can enjoy and spend, will forget my existence; but I have no right to expect more. They only want playfellows, not friends, and ask no more than they give."

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“Quite true, my young philosopher. Tell me, can you come on Saturday—come to stay?”

“I fear not. Besides I have a superstition about entering on a new abode on Saturday. Don’t laugh! But I will come to-morrow, if you like, and write and copy for you. I will come each day till Monday next, and so help you to clear up.”

“That is a good child! I wish I could make it worth your while to stay; but we don’t know what silver lining is behind the dark clouds of the present.”

Katherine shook her head. Mrs. Needham’s suggestion showed her that peace and a relieved conscience was the highest degree of silvery brightness she anticipated in the future. One thing alone could restore to her the joyousness of her early days, and that was far away out of her reach.

“Mr. Errington and Mr. Payne,” said one of the smart servants, throwing open the door.

“Ah, yes! Mr. Errington, *of* course,” exclaimed Mrs. Needham, under her breath. “I might have expected him. And you too, Mr. Payne?” she added aloud. “Very glad to see you both.”

As soon as they had paid their respects to the hostess, Errington spoke to Katherine, while Payne remained talking with Mrs. Needham.

“I am glad to see you looking better than when we last spoke together,” said Errington, pausing beside Katherine’s chair. “Have you had any communication from Newton yet?”

“I have heard nothing from him, and feel very anxious to know George Liddell’s decision. I had a note from Mrs. Ormonde, written in a much more friendly spirit than I had expected, but still in despair. She, with the Colonel, had been to demand explanations from Mr. Newton, and do not seem much cheered by the interview.”

“No doubt the appearance of your cousin was a tremendous blow, but they have no right to complain.”

“However that may be, I will not quarrel with the boys’ mother, in spite of her unkindness. I fear so much to create any barrier between us.”

“Those children are very dear to you,” said Errington, looking down on her with a soft expression and lingering glance.

“They are. I don’t suppose you could understand how dear.”

“Why? Do you think me incapable of human affection?” asked Errington, smiling.

“No, certainly not; only I imagine justice is more natural to you than love, though you can be generous, as I know.”

Errington did not answer. He stood still, as if some new train of thought had been suddenly suggested to him, and Katherine waited serenely for his next words, when Miss Bradley, who had not interrupted her conversation, or noticed the new-comers in any way, suddenly turned her face toward them, and said, with something like command, “Mr. Errington!”

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Errington immediately obeyed. Katherine watched them speaking together for some minutes with a curious sense of discomfort and dissatisfaction. Miss Bradley's face looked softer and brighter, and a sort of animation came into her gestures, slight and dignified though they were. They seemed to have much to say, and said it with a certain amount of well-bred familiarity. Yes, they were evidently friends; very naturally. How happy she was to be thus free from any painful consciousness in his presence! She was as stainless as himself, could look fearlessly in his eyes and assert herself, while she (Katherine) could only crouch in profoundest humility, and gratefully gather what crumbs of kindness and notice he let fall for her benefit. It was quite pitiable to be easily disturbed by such insignificant circumstances. How pitiably weak she was! So, with an effort, she turned her attention to Mrs. Needham and Bertie, who had slipped into an argument, as they often did, respecting the best and most effective method of dealing with the poor. In this Katherine joined with somewhat languid interest, quite aware that Errington and Miss Bradley grew more and more absorbed in their conversation, till Miss Payne, feeling herself *de trop*, left her place to speak with Mrs. Needham, while Katherine and Bertie gradually dropped into silence.

"Miss Bradley's carriage," was soon announced, and she rose tall and stately, nearly as tall as Errington.

"Will you excuse me for running away so soon, dear Mrs. Needham?" she said, "but I promised Mrs. Julian Starner to go to her musical party to-night. I am to play the opening piece of the second part, so I dare not stay longer. You are going?"—to Errington, who bowed assent. "Then I can give you a seat in my brougham," she continued, with calm, assured serenity.

"Thank you," and Errington, turning to Katherine, said quickly: "Will you let me know when you hear from Newton? I am most anxious as regards Liddell's decision."

"I will, certainly. Good-night." She put her hand into his, and felt in some occult manner comfort by the gentle pressure with which he held it for half a moment. Yes, beaten, defeated, punished as she was, he felt for her with a noble compassion. Ought not that to be enough?

"Good-night, Miss Liddell. I hope you will come and see me. I am always at home on Tuesday afternoons; and Miss Payne, when I have seen the grandmother of the girl we have been speaking about, I will let you know, and you will kindly take into consideration the points I mentioned. Good-night." And she swept away, leaning on Errington's arm.

"Now that we are by ourselves," said Mrs. Needham, comfortably, "I must tell you what I have been proposing to Miss Liddell. I should like you to know all about it," and she plunged into the subject. "I know it is but a poor offer," she concluded; "but for the present it is better than nothing, and she can be on the lookout for something else."

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Bertie wisely held his tongue. Katherine declared herself ready and willing to accept the offer, and Miss Payne, with resolute candor, declared that the remuneration was miserable, but that it was as well to be doing something while waiting for a better appointment.

Poor Katherine was terribly distressed by this frankness, but Mrs. Needham was quite unmoved. She said she saw the force of what Miss Payne said, but there it was, and it remained with Miss Liddell to take or leave what she suggested.

Then Miss Payne's prospects came under discussion, and the doubtful circumstances connected with Miss Bradley's proposition.

"Now it is long past ten o'clock, and we must say good-night," remarked Miss Payne. "Really, Mrs. Needham, you are a wonderful woman! You have nearly 'placed' us both. How earnestly I hope there are better and brighter days before my young friend, whom I shall miss very much!"

"That I am quite sure. Well, she can go and see you as often as you like. Now tell me, isn't Angela Bradley a splendid creature?"

"She is indeed," murmured Katherine.

"Well, there is a good deal of her," said Miss Payne, with a sniff.

"Not too much for Mr. Errington, I think," exclaimed Mrs. Needham with a knowing smile. "I fancy that will be a match before the season is over. It will be a capital thing for Errington. Old Bradley is *im*-mensely rich, and I am sure Errington is far gone. Well, good-night, my dear Miss Payne. I am so glad to think I shall have Miss Liddell for a little while, at all events. You will come the day after to-morrow at ten, won't you, and help me to regulate some of my papers? Good-night, my dear, good-night."

Mr. Newton came into his office the afternoon the day following Mrs. Needham's little dinner. His step was alert and his head erect, as though he was satisfied with himself and the world. A boy who sat in a box near the door, to make a note of the flies walking into the spider's parlor, darted out, saying, "Please sir, Miss Liddell is waiting for you."

"Is she? Very well." And the old lawyer went quickly along the passage leading to the other rooms, and opening the door of his own, found Katherine sitting by the table, a newspaper, which had evidently dropped from her hand, lying by her on the carpet. She started up to meet her good friend, who was struck by her pallor and the sad look in her eyes.

"Well, this is lucky!" exclaimed Newton, shaking hands with her cordially. "I was going to write to you, as I wanted to see you, and here you are."

“I was just beginning to fear I might be troublesome, but I have been so anxious.”

“Of course you have. And you have been very patient, on the whole. Well”—laying aside his hat, and rubbing his hands as he sat down—“I have just come from consulting with Messrs. Compton, and I am very happy to tell you it is agreed that George Liddell shall withdraw his claim to the arrears of income, but not to the savings you have effected since your succession to the property, also the balance standing to your name at your banker’s is not to be interfered with; so I think things are arranging themselves more favorably, on the whole, than I could have hoped.”

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“They are, indeed,” cried Katherine, clasping her hands together in thankfulness. “What an immense relief! I have more than three hundred pounds in the bank, and I have found employment for the present at least, so I can use my little income for the boys. How can I thank you, dear Mr. Newton, for all the trouble you have taken for me?” And she took his hard, wrinkled hand, pressing it between both hers, and looking with sweet loving eyes into his.

“I am sure I was quite ready to take any trouble for you, my dear young lady; but in this matter Mr. Errington has done most of the work. He has gained a surprising degree of influence over your cousin, who is a very curious customer; but for him (Mr. Errington, I mean), I fear he would have insisted on his full rights, which would have been a bad business. However, that is over now. Nor will Mr. Liddell fare badly. Your savings have added close on three thousand pounds to the property which falls to him. I am surprised that he did not try at once to make friends with you, for his little girl’s sake. I hear he is in treaty for a grand mansion in one of the new streets they are building over at South Kensington. He is tremendously fond of this little girl of his. It seems Liddell was awfully cut up at the death of his wife, about a year and a half ago. He fancies that if he had known of his father’s death and his own succession he would have come home, and the voyage would have saved her life. This, I rather think, was at the root of his rancor against you.”

“How unjust! how unreasonable!” cried Katherine. “Now tell me of your interview with Mrs. Ormonde and her husband.”

“Well—ah—it was not a very agreeable half-hour. I have seldom seen so barefaced an exhibition of selfishness. However, I think I brought them to their senses, certainly Mrs. Ormonde, and I am determined to make that fellow Ormonde pay something toward the education of his wife’s sons.”

“I would rather not have it,” said Katherine.

“Nonsense,” cried the lawyer, sharply. “You or they are entitled to it, and you shall have it. Mrs. Ormonde evidently does not want to quarrel with you, nor is it well for the boys’ sake to be at loggerheads with their mother.”

“No, certainly not; but, Mr. Newton, I can never be the same to her again. I never can forgive her or her husband’s ingratitude and want of feeling.”

“Of course not, and they know you will not; still, an open split is to be avoided. Now, tell me, what is the employment you mentioned?”

Katherine told him, and a long confidential conversation ensued, wherein she explained her views and intentions, and listened to her old friend’s good advice. Certain communication to Mrs. Ormonde were decided on, as Katherine agreed with Mr.

Newton that she should have no further personal intercourse concerning business matters with her sister-in-law.

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“By-the-way,” said Newton, “one of the events of the last few days was a visit from your protegee, Miss Trant. I was a good deal struck with her. She is a pretty, delicate-looking girl, yet she’s as hard as nails, and a first-rate woman of business. She seems determined to make your fortune, for that is just the human touch about her that interested me. She doesn’t talk about it, but her profound gratitude to you is evidently her ruling motive. I am so persuaded that she will develop a good business, and that you will ultimately get a high percentage for the money you have advanced—or, as you thought, almost given—that I am going to trust her with a little of mine, just to keep the concern free of debt till it is safely floated.”

“How very good of you!” cried Katherine. “And what a proof of your faith in my friend! How can you call her hard? To me she is most sympathetic.”

“Ay, to you. Then you see she seems to have devoted herself to you. To me she turned a very hard bit of her shell. No matter. I think she is the sort of woman to succeed. You have not seen her since—since her visit to me?”

“No. I have not been to see her because—not because I was busy, but idle and depressed. I will not be so any more. So many friends have been true and helpful to me that I should be ashamed of feeling depressed. I will endeavor to prove myself a first-rate secretary, and be a credit to you, my dear good friend.”

“That you will always be, I’m sure,” returned Newton, warmly.

“Now you must run away, my dear young lady, for I have fifty things to do. Your friend Miss Trant will tell you all that passed between us, and what her plans are.”

“I am going to pay her a visit this evening. I do not like to trouble her either in the morning or afternoon, she is so busy. But I always enjoy a talk with her. She is really very well informed, and rather original.”

“I believe she will turn out well. Good-by, my dear Miss Liddell. I assure you, you are not more relieved by the result of the morning’s consultation than I am.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

KATHERINE IN OFFICE.

The beginning of a new life is rarely agreeable, and when the newness consists of poverty in place of riches, of service instead of complete freedom, occupations not particularly congenial instead of the exercise of unfettered choice, in such matters—-why, the contrast is rather trying.

A fortnight after the interview just described, Katherine was thoroughly settled with Mrs. Needham.

Although she justly considered herself most fortunate in finding a home so easily, with so pleasant and kindly a patroness, she would have been more or less than human had she not felt the change which had befallen her. Mrs. Ormonde's conduct, too, had wounded her, more than it ought, perhaps, for she always knew her sister-in-law to be shallow and selfish, but not to the degree which she had lately betrayed.

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Her constant prayer was that she should be spared the torture of having to give up her dear boys to such a mother and such a step-father. She thought she saw little, loving, delicate Charlie shrinking into himself, and withering under the contemptuous indifference neglect of the Castleford household; and Cis—bolder and stronger—-hardening into defiance or deceit under the same influence.

By the sort of agreement arrived at between Mr. Newton and Mrs. Ormonde, it was decided that so long as Katherine provided for the maintenance of her nephews, their mother was only entitled to have them with her during the Christmas holidays; and Colonel Ormonde was with some difficulty persuaded to allow the munificent sum of thirty pounds a year toward the education of his step-sons.

This definite settlement was a great relief to Katherine's heart. How earnestly she resolved to keep herself on her infinitesimal stipend, and save every other penny for her boys! Of the trouble before her, in removing them from Sandbourne to some inferior, because cheaper, school, she would not think. Sufficient to the day was the evil thereof.

She therefore applied herself diligently to her duties. These were varied, though somewhat mechanical.

Mrs. Needham's particular den was a very comfortable, well-furnished room at the back of the house, crowded with books and newspapers, and prospectuses, magazines, and all possible impedimenta of journalism, on the outer edge of which women were beginning with faltering footsteps tentatively to tread. Mrs. Needham not only wrote "provincial letters" (with a difference!), but contributed social and statistical papers to several of the leading periodicals; and one of Katherine's duties was to write out her rough notes, and make extracts from the books, Blue and others, the reports and papers which Mrs. Needham had marked. Then there were lots of letters to be answered and MSS. to be corrected.

Besides these, Mrs. Needham asked Katherine as a favor to help her in her house-keeping, as it was a thing she hated; "and whatever you do," was her concluding instructions, "do not see too much of cook's doings. She is a clever woman, and after all that can be said about the feast of reason, the success of my little dinners depends on *her*. I don't think she takes things, but she is a little reckless, and I never could keep accounts."

Katherine therefore found her time fully filled. This, however, kept her from thinking too much, and her kind chief was pleased with all she did. Her mind was tolerable at rest about the boys, her friends stuck gallantly to her through the shipwreck of her fortune, and yet her heart was heavy. She could not look forward with hope, or back without pain. She dared not even let herself think freely, for she well knew the cause of her depression, and had vowed to herself to master it, to hide it away, and never allow her mental vision to dwell upon it.

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Work, and interest—enforced, almost feverish interest—in outside matters, were the only weapons with which she could fight the gnawing, aching pain of ceaseless regret that wore her heart. How insignificant is the loss of fortune, and all that fortune brings, compared to the opening of an impassable gulf between one's self and what has grown dearer than self, by that magic, inexplicable force of attraction which can rarely be resisted or explained!

Life with Mrs. Needham was very active, and although Katherine was necessarily left a good deal at home, she saw quite enough of society in the evening to satisfy her. The all-accomplished Angela Bradley showed a decided inclination to fraternize with Mrs. Needham's attractive secretary, but for some occult reason Katherine did not respond. She fancied that Miss Bradley was disposed to look down with too palpably condescending indulgence from the heights of her own calm perfections on those storms in a teacup amid which Mrs. Needham agitated, with such sincere belief in her own powers to raise or to allay them. Yet Miss Bradley was a really high-minded woman, only a little too well aware of her own superiority. She was always a favored guest at the "Shrubberies," as Mrs. Needham's house was called, and of course an attraction to Errington, who was also a frequent visitor. The evenings, when some of the *habitues* dropped in on their way to parties, or returning from the theatre (Mrs. Needham never wanted to go to bed!), were bright and amusing. Moreover, Katherine had complete liberty of movement. If Mrs. Needham were going out without her secretary, Katherine was quite free to spend the time with Miss Payne, or with Rachel Trant, whom she found more interesting. At the house of the former she generally found Bertie ready to escort her home, always kindly and deeply concerned about her, but more than ever determined to convert her from her uncertain faith and worldly tendencies, to Evangelicalism and contempt for the joys of this life.

Already the days of her heirship seemed to have been wafted away far back, and the routine of the present was becoming familiar. There was nothing oppressive in it. Yet she could not look forward. Hope had long been a stranger to her. Never, since her mother's death, since she had fully realized the bearings of her own reprehensible act, had she known the joy of a light heart. Some such ideas were flitting through her mind as she was diligently copying Mrs. Needham's lucubrations one afternoon, when the parlor maid opened the door and said, as she handed her a card, "The lady is in the drawing-room, ma'am."

The lady was Mrs. Ormonde.

"Is Mrs. Needham at home?"

"No, ma'am."

It was rather a trial, this, meeting with Ada, but Katherine could not shirk it. She did not want to have any quarrel with the boys' mother, so she ascended to the drawing-room.

There stood the pretty, smartly dressed little woman, all airy elegance, but the usually smiling lips were compressed, and the smooth white brow was wrinkled with a frown. She was examining a book of photographs—most of them signed by the donors.

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“Oh, Katherine! how do you do?” she said, sharply, and not in the least abashed by any memory of their last meeting. “I am up in town for a few days, and I couldn’t leave without seeing you. You see I have too much feeling to turn *my* back on an old friend, however injured I may be by circumstances over which you had no control. You are not looking well, Katie; you are so white, and your eyes don’t seem to be half open.”

“I am quite well, I assure you,” said Katherine, composedly, and avoiding a half-offered kiss by drawing a chair forward for her visitor.

“I wish I could say as much,” returned Mrs. Ormonde, with a deep sigh, throwing herself into it. “I am perfectly wretched; Ormonde is quite intolerable at times since everything has collapsed. I am sure I often wish you had never done anything for the boys or me, and then we should never have fancied ourselves rich. Of course I don’t blame you; you meant well, but it is all very unfortunate.”

“It is indeed; but is it possible that Colonel Ormonde is so unmanly as to—”

“Unmanly?” interrupted his wife. “Manly, you mean. Of course he revenges himself on me. Not always. He is all right sometimes; but if anything goes wrong, then I suffer. Fortunately I was prudent, and made little savings, with which I am—but”—interrupting herself—“that is not worth speaking about.”

“I am sorry you are unhappy, Ada,” said Katherine, with her ready sympathy.

“Oh, don’t think I allow myself to be trodden on,” cried Mrs. Ormonde, her eyes suddenly lighting up. “It was a hard fight at first, but I saw it was a struggle for life; and when we knew the worst, and Ormonde raved and roared, I said I should leave him and take baby (I could, you know, till he was seven years old), and that the servants would swear I was in fear of my life; and I should have done it, and carried my case, too! I’m not sure it would not have been better for me. But he gave in, and asked me to stay. I felt pretty safe then. Now, when he is disagreeable, I burst into tears at dinner, and upset my glass of claret on the table-cloth, and totter out of the room weak and tremulous. I can see the butler and James ready to tear him to pieces. When he is good-humored, so am I; and when he tries to bully, why, what with trembling so much that I break something he likes, and fits of hysterics, and being awfully frightened before strangers, and making things go wrong when he wishes to create a great effect on some one, I think he begins to see it is better not to quarrel with me. Still, it is awfully miserable, compared with what it used to be when I really thought he loved me. How pleasant we all were together at Castleford before this horrid man turned up! Why didn’t that awkward bush-ranger take better aim?”

“I dare say George Liddell is not quite of your opinion,” said Katherine, smiling at her sister-in-law’s candor.

“He was quite rich before,” continued Mrs. Ormonde, querulously. “Why couldn’t he be satisfied to stay out there and spend his own money? I hate selfishness and greed!”

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“They *are* odious in every one,” said Katherine, gravely.

“Now that I feel satisfied you are well and happy,” resumed Mrs. Ormonde, who had never put a single question respecting herself to Katherine, “there are one or two things I wanted to ask you. Where are the boys?”

“They are still at Sandbourne; but they leave, I am sorry to say, at Easter.”

“Oh, they do! It is an awfully expensive school. Are you quite sure, Katherine, they will not send in the bill to me?”

“Quite sure, Ada, for I have paid in advance.”

“That was really very thoughtful, dear. Then—excuse my asking; I would not interfere with you for the world—but what *are* you going to do with them in the Easter holidays? I *dare* not have them at Castleford. I should lose all the ground I have gained if such a thing was even hinted to the Colonel.”

“Why apologize for inquiring about your own children? Do not be alarmed, they shall *not* go. I am just now arranging for them to go to a school at Wandsworth, and for the Easter holidays Miss Payne has most kindly invited them.”

“Really! How very nice! I will send her a hamper from Castleford. I can manage that much. This is rather a nice little place,” continued Mrs. Ormonde, evidently much relieved and looking round. “What lots of pretty things! Is Mrs. Needham nice? She seemed rather a flashy woman. You must feel it an awful change from being an heiress, and so much made of, to being a sort of upper servant! Do you dine with Mrs. Needham?”

“Yes, I really do, and go out to evening parties with her.”

“No, really?”

“It is a fact. She is a kind, delightful woman to live with. I am most fortunate.”

“Fortunate? You cannot say that, Katie! You are the most unfortunate girl in the world. You know how penniless women are looked upon in society. *I* remember when Ormonde thought himself such a weak idiot for being attracted to me, all because I had no money. It makes such a difference! Why, there is Lord De Burgh; I met him yesterday, and asked him to have a cup of tea with me, and he never once mentioned your name.”

“Why should he? I never knew Lord De Burgh,” said Katherine.

“Yes, you did, dear! Why, you cannot know what is going on if you have not heard that old De Burgh died nearly a fortnight ago in Paris, and our friend has come in for *every*thing. He had just returned from the funeral, so he said, and is looking darker and glummer than ever. Well, you know how he used to run after you. I assure you he never made a single inquiry about you. Heartless, wasn’t it? I said something about that horrid man coming back, and—would you believe it?—he laughed in that odious, cynical way he has, and called me a little tigress. The only sympathetic word he spoke was to call it an infernal business. He doesn’t care what he says, you know. Then he asked if Ormonde was tearing his hair about it. What a pity you did not encourage him, Katie, and marry him! Once you were his wife he could not have thrown you off. Now I don’t suppose you’ll ever see *him* again. I rather think Mrs. Needham does not know many of *his* set.”

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“She knows an extraordinary number of people—all sorts and conditions of men; Mr. Errington often dines here.”

“Does he? But then he is a sort of literary hack now. Just think what a change both for you and him!”

“It is very extraordinary; but he keeps his position better than I do.”

“Of course. Men are always better off. Now, dear, I must go. I am quite glad to have seen you, and sorry to think that my husband is absurdly prejudiced against you from the way you spoke to him last time. It was by no means prudent.”

“Well, Ada, should Colonel Ormonde so far overcome his objection to me as to seek me again, I think it very likely I may say more imprudent things than I did last time. Pray, what do I owe him that I should measure my words?”

“Really, Katherine, when you hold your head up in that way I feel half afraid of you. There is no use trying to hold your own with the world when your pocket is empty. You see nobody troubles about you now, whereas—”

“Miss Bradley!” announced the servant; and Angela entered, in an exquisite walking dress of dark blue velvet; bonnet and feathers, gloves, parasol, all to match. Mrs. Ormonde gazed in delighted admiration at this splendid apparition.

“My dear Miss Liddell!” she exclaimed, shaking hands cordially. “I have rushed over to tell you that we have secured a box for Patti’s benefit on Thursday, and I want you to join us. I know Mrs. Needham has a stall, but she will sup with us after. Mr. Errington and one or two musical critics are coming to dine with me at half past six, and we can go together.”

“You are very good,” said Katherine, coloring. She did not particularly care to go with Miss Bradley, and she was amused at Mrs. Ormonde’s expression of astonishment. “Of course I shall be most happy.”

“Now I must not stay; I have heaps to do. Will you be so kind as to give me the address of the modiste you mentioned the other day who made that pretty gray dress of yours? Madame Maradan is so full she cannot do a couple of morning dresses for me, so I want to try your woman.”

“I shall be so glad if you will,” cried Katherine. “I will bring you one of her cards. Let me introduce my sister-in-law to you. Mrs. Ormonde, Miss Bradley.” She left the room, and Miss Bradley drew a chair beside her. “I think I had the pleasure of seeing you at Lady Carton’s garden party last July?” she said, courteously.

“Oh, dear me, yes! I thought I knew your face. Lady Carton introduced you to me. Lady Carton is a cousin of Colonel Ormonde’s.”

“Oh, indeed! Miss Liddell was not there?”

“No; she chose to bury herself by the sea-side for the whole season.”

Here Katherine returned with the card.

“I am so glad you are going to give my friend Rachel Trant a trial. I am sure you will like her. She has excellent taste.”

“Now I must not wait any longer. So good-by. Shall you be at Madame Caravicelli’s this evening?”

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“I am not sure. I don’t feel much disposed to go.”

“Good-by for the present, then. Good-morning,” to Mrs. Ormonde, and Miss Bradley swept out of the room.

“Well, Katherine!” cried Mrs. Ormonde, when her sister-in-law returned, “you seem to have fallen on your feet here. Pray who is that fine, elegant girl who seems so fond of you?”

“She is the daughter of a wealthy publisher, and has been very kind to me.”

“Ah, yes! I remember now, Lady Carton said she would have a large fortune; and so she is your intimate friend?”

“Well, a very kind friend.”

“Now I must bid you good-by. I am sure I am very glad you are so comfortable. I am going back to Castleford to-morrow, or I should call again. You are going to be Lucky Katherine, after all; I am sure you are;” and with many sweet words she disappeared.

“Lucky,” repeated Katherine, as she returned to her task, “mine has been strange luck.”

* * * * *

Despite Mrs. Ormonde’s assurances that De Burgh had quite forgotten her, the news that he was once more in town disturbed Katherine. Unless some new fancy had driven her out of his head, she felt sure that his first step in the new and independent existence on which he had entered would be to seek her out and renew the offer he had twice made before. Money or no money, position, circumstances, all were but a feather-weight compared to the imperative necessity of having his own way.

It would be very painful to be obliged to refuse him again, for, in spite of her grave disapprobation of him in many ways, she liked him, and had a certain degree of confidence in him. There were the possibilities of a good character even in his faults, and it grieved her to be obliged to pain him.

“After all, I may be troubling myself about a vain image; it is more than a month since I saw him. He is now a wealthy peer, and it is impossible to say how circumstances may have changed him.”

When Mrs. Needham had dressed for the dinner which was to precede Madam Caravicelli’s reception, Katherine put on her bonnet and cloak and set off to spend a couple of hours with Rachel Trant, not only to avoid a lonely evening, but to change the current of her thoughts—loneliness and thought being her greatest enemies at present.

She had grown quite accustomed to make her way by omnibus, and as the days grew longer and the weather finer, she hoped to be able to walk across Campden Hill, not only shortening the distance but saving the fare. A visit to Rachel amused Katherine and drew her out of herself more than anything; the details of the business and management of property which she felt was her own had a large amount of interest—-real, living interest. The state of the books, the increase of custom, the addition to the small capital which Rachel was gradually accumulating—all these were subjects not easily exhausted. Both partners agreed that their great object, now that the undertaking was beginning to maintain itself, was to lay by all they could, for of course bad debts and bad times would come.

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“It is a great satisfaction to think that though people may do without books or pictures or music, they must wear clothes; and if you fit well, and are punctual, you are certain to have customers. Of course if you give credit you must charge high; people are beginning to see that now. You cannot get ready money in the dressmaking trade except for those costumes you give for a certain fixed price; but I stand out for quarterly accounts.”

“And do you find no difficulty in getting them paid?”

“Not much; you see, I deduct five per cent. for punctual payment. Every one tries to save that five per cent. But talking of these things has put a curious incident out of my head, which I was longing to tell you. You remember among my first customers were Mrs. Fairchild and her daughters. They keep a very high class ladies’ school in Inverness Terrace, and have been excellent customers. Yesterday Miss Fairchild called and said that she wanted an entire outfit for a little girl of ten or eleven, who was to be with them. They did not wish for anything fine or showy; at the same time, cost was no object. I was to furnish everything, to save time. This morning they brought the child to be fitted; she is very tall and thin, but lithe and supple, with dark hair, and large, bright, dark-brown eyes. She will be very handsome. I could not quite make her out; she is not an ordinary gentlewoman, nor is she the very least vulgar or common. She gives me more the idea of a wild thing not quite tamed. When all was settled I was told to address the account to Mr. George Liddell, Grosvenor Hotel.”

“Why, it must be my cousin George!” cried Katherine. “How strange that in this huge town they should fix on you amongst the thousands of dressmakers! You must make my little cousin look very smart, Rachel.”

“She is not little. She is wonderfully mature for ten years old, something like a panther.”

“I should like to see her. I believe she is a great idol with her father. I wish,” added Katherine, after a pause, “he were not so unreasonably prejudiced against me. You may think me weak, Rachel, but I have a sort of yearning for family ties.”

“Why should I think you weak? It is a natural and I suppose a healthy feeling. *I* don’t understand it myself because I never had any. Isolation is my second nature. The only human being that ever treated me with tenderness and loyal friendship is yourself, and what you have been to me, what I feel toward you, none can know, for I can never tell.”

“Dear Rachel! How glad I am to have been of use to you! And you amply repay me, you are looking so much better. Tell me, are you not feeling content and happy?”

Rachel smiled, a smile somewhat grim in spite of the soft lips it parted. “I am resigned, and I have found an object to live for, and you know what an improvement that is compared to the condition you found me in. But I don’t think I am really any more in

love with life now than I was then. However, I am more mistress of myself." She paused, and her face grew very grave as she leaned back in her chair, her arm and small hand, closely shut, resting on the table beside her.

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“All the minute details, the thought and anxiety, my business, or rather our business, requires an enormous help—it is such a boon to be too weary at night-time to think! But *no* amount of work, of care, can quite shut out the light of other days. It is no doubt wrong, immoral, unworthy of a reformed outcast, but *if* my real heart’s desire could be fulfilled, I would live over again those few months of exquisite happiness, and die before waking to the terrible reality of my insignificance in the sight of him who was more than life to me—die while I was still something to be missed, to be regretted. He would have tired of me had I been his wife, and that would have been as terrible as my present lot—even more, for I must have seen his weariness day by day, and no amount of social esteem would have consoled me. As it is, my real self seems to have died, and this creature”—striking her breast—“was a cunningly contrived machine, that can work, and understand, but, save for one friend, cannot feel. I do not even look back to *him* with any regretful tenderness. I do not love him—that is dead. I do not hate him—I have no right. He did not deceive me; I voluntarily overstepped the line which separates the reputable and disreputable; as long as I was loved and cherished I never felt as if I had done wrong. I never felt humiliation when I was with him. When he grew tired of me he could not help it; he never did try to resist any whim or passion. But better, stronger men cannot hold the wavering will-o’-the-wisp they call ‘love’; and once it flickers out, it cannot be relighted. No, I have no one to blame; I can only resign myself to the bitterest, cruelest fate that can befall a woman—to be loved and eagerly sought, won, and adored for a brief hour, then thrown carelessly aside—a mere plaything, unworthy of serious thought. Ah, I have forgotten my resolution not to talk of myself to you. It is a weakness; but your kind eyes melt my heart. Now I will close it up—I will think only of the task I have set myself, to make a little fortune for you, a reputation for my own establishment—not a very grand ambition, but it does to keep the machine going; and I am growing stronger every day, with a strange force that surprises myself. I fear nothing and no one. I think my affection for you, dear, is the only thing which keeps me human. Now tell me, are you still comfortable with Mrs. Needham?”

The tears stood in Katherine’s eyes as she listened to this stern wail of a bruised spirit, but with instinctive wisdom she refrained from uttering fruitless expressions of sympathy. She would not encourage Rachel to dwell on the hateful subject; she only replied by pressing her friend’s hand in silence, and she began to speak of Mrs. Ormonde’s visit, and succeeded in making Rachel laugh at the little woman’s description of the means she adopted of reducing Colonel Ormonde to reason.

“Real generosity and unselfishness is very rare,” said Rachel. “The meanness and narrowness of men are amazing—and of women too; but somehow one expects more from the strength of a man.”

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“When men are good they are very good,” said Kate, reflectively. “But the only two I have seen much of are not pleasant specimens—my uncle, John Liddell, and Colonel Ormonde. Then against them I must balance Bertie Payne, who is good enough for two.”

“He is indeed! I owe him a debt I can never repay, for he brought you to me. I wish you could reward him as he would wish.”

“I am not sure that he has any wishes on the subject,” said Katherine, her color rising. “He thinks I am too ungodly to be eligible for the helpmeet of a true believer. Ah, indeed I am not half good enough for such a man!”

CHAPTER XXIX.

DE BURGH AGAIN.

That Rachel Trant should have drifted into communication George Liddell seemed a most whimsical turn of the wheel of fortune to Katherine, and she thought much of it.

Would it lead to any reconciliation between herself and her strange, unreasonable, half-savage kinsman? She fancied she could interest herself in his daughter, and towards himself she felt no enmity; rather a mild description of curiosity. Why should they not be on friendly terms?

But this and other subjects of thought were swallowed up in the anticipated pain of removing her nephews from their school at Sandbourne, where they had been so happy and done so well. Miss Payne’s friendly offer to take them in for a week or two had relieved Katherine of a difficulty; and Mrs. Needham was most considerate in promising to give her ample time to prepare them for their new school.

What a difference, poor Katherine thought, between the present and the past! quite as great as between the price of Sandbourne and Wandsworth. There was a certain rough and ready tone about the latter establishment which distressed her; yet the school-master’s wife seemed a kindly, motherly woman, and the urchins she saw running about the playground looked ruddy and happy enough. It was the best of the cheaper schools she had seen, and to Dr. Paynter’s care she resolved to commit them. As Wandsworth was within an easy distance, she could often go to see them.

Another matter kept her somewhat on the *qui vive*. In spite of Mrs. Ormonde’s assurance that De Burgh had forgotten her, Katherine had a strong idea that she had not seen the last of him.

Though Mrs. Needham’s wide circle of acquaintances included many men and women of rank, she knew nothing of the set to which De Burgh belonged. Those of his class,

admitted within the hospitable gate of the Shrubberies, were usually persons of literary, artistic, or dramatic leanings and connections, of which he was quite innocent.

It was a day or two after Katherine's last interview with Rachel Trant, and Mrs. Needham was "at home" in a more formal way than usual. Katherine was assisting her chief in receiving, when, in the tea-room, she was accosted by Errington. "Have you had tea yourself?" he asked, with his grave, sweet smile.

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“Oh yes! long ago.”

“Then, Miss Liddell, indulge me in a little talk. It is so long since I have had a word with you! It seems that since we agreed to be fast friends, founding our friendship on the injuries we have done each other, that we have drifted apart more than ever. Pray do not turn away with that distressed look. I am so unfortunate in being always associated with painful ideas in your mind.”

“Indeed you are not. All the good of my present life I owe to you,” and she raised her soft brown eyes, full of tender gratitude, to his. It was a glance that might have warmed any man’s heart, and Errington’s answer was:

“Come, then, and let us exchange confidences,” the crowd round the door at that moment obliging him, as it seemed to her, to hold her arm very close to his side.

At the end of the hall, which was little more than a passage, was a door sheltered by a large porch. The door had been removed, and the porch turned into a charming nook, with draperies, plants, colored lamps, and comfortable seats. Here Errington and Katherine established themselves.

“First,” he began, “tell me, how do you fare at Mrs. Needham’s hands? I am glad to see that you seem quite at home; and if I may be allowed to say it, you bear up bravely under the buffets of unkindly fortune.”

“I have no right to complain,” returned Katherine. “As to Mrs. Needham, were I her younger sister she could not be kinder. I think the great advantage of the semi-Bohemian set to which she belongs, is that among them there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither bond nor free, for all are one in our common human nature. Were I to go down into the kitchen and cook the dinner, it would not put me at any disadvantage with my good friend. I should have only to wash my hands and don my best frock, and in the drawing-room I should be as much the daughter of the house as ever.”

Errington laughed. There was a happy sound in his laugh. “You describe our kind hostess well. Such women are the salt of the social earth. And your ‘dear boys.’ How and where are they?”

“Ah! that is a trial. I go down to Sandbourne the day after to-morrow, to take them from that delightful school, and place them in a far different establishment.”

“Ha! Does Mrs. Ormonde go with you?”

“Mrs. Ormonde? Oh no. You know—” she hesitated. “Well, you see, Colonel Ormonde is exceedingly indignant with me because I have lost my fortune, and I fancy he does not approve of Ada’s having anything to do with me. Besides—” She paused, not liking

to betray too much of the family politics. “They have agreed to give the boys over to me.”

“I know. I paid Mr. Newton a long visit the other day, and he told me—perhaps more than you would like.”

“I do not mind how much you know,” said Katherine, sadly. “I am glad you care enough to inquire.”

“I want you to understand that I care very, very much,” replied Errington, in a low, earnest tone. “You and I have crossed each other’s paths in an extraordinary manner, and if you will allow me, I should like to act a brother’s part to you if—” He broke off abruptly, and Katherine, looking up to him with a bright smile, exclaimed, “I shall be delighted to have such a brother, and will not give you more trouble than I can help.”

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“Thank you.” He seemed to hesitate a moment, and then, with a change of tone, observed: “You and Miss Bradley seem to have become intimate. You must find her an agreeable companion. I think she might be a useful friend.”

“She is extremely kind. I cannot say how much obliged to her I am; but,” continued Katherine, impelled by an unaccountable antagonism, “do you know, I cannot understand why she likes me. There is no real sympathy between us. She is so wise and learned. She never would do wrong things from a sudden irresistible impulse, and then devour her heart with, not repentance, exactly, but remorse which cannot be appeased.”

“Probably not. She is rather a remarkable woman. Strong, yet not hard. I fancy we are the arbiters of our own fate.”

“Oh no! no!” cried Katherine, with emotion. “Just think of the snares and pitfalls which beset us, and how hard it is to keep the narrow road when a heart-beat too much, a sudden rush of sorrow or of joy, and our balance is lost: even steady footsteps slide from the right way. Believe me, some never have a fair chance.”

Errington made a slight movement nearer to her, and after a brief pause said, “I should like to hear you argue this with Angela Bradley.”

It sounded strange and unpleasant to hear him say “Angela.”

“I never argue with her,” said Katherine. “Mine are but old-fashioned weapons, while hers are of the latest fashion and precision. Moreover, we stand on different levels, I am sorry to say. I wonder she troubles herself about me. Is it pure benevolence? or”—-with a quick glance into his eyes, which were unusually animated—“did you ask her of her clemency to throw me some crumbs of comfort? If so, she has obeyed you gracefully and well.”

“Unreason has a potent advocate in you, Miss Liddell,” said Errington; smiling a softer smile than usual. “But I want you to understand and appreciate Miss Bradley. She is a fine creature in every sense of the word. As friend, I am sure she would be loyal with a reasonable loyalty, and I flatter myself she is a friend of mine.”

“Another sister?” asked Katherine, forcing herself to smile playfully.

“Yes,” returned Errington, slowly, looking down as he spoke; “a different kind of sister.”

Katherine felt her cheeks, her throat, her ears, glow, as she listened to what she considered a distinct avowal of his engagement to the accomplished Angela, but she only said, softly and steadily, “I hope she will always be a dear and loyal sister to you.”

There was a moment's silence. Then Errington said, abruptly, his eyes, as she felt, on her face, "Have you seen De Burgh since his return?"

"No."

"No doubt you will. What a curious fellow he is! I wonder how he will act, now that he has rank and fortune? He has some good points."

"Oh yes, many," cried Katherine, warmly, "I could not help liking him. He is very true."

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“And extremely reckless,” put in Errington, coldly, as Katherine paused to remember some other good point.

“Certainly not calculating,” she returned.

“Probably his new responsibilities may steady him.”

“They may. I almost wish I dare——”

“My dear Katherine, I have been looking everywhere for you. I want you so much to play Mrs. Grandison’s accompaniment. She is going to sing one of your songs, and no one plays it as well as you do. So sorry to interrupt your nice talk; but what can a wretched hostess do?”

“Oh, I am quite ready, Mrs. Needham,” said Katherine; and she rose obediently.

“Will you come, Mr. Errington?” asked the lady of the house.

“To hear Mrs. Grandison murder one of Miss Liddell’s songs, which I dare say I have heard at Castleford? No, thank you. I shall bid you good-night. I am going on to Lady Barbara Bonsfield’s, where I shall not stay long.”

“Horrid woman! she robbed me of Angela Bradley to-night!” exclaimed Mrs. Needham.

With a quick “Good-night,” Katherine went to fulfil her duties in the drawing-room, and did not see Errington again for several days.

“I was vexed with you for not singing last night,” said Mrs. Needham, as she sat at luncheon with her young friend the next morning. “You may not have a great voice, but you are much more thoroughly trained than half the amateurs whose squallings and screechings are applauded to the echo.”

“I do not know why, but I really did not feel that I could sing, Mrs. Needham. I do not often feel miserable and choky, but I did last night. I am so anxious and uneasy about the boys and the school they are going to, that I was afraid of making a fool of myself. When the change is accomplished I shall be all right again, and not bore you with my sentimentality.”

“You don’t do anything of the sort. You are a capital plucky girl. Now I have nothing particular for you to do this afternoon, and I can’t take you with me; so just go out and call on Miss Bradley or Miss Payne to divert your——”

“A gentleman for Miss Liddell;” said the parlor maid, placing a card beside Katherine.

“Lord de Burgh!” she exclaimed, in great surprise.

“Lord who?” asked Mrs. Needham.

“Lord de Burgh; he is a relation of Colonel Ormonde; I used to meet him at Castleford.”

Mrs. Needham eyed her curiously. “Oh, very well, dear,” she said, with great cheerfulness. “Go and see him, and give him some tea; only it is too early. I am sorry I cannot put in an appearance, but I have just a hundred and one things to do before I go to Professor Maule’s scientific ‘afternoon’ at four. Give me my bag and note-book. I must go straight away to the ‘Incubator Company’s Office;’ I promised them a notice in my Salterton letter next week. There, go, child; I don’t want you any more.”

“But I am in no hurry, Mrs. Needham. Lord de Burgh is no very particular friend of mine.”

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“Well, well! That remains to be seen. Just smooth your hair, won’t you? It’s all rough where you have leaned on your hand over your writing. It’s no matter? Well, it doesn’t much. Do you think he has any votes for the British Benevolent Institution for Aged Women? I do so want to get my gardener’s mother—There, go, go, dear! You had better not keep him waiting.” And Katherine was gently propelled out of the room.

In truth, she was rather reluctant to face De Burgh, although she felt gratified and soothed by his taking the trouble to find her out.

Katherine found her visitor pacing up and down when she opened the drawing-room door, feeling vexed with herself for her changing color and the embarrassment she felt she displayed. De Burgh was looking taller and squarer than ever, but his dark face brightened so visibly as his eyes met Katherine’s, that she felt a pang as she thought how unmoved she was herself.

“I thought you had escaped from sight!” he exclaimed, holding her hand for a moment longer than was absolutely necessary. “The first time I went to look for you in the old place, I was simply told you had left, by a stupid old woman who knew nothing. Then I called again and asked for Miss—you know whom I mean; she is rather a brick, and told me all about you. In the mean time I met Mrs. Ormonde. I was determined not to ask *her* anything—she is such a selfish little devil. Now here I am face to face with you at last.” And he drew a chair opposite her, and was silent for a minute, gazing with a wistful look in her face.

“You have not a very high opinion of my sister-in-law,” said Katherine, beginning as far away from themselves as she could.

“She is an average woman,” he said, shortly. “But tell me, what is the matter with you? I did not think you were the sort of girl to break your heart over the loss of a fortune.”

“But I have not broken my heart!” she exclaimed, somewhat startled by his positive tone.

“There’s a look of pain in your eyes, a despondency in your very figure; don’t you think I know every turn of you? Well, I won’t say more if it annoys you. We have changed places, Katherine—I mean Miss Liddell. Fortune has given me a turn at last, and I have been tremendously busy. I had no idea how troublesome it is to be rich. There are compensations, however. This doesn’t seem a bad sort of place”—looking round at the crowd of china and bric-a-brac ornaments and the comfortable chairs. “How did you come here, and what has been settled? Don’t think me impertinent or intrusive; you know you agreed we should be friends, and you must not send me adrift!”

“Thank you, Lord de Burgh. I am sure you could be a very loyal friend. My story is very short.” And she gave him a brief sketch of how her affairs had been arranged.

“By George! Ormonde is a mean sneak. To think of his leaving those boys on your hands! and he has plenty of money. I happen to know that his wife has been dabbling in the stocks, and turned some money too. Now where did she get the cash to do it with but from him? So I suppose you intend to starve yourself in order to educate the poor little chaps?”

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“Oh no. On the contrary, I am living on the fat of the land, with the kindest mistress in the world.”

“Mistress! Great heavens! Why *will* you persist in such a life?”

“My dear Lord de Burgh, don’t you know that it is not always easy to judge or to act for another?

“Which means I am to mind my own business?”

“You have a very unvarnished style of stating facts.”

“I know I have.” A short pause, and he began again. “Where are those boys now?

“At Sandbourne. But, alas! I am going to take them away to-morrow. They are going to a school at Wandsworth.”

“Going down to Sandbourne to-morrow? Is Miss Payne going with you?”

“Oh no; I don’t need any one.”

“Nonsense! you can’t go about alone. I’ll meet you at the station and escort you there.”

Katherine laughed. “I am afraid that would never do. You have increased in importance and I have diminished, till the distance between our respective stations has widened far too much to permit of familiar intercourse, or—”

“I never thought I should hear *you* talking such rubbish. What difference can there be between us, except that you are a good woman and I am *not* a good man? I don’t think it’s quite fair that on our first meeting after ages—at least quite two months of separation—you should talk in this satirical way.”

“I speak the words of truth and soberness, Lord de Burgh.”

“Perhaps. I can’t quite make you out. I am certain you have been in worse trouble than even want of money. I wish you’d confide in me. That’s the right word, isn’t it? Do you know, I can be very true to my friends, and silent as the grave. I could tell *you* everything.”

“Thank you. I am sure you could be a faithful friend.”

“Do you ever see Errington?” asked De Burgh, changing the subject abruptly.

“Oh yes. He often comes here.”

“Indeed? To see you, or Mrs.—what’s her name?”

“To see Mrs. Needham,” returned Katherine, smiling.

“Hum! I suppose he has a taste for mature beauty?”

“I do not know. At all events Mrs. Needham knows charming girls—enough to suit all tastes, and Mr. Errington—”

“Is too superior a fellow to be influenced by such attractions, eh?” put in De Burgh.

“I am not so sure;” and she laughed merrily. “I think there is one fair lady for whom he is inclined to forego his philosophic tranquility.”

“Ha! I thought so. Yourself?”

“*Me*! No, indeed! A young lady of high attainments and a large fortune.”

“Indeed? I am glad of it. He must be awfully hard up, poor devil!”

“Mr. Errington can never be poor,” cried Katherine, offended by the disparaging epithet. “He carries his fortune in his brain.”

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“Well, I am exceedingly thankful I carry mine in my pocket,” returned De Burgh, laughing. “Evidently Errington can do no wrong in your eyes. Let us wish him success in his wooing. So I am not to be your escort to Sandbourne? You ought to let me be your courier, I have knocked about so much. I thought I’d take to the road in the modern sense, when I came to my last sou, if the poor old lord had not died. Now I am going to be a pattern man as landlord, peer, and sportsman. Can’t give up that, you know.”

“I do not see why you should.”

“I see you are looking at the clock; that means I am staying too long. You don’t know how delightful it is to sit here talking to you, without any third person to bore us.”

“I don’t mean to be rude, Lord de Burgh, but you see I have letters to write for my chief.”

“The deuce you have! It is too awful to see you in slavery.”

“Very pleasant, easy slavery.”

“So this chief of yours gives parties, receptions, at homes. Why doesn’t she ask me?”

“I am sure she would if she knew of your existence.”

“Do you mean to say you have never mentioned me to her, nor enlarged upon my many delightful and noble qualities?”

“I am ashamed to say I have not.”

Lord de Burgh rose slowly and reluctantly. “Are you going to bring the boys here?”

“No; Miss Payne has most kindly invited them to stay with her. As yet she has not found any one to replace me. Poor little souls, I shall be glad when their holidays are over, for I fear they are not the same joy to Miss Payne as they are to me.”

“Ah! believe me, you want some help in bringing up a couple of boys. Just fancy what Cis will be six or seven years hence. Why, he’ll play the devil if he hasn’t a strong hand over him.”

“I don’t believe it!” cried Katherine, smiling. “Why should he be worse than other boys?”

“Why should he be better?”

“Well, I can but do my best for them,” said Katherine with a sigh.

“I am a brute to prophesy evil, when you have enough to contend with already,” cried De Burgh, taking her hand, and looking into her eyes with an expression she could not misunderstand.

“You must not exaggerate my troubles,” returned Katherine, with a sweet bright smile on her lips and in her eyes that thanked him for his sympathy, even while she gently withdrew her hand.

“I wish you would let me help you,” said De Burgh; and as her lips parted to reply, he went on, hastily: “No, no; don’t answer—not yet, at least. You will only say something disagreeable, in spite of your charming lips. Now I’ll not intrude on you any longer. I suppose there is no objection to my calling on the young gentlemen at Miss Payne’s, and taking them to a circus, or Madame Tussaud’s, or any other dissipation suited to their tender years?”

“My dear Lord de Burgh, what an infliction for you! and how very good of you to think of them! Pray do not trouble about them.”

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“I understand,” said De Burgh. “I’ll leave my card for your chief below; and be sure you don’t forget me when you are sending out cards. By-the-way, I have a pressing invitation to Castleford. When I write to refuse I’ll say I have seen you, and that I am going to take charge of the boys during the holidays.”

“No, no; pray do not, Lord de Burgh,” cried Katherine, eagerly. “You know Ada, and—”

“Are you ashamed to have me as a coadjutor?” interrupted De Burgh, laughing. “Trust me; I will be prudent. Good-by for the present.”

Katherine stood in silent thought for a few moments after he had gone. She fully understood the meaning of his visit; though there had been little or nothing of the lover in his tone. He had come as soon as possible to place himself and all he had at her disposal. He was perfectly sincere in his desire to win her for his wife, and she almost regretted she could not return his affection: it might be true affection—something beyond and above the dominant whim of an imperious nature. And what a solution to all her difficulties! But it was impossible she could overcome the repulsion which the idea of marriage with any man she did not love inspired. There was to her but one in the world to whom she could hold allegiance, and *he* was forbidden by all sense of self-respect and modesty. How was it that, strive as she might to fill her mind to his exclusion, the moment she was off guard the image of Errington rose up clear and fresh, pervading heart and imagination, and dwarfing every other object?

“How miserably, contemptibly weak I am, and have always been! Why did I not stifle this wretched, overpowering attraction in the beginning?” Ay! but when did it begin?

This is a sort of question no heart can answer. Who can foresee that the tiny spring, forcing its way up among the stones and heather of a lonely hill-side, will grow into the broad river, which may carry peace and prosperity on its rolling tide to the lands below, or overwhelm them with destructive floods, according to the forces which feed it and the barriers which hedge it in?

CHAPTER XXX.

“CIS AND CHARLIE.”

Again the spring sunshine was lending perennial youth even to London’s dingy streets, and making the very best winter garments look dim and shabby. Hunting was over, and Colonel Ormonde found himself by the will of his wife, once more established in London lodgings—of a dingier and obscurer order than those in which they had enjoyed last season.

Mrs. Ormonde was neither intellectually nor morally strong, but she had one reflex ingredient in her nature, which was to her both a shield and spear. She knew what she

wanted, and was perfectly unscrupulous as to the means of getting it. A woman who is pleasantly indifferent to the wants and wishes of her associates, if they happen to clash with her own, is tolerably sure to have her own way on the whole. Now and then, to be sure, she comes to grief; but in her general success these failures can be afforded.

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When first the tidings of George Liddell's return and his assertion of his rights reached her, she was terrified and undone by Colonel Ormonde's fury against Katherine, herself, her boys, every one. In short, that gallant officer thought he had done a generous and manly thing, when he married the piquant little widow who had attracted him, although she could only meet her personal expenses and those of her two sons, without contributing to the general house-keeping. This sense of his own magnanimity, backed by the consciousness that it did not cost him too dear, had kept Colonel Ormonde in the happiest of moods for the first years of his married life. Terrible was the awakening from the dream of his own good luck and general "fine-fellowism"; and heavily would the punishment have fallen on his wife had she been a sensitive or high-minded woman. Being, however, admirably suited to the partner of her life, she looked round, as soon as the first burst of despair was over, to see how she could make the best of her position.

She was really vexed and irritated to find how little tenderness or regard her husband felt for her, for she had always believed that he was greatly devoted to her. To both of them the outside world was all in all, and on this Mrs. Ormonde counted largely. Colonel Ormonde could not put her away or lock her up because the provision made by Katherine for the boys failed her, so while she was mistress of Castleford she must have dresses and carriages and consideration. Knowing herself secure on these points, she fearlessly adopted the system of counter-irritation she described to Katherine; and to do her justice, her consciousness that the boys were safe under the care of their aunt, who would be sure to treat them well and kindly, made her the more ready to brave the dangers of her husband's wrath.

"He must behave well before people, or men will say he is a 'cad' to visit his disappointment on his poor little simple-hearted wife," she thought. "He knows that. Then it is an enormous relief that Katherine still clings to the boys, poor dears! She really is a trump; so I have only myself to think of; and Duke shall find that his shabbiness and ill-temper do him no good. It's like drawing his teeth to get my quarter's allowance, beggarly as it is, from him."

Colonel Ormonde's reflections, as he composed a letter to his steward, were by no means soothing. Though it was all but impossible for him to hold his tongue respecting his disappointment, whenever a shade of difference occurred between him and his wife, he was uncomfortably conscious that he often acted like a brute toward the mother of his boy, of whom he was so proud; he was not therefore the more disposed to rule his hasty, inconsiderate temper. The fact that Mrs. Ormonde had her own methods of paying him back disposed him to respect her, and it could not be doubted that in time the friction of their natures would rub off the angles of each, and they would settle down into tolerable harmony, whereas a proud, true-hearted woman in her place would have been utterly crushed and never forgiven.

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Ormonde, then, was meditating on his undeserved misfortunes, when the door was somewhat suddenly and vehemently pushed open, and Mrs. Ormonde came in, her eyes sparkling, and evidently in some excitement.

“What’s the matter?” asked her husband, not too amiably. “Has that rascally, intruding fellow Liddell kicked the bucket?”

“No; but whom do you think I saw as I was leaving Mrs. Bennett’s in Hyde Park Square, you know?”

“How can I tell? The policeman perhaps.”

“Nonsense, Duke! I had just come down the steps, and was turn turning toward Paddington, for, as it was early, I thought I would take the omnibus to Oxford Circus (see how careful I am!), when I saw a beautiful dark brougham, drawn by splendid black horse—the coachman, the whole turn-out, quite first rate—come at a dashing pace towards me. I recognized Lord de Burgh inside, and who do you think was sitting beside him?”

“God knows! The Saratoffski perhaps.”

“Really, Ormonde, I am astonished at your mentioning that dreadful woman to me.

“Oh! are you? Well, *who* was De Burgh’s companion?”

“Charlie! my Charlie! and Cis was on the front seat. Cis saw me, for he clapped his hands and pointed as they flew past. What do you think of that?”

“By George!” he exclaimed, in capital letters. “I believe he is still after Katherine. If so, she’ll have the devil’s own luck.”

“Now listen to me. As Wilton Street was quite near, I went on there to gather what I could from Miss Payne. She was at home, and a little less sour and silent then usual. She was sorry, she said, the boys were out. They have been with her for a week, and Lord de Burgh had been most kind. He had taken them to the Zoological Gardens and Madame Tussaud’s, and just now had called for them to go to the circus. Isn’t it wonderful? Do try and picture De Burgh at Madame Tussaud’s.”

“There is only one way of accounting for such strange conduct,” returned the Colonel, thoughtfully. “He means to marry your sister. This would change the face of affairs considerably.”

“Yes; it would be delightful.”

“I’m not so sure of that,” returned Ormonde, seriously. “Now that he is in love—and you know he is all fire and tow—he makes a fuss about the boys; but wait till he is married, and he will try to shift them back on you. Why should he put up with his wife’s nephews any more than I do with *my* wife’s sons?”

“Because he is more in love, and a good deal richer,” returned Mrs. Ormonde.

“More in love! Bosh! In the middle of the fever, you mean. Of course that will pass over.”

“Really men are great brutes,” observed Mrs. Ormonde, philosophically.

“And women awful fools,” added her husband.

“Well, perhaps so,” she returned, with a slight smile and a sharp glance.

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“Seriously, though,” resumed Colonel Ormonde, “it’s all very well for Katherine to make a good match, and if De Burgh is fool enough to be in earnest, it will be a splendid match for her; but things may be made rather rough for me. That fellow De Burgh has the queerest crotchets, and doesn’t hesitate to air them. He’d think nothing of slapping my shoulder in the club before a dozen members, and asking me if I meant to leave my wife’s brats on his hands.”

“Do you really think so? Oh, Katherine would never let him. She dearly loves the boys.”

“Wait till she has a son of her own.”

“Even so. She has her faults, I know. Her temper is rather violent, her ideas are too high-flown and nonsensical, and she won’t take advice, but she never would injure *me*, I am sure of that.”

An inarticulate grunt from Colonel Ormonde, as he fixed his double glass on his nose and took up his pen again.

“Duke,” resumed Mrs. Ormonde, after a pause, “don’t you think I had better go and see Katherine? You know we never had any quarrel, and that Mrs. Needham she lives with gives very nice parties.”

“Parties! By Jove! you’d go to old Nick for a party. What good will it do you to meet a pack of beggarly scribblers?”

“They may not have money, Duke, but they have *manners*, and something to say for themselves,” she retorted. “Never mind about the parties. Don’t you think I would better call on Katherine?”

“Do as you like but consider that she has behaved very badly—with extreme insolence; but I don’t want to influence you.” This in a tone of magnanimity, as he began to write with an air of profound attention.

Mrs. Ormonde made a swift contemptuous grimace at his back, and said, in mellifluous tones: “Very well, dear. I may as well go at once, and perhaps she will come with me to that dressmaking ally of hers, Miss Trant. I hear she is raising her prices, but she will not do so to me if I am with her original patroness.”

“Oh, do as you like; only don’t send me in a long milliner’s bill.”

“I am sure, Duke, my clothes never cost you much.”

“Not so far, but the future looks rather blue.”

To this she made no reply. Leaving the room noiselessly, she retired to give a touch of kohl to her eyes, a dust of pearl powder to her cheeks, and then started on her mission of inquiry and reconciliation.

It is not to be denied that Katherine was greatly touched by De Burgh's thoughtful kindness to her boys. She had been a good deal troubled about their holidays, for she did not like to take full advantage of Mrs. Needham's kind permission to absent herself as much as she liked in order to be with them, and she well knew that in Miss Payne's very orderly establishment the two restless, active little fellows would be a most discordant ingredient. Above all, she wanted them to have a very happy holiday, as she feared their cloudless sunny days were numbered.

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The second morning, therefore, after she had deposited them in Wilton Street, when she went to inquire for them, and found that Lord de Burgh had called and carried them off to have luncheon with him first, and to spend the afternoon at the Zoological Gardens after, she could hardly credit her ears.

“I must say,” observed Miss Payne, “that I am agreeably surprised. I had no idea Lord de Burgh was so straightforward and well-disposed a man. A little abrupt, and would not stand any nonsense, I fancy, but a sterling character. He has tact too. He always spoke of the boys as his cousin Colonel Ormonde’s step-sons. He might be a good friend to them, Katherine.”

“No doubt,” she replied, thoughtfully.

“He will send his butler or house-steward to take them to Kew Gardens to-morrow; but I dare say he will call and tell you himself.”

“He is wonderfully good,” said Katherine, feeling puzzled and oppressed. “I will go back, then, as fast as I can, and get my work done by six o’clock; then I may spend the evening here with you and the boys.”

“Pray do, if you can manage it.”

Lord de Burgh’s remarkable conduct troubled Katherine a good deal. How ought she to act? Certainly he would not put himself out of the way for Cis and Charlie, had he not wished to please her, or really interested himself in them for her sake. Ought she to encourage him by accepting these very useful and kindly attentions? How could she reject them without saying as plainly by action as in words, “I know you are pressing your suit upon me, and I will not have it,” which, after all, might be a mistake; besides, she would thus deprive her nephews of much pleasure. She could not come to a conclusion; she must let herself drift. But the question tormented her, and it was with an effort she banished it, and applied herself to her task of arranging her chief’s notes.

Mrs. Needham was exceedingly busy that afternoon, and did not go out, as she had some provincial and colonial letters to finish, and had a couple of engagements in the evening. She and her secretary therefore wrote diligently till about half-past five, when Ford, the smart parlor-maid, announced that “the gentleman” and two little boys were in the drawing-room.

“Good gracious!” cried Mrs. Needham, slipping off her glasses. “This is growing interesting. I shall go and speak to Lord de Burgh myself. Besides, I want to see your boys, my dear. How funny it sounds!”

“Do, Mrs. Needham. I will come.”

Lord de Burgh was glaring absently out of the window, and the boys were eagerly examining the diverse and sundry objects thickly scattered around. They had wonderfully dirty hands and faces, their jackets were splashed as if with some foaming beverage, the knees of their knickerbockers were grubby with gravel and grass, and they had generally the aspect of having done wildly what they listed for some hours.

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“Lord de Burgh, I suppose?” said Mrs. Needham, in loud and cheerful accents. “I am very pleased to see you” (De Burgh bowed); “and you, my dears—I am very glad to see you too, especially if you will be so good as not to touch my china!”

“We haven’t broken anything!” cried Cecil, coming up to her and giving her a dingy little paw, while he stared in her face. “Where is auntie?”

“She’ll be here directly. This is Charlie: what a sweet little fellow! Why, your eyes are like your aunt’s.”

“Do you think so?” said De Burgh, drawing near. “They are lighter—a good deal lighter.”

“Perhaps so. The shape and expression are like, though. And so you have been to see the lions and tigers?”

“And the bears,” put in Charlie.

“Isn’t Lord de Burgh kind to take you—”

“He *is!* he’s a jolly chap!” cried Cecil, warmly. “I shouldn’t mind living with him.”

“Nor I either,” added Charlie.

Here Katherine made her appearance, a conscious look in her eyes, a flitting blush on her cheek. The boys immediately flew to hug and kiss her, barely allowing her to shake hands with De Burgh. Then, when she sat down on the sofa, Charlie established himself on her knee and Cecil knelt on the sofa, the better to put his arms round her neck.

“What dreadfully dirty little boys! What have you been doing to yourselves?”

“Oh, we have been on the elephant and the camel, and in the ostrich cart. Then Charlie tumbled down in the monkey-house. Oh, how funny the monkeys are! and he” (pointing to Lord de Burgh) “took us to dinner. Such a beautiful dinner in a lovely room! He says he will take us to the circus.”

“I’ll ask him to take you too, auntie!” cried Charlie.

“Oh yes!” echoed Cecil. “You’ll take her, Lord de Burgh, won’t you? I don’t think auntie ever saw a circus.”

“If you promise to be *very* good, and that your aunt too will be quiet and well-behaved, I may be induced to let her come,” returned De Burgh, his deep-set eyes glittering with fun and anticipated pleasure.

“Thank you,” said Katherine, laughing, as soon as her delighted nephew ceased kissing her.

“And you’ll come?—the day after to-morrow? I will call for the boys, bring them round here.”

“If I have nothing special—” she began.

“Certainly not; I will take care of that,” cried Mrs. Needham, “It is such a great thing to get a little amusement for the poor little fellows, and so very kind of Lord de Burgh to take so much trouble.”

“It is indeed. I really don’t know how to thank you enough,” said Katherine. “Mrs. Needham, I must really take them to wash their hands; they are so terribly dirty!”

“No; ring the bell; Ford will manage them nicely, and bring them back in a few minutes.” Mrs. Needham rang energetically as she spoke, and the young gentlemen were speedily marched off.

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“I am afraid I am not a wise child’s guide,” said De Burgh, laughing; “but they ran and tumbled about till they got into an awful pickle. They are really capital little fellows, and most amusing. When do they go back to school?”

“In about ten days—on the 25th. I assure you I quite dread their going to this Wandsworth place. They have been asking, entreating me to let them go back to Sandbourne, but I think Cis at last grasps the idea that it is a question of money.”

“It’s an early initiation for him,” observed De Burgh, as if to himself. Then, eagerly: “You’ll be sure to come with us on Friday, Miss Liddell? The boys will enjoy the performance ever so much more if you are with them.”

Katherine looked for half a second at Mrs. Needham, who nodded and frowned in a very energetic and affirmative way. “I shall be very glad to enjoy it with them,” she said, hesitatingly, “if Mrs. Needham can spare me.”

“Of course I can,”—briskly. “Lord de Burgh, if you care for music—not severe classical music, you know—ballads, recitatives, and that sort of thing—Hyacinth O’Hara, the new tenor, and Mr. Merrydew, that wonderful mimic and singer, are coming to me next Tuesday; I shall be delighted to see you.”

“Not so delighted, I am sure, as I shall be to come,” returned De Burgh, with unusual suavity.

“Very well—half past nine. Don’t be late, and don’t forget.”

“No danger of forgetting, I assure you.”

“By-the-bye,” resumed Mrs. Needham, as if seized with a happy thought, “Angela Bradley receives on Sunday afternoons at their delightful villa at Wimbledon all through the season. Her first ‘at home’ will be the Sunday after next. I am sure she will be delighted to see any friend of Miss Liddell’s.”

“If Miss Liddell will be so good as to answer for me, I shall be most happy to present myself. To make sure of being properly backed up, suppose I call here for Miss Liddell and yourself, and and drive you down?

“Is it not rather far off to make arrangements?” asked Katherine, growing somewhat uneasy at thus drifting into a succession of of engagements with the man she half liked, half dreaded.

“Far off!” echoed Mrs. Needham. “You don’t call ten days far off? But I must run away and finish my letter. A journalist is the slave of her pen. Good morning, Lord de Burgh. I’ll send the boys to you, Katherine.”

“That is an admirable and meritorious woman,” and De Burgh, drawing a chair beside the sofa where Katherine sat. “Why are you so savagely opposed to anything like friendly intercourse with me—so reluctant to let me do anything for you? Do you think I am such a cad as to think that *anything* I could do would entitle me to consider you under an obligation?”

“No, indeed, Lord de Burgh! I believe you to be too true a gentleman for—”

“For what? I see you are afraid of giving me what is called, in the slang of the matrimonial market, encouragement. Just put all that out of your mind, Let me have a little enjoyment, however things may end, and, believe me, I’ll never blame you. I am not going to trouble you with my hopes and wishes, not at least for some time; and then, whatever the upshot, on my head be it.”

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“But I cannot bear to give you pain.”

“Then don’t—”

“Auntie, we are quite clean. Won’t you come back to tea at Miss Payne’s? Do make her come, Lord de Burgh.”

“Ah, it is beyond my powers to make her do anything.”

“I cannot come now, my darlings; but I will be with you about half past six, and we’ll have a game before you go to bed.”

“Come along, boys; we have intruded on your aunt long enough. Don’t forget the circus on Friday, Miss Liddell.”

Another hug from Cis and Charlie, a slight hand pressure from their newly found playfellow, and Katherine was left to her own reflections.

The expedition to the circus was most successful. It was on his way from Wilton Street to call for Katherine, on this occasion, that De Burgh encountered Mrs. Ormonde. Need we say that she lost no time in making the proposed call on her sister-in-law; unfortunately Katherine was out; so Mrs. Ormonde was reduced to writing a requisition for an interview with her boys and their aunt.

This was accordingly planned at Miss Payne’s house, and Mrs. Ormonde was quite charming, playful, affectionate, tearful, repentant, apologetic for “Ormonde,” and deeply moved at parting from her boys, who where somewhat awed by this display of feeling. Still she did not succeed in breaking the “cold chain of silence” which Katherine persisted in “hanging” over the events of the past week.

“So De Burgh took the boys about everywhere?” said Mrs. Ormonde, as Katherine went downstairs with her when she was leaving, and they were alone together. “It is something new for him to play the part of children’s maid; and, do you know, he only left cards on us, and never asked to come in.”

“He was always good-natured,” returned Katherine, with some embarrassment; “and, you remember, he used to notice Cis and Charlie at Castleford a good deal.”

“Yes; after *you* came,” significantly. “Never mind, Katie dear, I am not going to worry you with troublesome questions; but I am sure no one in the world would be more delighted than myself *did* you make a brilliant match.”

“Believe me, there will never be anything brilliant about me, Ada.”

“Well, we’ll see. When do you take the boys to school?

“On Wednesday; should you like to come and see the place?”

“I should like it of all things, but I mustn’t, dear.”

“I do hope the school may prove all I expect; but the change will be bad for Charlie. He had lost nearly all his nervousness; strange teachers and a new system may bring it back.”

“Oh, I hope not. Does he still stop short and speechless, and then laugh as if it were a good joke, when he is puzzled or frightened?”

“Very rarely, I believe. I will write to you the day after I leave the boys at Wandsworth. They don’t like going at all, poor dears.’

“Well, we shall not be much longer in town, I am sorry to say, and I want a few things from Miss Trant before I go. I suppose she will not raise her prices to me?”

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“Oh no, I am sure she will not.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

“MISS BRADLEY AT HOME.”

It was a bleak, blowy day when Katherine took the boys to school, and on returning she went straight to Miss Payne, who had promised to have tea ready for her.

Somewhat to her regret, she found only Bertie Payne, who explained that his sister had been called away about some business connected with a lady with whom she was trying to come to terms respecting her house, which she had now decided on letting.

“And how did you part with the boys?” he asked when he had given her a cup of tea and brought her the most comfortable chair.

“It was very hard to leave them,” returned Katherine, whose eyes looked suspiciously like recently shed tears. “The place did not look half so nice to-day as I thought it was. Everything is rough and ready. The second master, too, is a harsh, severe-looking man. Of course he has not much authority; still, had I seen him, I do not think I should have agreed to send Cis and Charlie there; but now I am committed to a quarter. I cannot afford to indulge whims, and, at all events, they are within an easy distance. Charlie looked so white, and clung to me as if he would never let me go! How hard life is!”

“This portion of it is, and wisely so. We must set our affections on things above. I have been learning this lesson of late as I never thought I should have to learn it.”

“*You*?—you who are so good, so unworldly? Oh, Mr. Payne, what do you mean? You are looking ill and worn.”

“I have been fighting a battle of late,” he returned, with his sweet, patient smile, “and I have conquered. The right road has been shown to me, the right way, and I am determined to walk in it.”

“What are you going to do?” asked Katherine, with a feeling of alarm.

“I am going to take orders, and join the missionary ranks, either in India or China. Work in England was growing too easy—too heavenly sweet—to be any longer saving to my own soul.”

“But Mr. Payne, don’t you see that your own poor country people have the first claim upon you—that you are leaving a work for which you are so wonderfully well suited, in which you are so successful? Oh, do think! Here you leave people of your own race,

whose wants, whose characters you can understand, to run away to creatures of another climate—a different stock—whose natures, in my opinion, unfit them for a faith such as ours, and who never, never will accept our religion!”

“Hush!” cried Payne, in an excited tone. “Do not torture me by showing the appalling gulf which separates us. Strange that a heart so tender as yours to all mere human miseries should yet be adamant against the Saviour’s loving touch. This has been my cruel cross, and my only safety lies in flight, wretched man that I am!”

“I am dreadfully distressed about you, Mr. Payne. Does your sister know? It is really unkind to her.”

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“That must not weigh with me. Even if the right hand offends you, ’cut it off,’ is the command.”

“At all events, you must study, or go though some preparation, before you are ordained, and perhaps in that interval you may change your views. I do hope you will. I should be indeed sorry to lose sight of a true friend like yourself.”

“A friend!” he returned, his brow contracting as if with pain. “You do not know the depths of my selfishness——”

The entrance of Miss Payne interrupted the conversation, and Bertie immediately changing the subject, Katherine understood that he did not as yet intend to speak to his sister of his new plans.

To Miss Payne, Katherine had again to describe her parting with her nephews, and she, in her turn, talked comfortably of her affairs. She thought of going abroad for a short time should she let her house, as nothing very eligible offered in the shape of a young lady to chaperon. Indeed she was somewhat tired of that sort of life, *etc*., *etc*. At length Katherine bade them adieu, and returned to her present abode with a very sad heart.

The parting with her nephews had been a sore trial. The idea of Bertie, her kind friend, whose sympathetic companionship had helped her so much to overcome the poignancy of her first grief for her dear mother, going away to banishment, and perhaps death, at the hands of those whose souls he went to save, caused her the keenest pain; and for nearly a fortnight she had not seen Errington! She could not bring herself to ask where he was, and no one had happened to mention him. This was really better. His absence should be a help to forgetfulness; but somehow it was not. He was so vividly before her eyes; his voice sounded so perpetually in her heart.

Why could she not think thus of De Burgh, whose devotion to her was evident, and whom, in spite of herself as it seemed, she was, to a certain degree, encouraging?

She felt unutterably helpless and oppressed. Moreover, she was distressed by the consciousness that the small reserve fund which she had with difficulty preserved, could barely meet unexpected demands such as removing the boys from school, if necessary, an attack of illness, a dozen contingencies, any or all of which were possible, if not imminent.

Such a mood made her feel peculiarly unfit to shine at Mrs. Needham’s reception. Still it was better to be obliged to talk and to think about others than to brood perpetually on her own troubles. So she arrayed herself in one of the pretty soft grey demi-toilette dresses which remained among her well-stocked wardrobe, and prepared to assist her chief in receiving her guests, who soon flocked in so rapidly as to make separate receptions impossible. Miss Bradley came early, arrayed in white silk and lace with

diamond stars in her coronet of thickly-plaited red hair. She was looking radiantly well —so well and unusually animated that her aspect struck sudden terror into Katherine's heart; something had gladdened her heart to give that expression of joyous softness to her eyes. But it was weak and contemptible to let this sudden fear overmaster her, so she strove to be amused and interested in the conversation of those she knew, and her acquaintance had increased enormously since she came to reside with Mrs. Needham.

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Presently Katherine caught sight of a stately head above the general level of the crowd, and a pair of grave eyes evidently seeking something. Who was Errington looking for? Miss Bradley, of course! As she arrived at this conclusion, De Burgh appeared at the head of the stairs, looking, as he always did, extremely distinguished—his dark strong face showing in remarkable contrast to the simpering young minstrels, pale young poets, and long-haired professors who formed the larger half of the male guests.

“Well, Miss Liddell, are you quite well and flourishing? Why, it is quite three days since I saw you,” he asked, and his eyes dwelt on her with a look of utter restful satisfaction—a look that disturbed her.

“Is it, indeed? They seem all rolled into a single disagreeable one to me.”

“Tell me all about it,” said De Burgh, in a low confidential tone. “Must you stand here in the gangway? it’s awfully hot and crowded.”

Before she could reply, Errington forced his way through the crowd, and addressed her.

“I began to fear I should not find you, Miss Liddell,” he said, with a pleasant smile. “I have been away for some time—though perhaps you were not aware of it.”

“I was aware we did not see you as frequently as usual. Where have you been?”

“On a secret and delicate mission which taxed all my diplomatic skill, for I had to deal with an extremely crotchetty Scotchman.”

“You make me feel desperately curious,” said Katherine, languidly.

“How do you do, Errington?” put in De Burgh. “I heard of you in Edinburgh last week;” and they exchanged a few words. Then, to Katherine’s annoyance, De Burgh said, with an air of proprietorship, “I am going to take Miss Liddell out of this mob, to have tea and air, if we can get any. I have to hear news, too,” he added, significantly.

Errington grew very grave, and drew back immediately with a slight bow, as if he accepted a dismissal.

There was no help for it, so Katherine took De Burgh’s offered arm and went downstairs.

“I wonder what the secret mission could have been?” said Katherine, when they found themselves in the tea-room.

“God knows! I wonder Errington did not go in for diplomacy when he smashed up. He is just the man for protocols, and solemn mysteries, and all that.”

“Men cannot jump into diplomatic appointments, can they?”

“No, I suppose not. I hear some of Errington’s political articles have attracted Lord G ——’s notice; they say he’ll be in Parliament one of these days. Well, he deserves to win, if that sort of thing be worth winning.”

“Of course it is. Have you no ambition, Lord de Burgh? Were I a man, I should be very ambitious.”

“I have no doubt you would; and if you had a husband you’d drive him up the ladder at the bayonet’s point.”

“Poor man! I pity him beforehand.”

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“I don’t,” returned De Burgh, shortly. “Do you know, I have just been dining with Ormonde and his wife, not as their guest, but at Lady Mary Vincent’s. Tell me, hasn’t he behaved rather badly to you? I want to know, because I don’t want to cut him without reason.”

“Pray do not cut him on my account, Lord de Burgh. Colonel Ormonde has very naturally, for a man of his calibre, felt disgusted at my inability to carry out my original arrangements respecting my nephews, and he showed his displeasure, after his kind, with remarkable frankness; but I am not the least angry, and I beg you will make no difference for my sake.”

“If you really wish it—” he paused, and then went on—“Mrs. Ormonde whined a good deal to me in a corner about her affection for you, her hard fate, Ormonde’s brutality, *etc*., *etc*.; she is a *rusee* little devil.”

“Poor Ada! I fancy she has not had a pleasant time of it. Had she been a woman of feeling, it would have been too dreadful....”

“Well, you make your mind easy on that score. Now, what about the boys?”

Katherine was vexed to find how impossible it was to talk of them with composure; she was unhinged in some unaccountable way, and Lord de Burgh’s ill-repressed tenderness made her feel nervous. At length she asked him to come upstairs and look for Mrs. Needham, as her head ached, and she thought she would like to retire if she could be spared.

“Yes, you had better—you don’t seem up to much,” he returned, pressing her hand slightly against his side. “I can’t bear to see you look worried and ill. That’s not a civil speech, I suppose; but, ill or well, you *know* your face is always the sweetest to me, and I am always dying to know what you are thinking of. There, I will not worry you now; but shall you be ‘fit’ for this function on Sunday?”

“Oh, yes, quite.”

“I am obliged to run down to Wales—some matters there want the master’s eye, they tell me—but I shall return Friday or Saturday. By the way, I wish you would introduce me to this wonderful Angela of Mrs. Needham’s.”

“Certainly.”

On entering the drawing-room, the first forms that met their eyes were Errington and Miss Bradley; she was sitting in a large crimson velvet chair, against the back of which Errington was leaning. Angela was looking up at him with a peculiarly happy, absorbed expression, while his head was bent towards her.

“She is deucedly handsome,” said De Burgh, critically, “and much too pleasantly engaged to be interrupted. I can wait.”

“Yes, I think it would be unkind to break in on such a conversation. Oh, here is Mrs. Needham! Do you want me very much, Mrs. Needham? because, if not, I should like to go to bed. I have a tiresome headache.”

“Go by all means, my dear; you are looking like a ghost; they are all talking and amusing each other now, and don’t want you or me.” “Good night, then,” said Katherine, giving her hand to De Burgh, and she glided away.

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“What a lot she takes out of herself!” said De Burgh, looking after her.

“She does indeed,” cried Mrs. Needham; “she is so unselfish. I hate to see her worried. I wonder if he has proposed?” she thought.

“I think he is pretty far gone. Now pray don’t run away just now; Merrydew is going to give one of his musical sketches, and then I want to introduce you to Professor Gypsum. He thinks there ought to be a rich coal seam on your South Wales property; he is a most intelligent, accomplished man.”

“Very well—with pleasure,” said De Burgh, complacently.

It was rather a relief to be quite sure that De Burgh was safe out of the way for a few days. His presence always disturbed her with a mixed sense of pain and self-reproach. He gave her no opening to warn him off, yet she felt that he lost no opportunity of pushing his mines up to the defences; and she liked him—liked him sincerely—always believing there was much undeveloped goodness under his rough exterior.

Sunday came quickly, for the intervening days had been very fully occupied, and thus Katherine had been saved from too much thought of the boys and their possible trials.

It was a soft, lovely spring day. The lilacs and laburnums had put on their ball-dresses for the season, and there was a fresh, youthful feeling in the air. The villa of which Angela was the happy mistress was one of the few old places standing on the edge of the common at Wimbledon, and boasting mossy green lawns, huge cedar trees, and delightful shrubberies, paths leading through a well-disposed patch of plantation, and a fine view from the windows of the deep red-brick mansion, with its copings, window-heads, and pediments of white stone.

Katherine started with a brave determination to throw off dull care and enjoy herself, if possible—why should she not? Life had many sides, and, though the present was gloomy, there was no reason why its clouds should not hide bright sunshine which lay awaiting the future. She had manoeuvred that Mrs. Needham should join an elderly couple of their acquaintance in an open carriage, and so avoided appearing in Lord de Burgh’s elegant equipage.

The grounds were already dotted with gaily dressed groups; for, although there were no formally invited guests, Miss Bradley’s Sundays were largely attended by her extensive circle of acquaintance, and this first Sabbath of really fine spring weather brought a larger number than usual.

“I am glad you put on that pretty black and white dress,” whispered Mrs. Needham, as they alighted and went into the hall. “I see everyone is in their best bibs and tuckers;—-isn’t it a lovely house! Ah! many a poor author’s brain has paid toll to provide all this.”

“I suppose so.”

“Miss Bradley is in the conservatory,” said a polite butler, and into a deliciously fragrant conservatory they were ushered.

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“Very glad to see you, Miss Liddell,” said Angela, kindly, when she had greeted Mrs. Needham. “This is your first visit to the Court. Do you know I wanted to ask you to come down to us for a few days; but, when I looked for you at Mrs. Needham’s the other night, you had vanished, and since I have been so much taken up, as I will explain later, that I have been quite unable to write. I hope you will manage to pay us a visit next week; the air here is most reviving.”

“You are too good, Miss Bradley,” returned Katherine, touched by her kind tone. “If Mrs. Needham can spare me, I shall of course be delighted to come;” and she resolved mentally that she should *not* be spared.

“Major Urquhart,” continued Miss Bradley, turning to a very tall, thin, soldierly-looking man, who might once have been fair, but was now burnt to brickdust hue, with long tawny moustache and thick overhanging eyebrows of the same color, “pray take Miss Liddell round the grounds, and show her my favorite fernery.”

Major Urquhart bowed low and presented his arm.

“I see,” continued Angela, “that Mrs. Needham is already absorbed by a dozen dear friends.”

“You have not been here before,” said Major Urquhart, in a deep hollow voice.

“Never.”

“Charming place! immensely improved since I went to India five years ago.”

“Miss Bradley has great taste,” remarked Katherine.

“Wonderful—astonishing; she has made all this fernery since I was here last.”

Then there was a long pause, and a few more sentences expressive of admiration were exchanged, and somehow Katherine began to feel that her companion was rather bored and preoccupied, so she turned her steps towards the house, intending to release him.

At the further side of the fernery, in a pretty path between green banks, they suddenly met Errington face to face.

“Miss Bradley wants you, Urquhart,” he said, as soon as they had exchanged salutations. “You may leave Miss Liddell in my charge, if she will permit.” Major Urquhart bowed himself off, and Errington continued, “You would not suspect that was a very distinguished officer.”

“I don’t know; he seems very silent and inanimate.”

“Well, I assure you he is a very fine fellow, and did great deeds in the Mutiny. But come, the lawn is looking quite picturesque in the sunshine, with the groups of people scattered about. It would be perfect were it sleeping in the tranquil silence of a restful Sabbath day.”

“Are you not something of a hermit in your tastes?” asked Katherine, looking up at him with one of her sunny smiles.

“By no means. I like the society of my fellow-men, but I like a spell of solitude every now and then, as a rest and refreshment on the dusty road of life.”

“I begin to think peace the greatest boon heaven can bestow.”

“Yes, after the late vicissitudes, it must seem to you the greatest good. Let us sit down under this cedar; there is a pretty peep across the common to the blue distance. We might be a hundred miles from London, everything is so calm.”

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They sat silent for a few moments, a sense of peace and safety stealing over Katherine's heart.

Suddenly Errington turned to her, and said,

"Our friend De Burgh can scarcely know himself in his new condition."

"He seems remarkably at home, however. I hope he will distinguish himself as an enlightened and benevolent legislator."

"He must be a good deal changed if he does. You have seen a great deal of him, I believe, since he returned to London?"

"I have seen him several times. He seems to get on with Mrs. Needham."

"With Mrs. Needham?" repeated Errington, in a slightly mocking tone, and elevating his eyebrows in a way that made Katherine blush for her uncandid remark.

"Well, Mrs. Needham seems to have taken immensely to him."

"I can understand that. De Burgh has wherewithal now to recommend him to most party-giving dowagers."

"That speech is not like you, Mr. Errington; you know my dear good chief is utterly uninfluenced by worldly considerations. Lord de Burgh has been very good and helpful to me with the boys, I assure you," said Katherine, feeling that she changed color under Errington's watchful eyes.

"Yes, I have no doubt he could be boundlessly kind where he wishes to please—more, I think he *is* a generous fellow; but—I am going to be ill-natured," he said, with a slight change of tone, "and, as you have allowed me the privilege of a friend, I must beg you to reflect that De Burgh is a man of imperious temper, given to somewhat reckless seeking of what he desires, and not too steady in his attachments. Though in every sense a man of honor, and by no means without heart, yet I fear as a companion he would be disturbing, if not——"

"Why do you warn me?" cried Katherine, growing somewhat pale. "And what has poor Lord de Burgh done to earn your disapprobation?"

"I know I am somewhat Quixotic and unguarded in speaking thus to you; but it would be affectation to say I did not perceive De Burgh's very natural motive. There is much about him that is attractive to women, apart from his exceptional fortune and position; but I doubt if he could make a woman like you happy. If the ease and luxury he could bestow ever prove tempting, I do not think that anything except sincere affection would enable you to surmount the difficulty of dealing with a character like his."

While Errington spoke with quiet but impressive earnestness, a perverse spirit entered into Katherine Liddell. Here was this man, sailing triumphantly on the crest of good fortune, about to ally himself to a woman, good, certainly, and suited to him, but also rich enough to set him above all care and money troubles, urging counsels of perfection on *her*. Why was she to be advised to reject a man who certainly loved her by one who only felt a temperate and condescending friendship for her? How could he judge what amount of influence De Burgh's affection for herself might give her?

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“I ought to feel deeply grateful to you for overstepping the limits of conventionality in order to give me what is, no doubt, sound advice.”

“Do you mean that as a rebuke?” asked Errington, leaning a little forward to look into her eyes. “Do you not think that a friendship, founded as ours is on most exceptional and unconventional circumstances, gives me a sort of right to speak of matters which may prove of the last importance to you? You cannot realize how deeply interested I am in your welfare, how ardently I desire your happiness.”

The sincerity of his tone thrilled Katherine with pain and pleasure. It was delightful to hear him speak thus, yet it would be better for her never to hear his voice again.

“I daresay I am petulant,” she said, looking down, “and you are generally right; but don’t you think in this case you are looking too far ahead, and attributing motives to Lord de Burgh of which he may be entirely innocent?”

“Of that you are the best judge,” returned Errington, coldly; and silence fell upon them —a silence which Katherine felt to be so awkward that she rose, saying,

“I must find Mrs. Needham; she will wonder where I am;” and, Errington making no objection, they strolled slowly towards the front of the house, where most of the visitors were standing or sitting about.

There they soon discovered Mrs. Needham, in lively conversation with Lord de Burgh, who was a good deal observed by those present as his name and position were well known to almost all of Mrs. Needham’s set. He turned quickly to greet Katherine, and spoke not too cordially to Errington, who after some talk with Mrs. Needham, quietly withdrew, and kept rather closely to Angela’s side.

The rest of the afternoon was spoiled for Katherine by a sense of irritation with Lord de Burgh, who scarcely left her, thereby making her so conspicuous that she could hardly refrain from telling him.

“What is the matter with you?” asked De Burgh, as they walked, together behind Mrs. Needham to the gate where their carriage awaited them. “Do you know you have hardly said a civil word to me—what have I done?”

“You are mistaken! I never meant to be uncivil, I am only tired, and I have rather a headache.”

“You often have headaches. Are you sure the ache is in your *head*?”

“No, I am not,” said Katherine, frankly. “Don’t you know what it is to be out of sorts?”

“Don’t I, though? If that’s what ails you I can understand you well enough. I wish you would let me prescribe for you: a nice long wandering through Switzerland, over some old passes into Italy (they are more delicious than ever, now that they are deserted), and then a winter in Rome.”

“Thank you,” returned Katherine, laughing. “Perhaps you might also recommend horse exercise on an Arab steed.”

“Yes, I should. You would look stunning in a habit.”

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“Dreams, idle dreams, Lord de Burgh. I shall be all right to-morrow.”

“I intend to come and see you if you are,” he returned, significantly.

“To-morrow I shall be out all the afternoon,” said Katherine, quickly.

“Some other day then,” he replied, with resolution.

“Good-morning, Lord de Burgh, or rather good evening, for it is seven o’clock,” said Mrs. Needham. “Charming place, isn’t it?”

“Very nice, indeed. I suppose I have the freedom of the house now, through your favor.”

“Certainly; good-bye, come and see us soon.”

“May I?” he whispered, as he handed Katherine into the carriage.

She smiled and shook her head, looking so sweet and arch that De Burgh could not help pressing her hand hard as he muttered something of which she could only catch the word “mischief.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Needham, when they had left the villa behind, and she had succeeded in wrapping a woollen scarf closely round her throat, for the evening had grown chill, “I knew I was right all along, and now old Bradley himself has as good as told me that Angela is engaged to Errington.”

“Indeed!” said the lady, who shared their conveyance. “What did he say?”

“He was sitting with me on the lawn, and Miss Bradley went past between Errington and that tall military-looking man, who did not seem to know anyone; so I just remarked what a distinguished sort of person Mr. Errington was, and Bradley, looking after him in an exulting sort of way, said, “Distinguished! I believe you. That man, ma-am,” (you know his style) “will be in the front rank before long. I recognized his power from the first, and, what’s more, so did Angela. I am going to give a proof of my confidence in him that will astonish everyone; you’ll hear of it in a week or two.” Now what can that mean but that he is going to trust his daughter to him? You see, Errington is like a son of the house. I am heartily glad, for I have reason to know that he has been greatly attached to her a considerable time, and they are admirably suited.”

“Well! he is a very lucky fellow; independent of all the money Bradley has made, this new magazine of his is a splendid property.”

And Katherine, listening in silence, told herself that one chapter of her life was closed for ever.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ILL MET.

A note from Mrs. Ormonde next morning informed Katherine that she had returned to Castleford, and recorded her deep regret that she could not call before leaving town, but that time was too short, although they had delayed their departure for a couple of days.

“We met Lord de Burgh at Lady Mary Vincent’s; you can’t think what a fuss she made about him. I remember when she would not let him inside her doors. He is older and more abrupt than ever. He told me he was going to meet you at Mrs. Needham’s, and said hers was the only house in London worth going to. I suspect there is great fortune in store for you, Katie, and no friend will rejoice at it more warmly than I shall. Do write and tell me all about everything; it is frightfully dull down here.
“Your ever attached sister,
“ADA.”

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Beyond a passing sensation of annoyance that De Burgh should make a display of his acquaintance with Mrs. Needham and herself, this epistle made no impression on Katherine, who was glad to have an unusual amount of work for Mrs. Needham, who had started—or rather promised her assistance in starting—a new scheme for extracting wax candle out of peat. Respecting this she was immensely sanguine, for the first time in her life she was to be properly remunerated for her trouble, and in a year or two would make her fortune.

The day flew past with welcome rapidity, and in the evening Katherine was swept off to a “first-night representation,” which, though by no means first-rate, helped to draw Katherine out of herself, and helped her to vanquish vain regrets.

“You’ll make a dozen copies of those notes please, dear,” said Mrs. Needham, as she stood dressed to go out after an early luncheon the following day, “and I’ll sign them when I come in; then there is the notice of the play for my Dullertoova letter, and be sure you send those extracts from the *Weekly Review* to Angela Bradley. You know all the rest; if I am not home by seven don’t wait dinner for me.”

Katherine had scarcely settled to her task, when the servant entered to say that Lord De Burgh would be glad to speak to her, as he had a message from Mrs. Needham.

“How strange!” murmured Katherine, adding aloud, “Then show him in.”

“I have just met Mrs. Needham, and she told me to give you this,” said De Burgh, handing a card to Katherine as soon as she had shaken hands with him. It was one of her own cards, and on the back was scribbled,

“Don’t mind the notes.”

“How extraordinary!” cried Katherine. “I thought they were of the last importance. What did she say to you? you must have met her directly she went out!”

“I think I did. I was coming through the narrow part of Kensington, and was stopped by a block; just caught sight of your chief, and jumped out of my cab to have a word with her. She told me I should find you, and gave me that.” De Burgh went on: “So this is the tremendous laboratory where Mrs. Needham forges her thunderbolts,” looking round with some curiosity.

“And where *I* forge *my* thunderbolts, said Katherine, laughing.

“Thunderbolts!” echoed De Burgh, looking keenly at her. “No! where you launch the lightning that either withers or kindles life-giving flames.”

“Really, Lord De Burgh, you are positively poetical! I never dreamed of your developing this faculty when you tried to teach me how to drive at Castleford.”

“No! it did not exist then—now I want to tell you of the cause of its growth, you have silenced me often enough. To-day I will speak, Katherine.”

“If you please, ’m—there’s twopence to pay,” said the demure Ford, advancing with a letter.

Half amused and partly relieved by the interruption, Katherine sought for and produced the requisite coin, and then took the letter with a look of some anxiety.

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“It is my own writing,” she said, “it is one of the envelopes I left with Cis.” Opening it and glancing at the contents her color rose, and her bosom heaved. “Oh! do look at this,” she cried.

De Burgh rose and read over her shoulder.

“DEAR AUNTIE,

“I hope you are quite well. We have had a dreadful row! Charlie could not say his lesson, so Mr. Sells roared at him like a bull. Charlie got into one of his fits, you know, and then he burst out laughing. Mr. Sells went into such a rage; he laid hold of him and whipped him all over, and I ran to break the cane. I hit his nose with my head so hard that the blood came. I was glad to see the blood; then they locked us both up. I have no stamp. Do come and take us away, do do do!

“Your loving,
“CIS.”

“P.S.—If you don’t come we’ll run away to the gipsies on the common.”

“The scoundrel! I’ll go and thrash him within an inch of his life!” cried De Burgh, when they had finished this epistle.

“I should like to do it myself,” said Katherine in a low fierce tone, starting up and crushing the letter in an angry grip.

“By Jove! I wish you could, I fancy you’d punish him pretty severely,” returned De Burgh admiringly.

“I must go—go at once,” continued Katherine, her lips trembling, her lustrous eyes filling. “Think of the tender, fragile, sweet boy—who is an angel in nature—beaten by a *dog* like that! Lord de Burgh, I must leave you, I must go at once.”

“Yes, of course,” said De Burgh, standing between her and the door; “but not alone. May I come with you?”

Katherine paused, and put her hand to her head.

“No, I think you had better not.”

“I will do whatever you like. Take Miss Payne with you—she is a shrewd woman—and consult with her what you had better do. Shall you remove the boys?”

She paused again before replying, looking rapidly, despairingly round. These changes had cost her a good deal, and she had not much to go on with unless she broke into the deposit which she hoped to preserve intact for a long time to come.

“I do not know where to put them,” she said, and there was a sound of tears in her voice.

“You can do whatever you choose,” said De Burgh, emphatically, “only, while you are driving down to this confounded place, make up your mind what to do. I wish you would feel yourself free to do anything or pay anything. While you are dressing, I will go round to Miss Payne and bring her back with me; then you must take my carriage, it will save time; and don’t exaggerate the effects of this whipping, a few impatient cuts with a cane over his jacket would not hurt him much.”

“Hurt him, no; crush and terrify him, yes. It will be months before he can forget it; and I told the head master of Charlie’s peculiarly nervous temperament—this man seems to be an assistant. I will take your advice, Lord de Burgh, and make some plan with Miss Payne. I hope she will be able to come.”

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“She must—she shall,” cried De Burgh, impetuously, and he hastily left the room.

By the time Katherine had put on her out-door dress, and written an explanatory line to Mrs. Needham, De Burgh returned with Miss Payne.

“You must tell me all about it as we go along,” said that lady, as Katherine took her place beside her, “and you must do nothing rash.”

“Oh no, if I can only prevent a recurrence of such a scene. I am most grateful to you for your kind help, Lord de Burgh. I will let you know how things are settled.”

“Thank you. I shall be glad of a line; but I shall call to-morrow to hear a full and true account. Now, what’s the name of the place?”

“Birch Grove, Wandsworth Common.”

De Burgh gave the necessary directions, and the big black horse tossed up his head, and dashed off at swift trot. Deep was the discussion which ensued, and which ended in deciding that they would be guided by circumstances.

The arrival of Miss Liddell was evidently most unexpected. She and her companion were shown into the guest-parlor, where, after a while, Mr. Lockwood, the principal, made his appearance.

“This is an unexpected pleasure, Miss Liddell. May I ask the reason of your visit?”

Whereupon Katherine spoke more temperately than Miss Payne expected, describing Cecil’s letter, and reminding him that she had fully explained Charlie’s nervous weakness, and stating that, if she could not be assured such treatment should not occur again, she must remove the boy.

The ‘dominie,’ apparently touched by her tone, answered with equal frankness. He had been called away by unavoidable business at the beginning of the term, and had forgotten to warn his assistant respecting Liddell minor. He regretted the incident; indeed, he had intended to inform Miss Liddell of the unfortunate occurrence, but extreme occupation must plead his excuse. Miss Liddell might be sure that it should never happen again; indeed, her nephews were very promising boys—the youngest a little young for his school, but it was all the better for him to be accustomed to a higher standard. He hoped, now that this unpleasantness was over, all would go on well.

“I hope so, Mr. Lockwood,” returned Katherine; “but should my nephew be again punished for what he cannot help, I shall immediately remove him and his brother.”

“So I understand, madam,” said the schoolmaster, who was visibly much annoyed by the whole affair. “I presume you would like to see the boys?”

“Yes, certainly. Will you be so good as to grant them a half-holiday?”

This was agreed to, and in a few minutes Cis and Charlie were hanging round their aunt.

“Oh, auntie dear, have you come to take us away?”

“No, dears, but I have talked to Mr. Lockwood;” and she explained the fact that Mr. Sells did not know that Charlie’s laughter was involuntary.

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The poor little fellow did not complain of his aunt's decision; he just laid his head on her shoulders and cried silently. This was worse than any other line of conduct. Cis declared his intention of running away forthwith; however, when matters were laid before him and the joys of a half-holiday set forth, he consented to try 'old Sells' a little longer, and then Katherine took them back to Wilton Street, where they spent a quiet happy afternoon with their aunt, to whom they poured out their hearts, and were finally taken back by the polite Francois.

"You are the kindest of much enduring employers," said Katherine, gratefully, when she joined Mrs. Needham at dinner. "I earnestly hope my sudden desertion has not inconvenienced you. Now I am ready to work far into the night to make up for lost time."

"Oh, you need not do that; I changed my plans after I met Lord de Burgh, and came home to write here. Now tell me all about those poor dears and that brute of a master."

The excitement of this expedition over, Katherine felt rather depressed and nervous the next morning. She dreaded Lord de Burgh's visit, yet did not absolutely wish to avoid it. It was due to him that the sort of probation which he had voluntarily instituted should come to an end. She could not allow herself to be made conspicuous by the constant attentions of a man who was known to be about the best match in London, yet she was genuinely sorry to lose him—as a friend he had been so kind and thoughtful about the boys too! Well, she would be frank and sympathetic, and soften her refusal as much as possible. How she wished it were over, she found writing an impossible task, and Mrs. Needham, noticing her restlessness, observed, with a grave smile,

"I expect you will have some very good news for me this afternoon! I am going out to luncheon."

"No, dear Mrs. Needham, I do not think I shall," returned Katherine. "I fear——"

"Lord de Burgh is in the drawing room," said the parlor-maid.

"Go, Katherine," cried Mrs. Needham; "and don't tell me there is any doubt about your having good news! You deserve bread and water for the rest of your natural life if you don't take the goods the gods provide."

Katherine hesitated, smiled miserably, and left the room.

"Well, and how did you find the poor little chap?" were De Burgh's first words. "There's nothing wrong, I hope?—you look as white as a ghost, and your hand is quite cold;" placing his left on it, as it lay in his grasp. "The boys are well?"

"Yes, quite well, and reconciled with some difficulty to remain where they are," she returned, disengaging herself and sinking rather than sitting down into a corner of a sofa nearest her.

“Then what has upset you? I suppose,” softening his voice, “the whole thing was too much for you.”

“I daresay I excited myself more than I need have done, but I think my little Charlie is safe for the future.”

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“Do you know that it makes me half mad to see that look of distress in your eyes, to see the color fading out of your cheeks! Katherine, I can’t hold my tongue any longer. I thought I was far gone when I used to count the days between my visits to Sandbourne; I am a good deal worse now that you have let me be a sort of chum! Life without you is something I don’t care to face, I don’t indeed! Why don’t you make up your mind to take me for better for worse? I’ll try to be all better; just think how happy we might be! Those boys should have the best training money or care could get; and, Katherine, I’m not a bad fellow! Now you know me better, you must feel that I should never be a bad fellow to *you*.”

“You are a very good fellow, Lord de Burgh, that I quite believe; but (it pains me so much to say it) I really do not love you as I ought, and, unless I do love I dare not marry.”

“Why not?—that is, if you don’t love some other fellow. Will you tell me if any man stands in my way?”

“No, indeed, Lord de Burgh; who could I love?”

“That is impossible to say; however, your word is enough. If your heart is free, why not let me try to win it? and the opportunities afforded by matrimony are endless; you are the sort of woman who would be faithful to whatever you undertook, and when you saw me day by day living for you, and you only, you’d grow to love me! Just think of the boys running wild at Pont-y garvan in the holidays, and——By heaven, my head reels with such a dream of happiness.”

“I am a wretch, I know,” said Katherine, the tears in her eyes, her voice breaking; “but I know myself. I am a very lawless individual, and—you had better not urge me.”

“What is your objection to me? I haven’t been a saint, but I have never done anything I am ashamed of. Why do you shrink from life with me? Come, cast your doubts to the winds, and give me your sweet self. There is no one to love you as I do, and I swear your life shall be a summer holiday.”

His words struck her with sudden conviction. It was true there was no one to love her as he did, and what a tower of refuge he would be to the boys! Why should she not think of him? He had been very true to her. Why should she not drive out the haunting image of the man who did not love her by the living presence of the man who did? But, if she accepted him, she must confess her crime; she could not keep such an act hidden from the man who was ready to give his life to her. How awful this would be! And he might reject her; then her fate would be decided for her. Lord de Burgh saw that she hesitated, and pressed her eagerly for a decision.

“You deserve so much gratitude for your kindness, your faithfulness, that—ah! do let me think,” covering up her face with her hands. “It is such a tremendous matter to decide.”

“Yes, of course, you shall think as much as ever you like,” cried De Burgh, rapturously, telling himself “that she who deliberates is lost.” “Take your own time, only don’t say *no*,” ferociously. “Reflect on the immense happiness you can bestow, the good you can do. Why do you shiver, my darling? If you wish it, I’ll go now this moment, and I’ll not show my face till—till the day after to-morrow, if you like.”

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“The day after to-morrow? that is but a short space to decide so momentous a question.”

“If you can’t make up your mind in twenty-four hours, neither can you in two hundred and forty. I don’t want to hurry you, but you must have some consideration for me; imagine my state of mind. Why, I’ll be on the rack till we meet again. I fancy a conscientious woman is about the cruellest creature that walks! However, I’ll stick to my promise: I will not intrude on you till the day after to-morrow. Then I will come at eleven o’clock for your answer; and, Katherine, my love, my life, it must be ‘yes.’”

He took and kissed her hand more than once, then he went swiftly away.

The hours which succeeded were painfully agitated. Katherine felt that De Burgh had every right to consider himself virtually accepted. She liked him—yes, certainly she liked him, and might have loved him, but for her irresistible, unreasonable, unmaidenly attachment to Errington. If she made up her mind to marry him, that would fill her heart and relieve it from the dull aching which had strained it so long; once a wife, she would never give a thought save to her own husband, but, before she reached the profound and death-like peace of such a position, she must tell her story to De Burgh—and how would he take it? With all his ruggedness, he had a keen and delicate sense of honor; still she felt his passion for her would overcome all obstacles for the time, but how would it be afterwards, when they had settled down to the routine of every-day life? It would be a tremendous experiment, but she could not let him enter on that close union in ignorance of the blot on her scutcheon, and then the door would be closed on the earlier half of her life, which had been so bitter-sweet. How little peace she had known since her mother’s death! how heavenly sweet her life had been when she knew no deeper care than to shield that dear mother from anxiety and trouble! and now there was no one belonging to her on whose wisdom and strength she had a right to rely. Perhaps, after all, it might be better to accept De Burgh, and end her uncertainties. Though by no means given to weeping, Katherine could not recover composure until after the relief of a copious flood of tears.

“Well, dear!” cried Mrs. Needham, when they were left together after dinner, “I am just bursting with curiosity. What news have you for me? and what have you been doing with yourself? You look ghastly, and I positively believe you have been crying. What have you done? I can’t believe that you have refused Lord de Burgh—you couldn’t be such a madwoman! Why you might lead——”

“How do you know he gave me an opportunity?” interrupted Katherine, with a faint smile.

“Don’t talk like that, dear!” said Mrs. Needham, severely. “What would bring Lord de Burgh here day after day but trying to win you? I have been waiting for what I knew was inevitable; now, Katherine, tell me, have you rejected him?”

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“No, Mrs. Needham, I have asked him for time to reflect.”

“Oh, that is all right,” in a tone of satisfaction, “and only means a turn of the rack while you can handle the screws; of course you’ll accept him when he comes again. After all, though there are plenty of unhappy marriages, there is no joy so delightful as reciprocal affection. I am sure I never saw a creature so glorified by love as Angela Bradley; she told me at Mrs. Cochrane’s she had a wonderful piece of news for me, and, when I said perhaps I knew it, she beamed all over and squeezed my hand as she whispered, “Perhaps you do!” I saw her driving Errington in her pony-carriage afterwards, and meeting old Captain Everard just then, he nodded after them and said, ’That’s an excellent arrangement; the wedding, I hear, is fixed for the twenty-ninth of next month.’ Now, I don’t quite believe *that*; Angela would certainly have told me, but I am sure it will come off soon. I am glad for both their sakes.”

“I am sure they will make a very happy couple, and I really believe I shall follow their example.”

“Quite right! The double event will make a sensation, my dear child: to see *you* happily and splendidly settled will be the greatest joy I have known for years, and what will Colonel Ormonde say?”

“I neither know nor care; and, Mrs. Needham, if you don’t mind, I will go to bed. I have *such* a headache.”

The fateful morning found Katherine resolved and composed.

She would tell De Burgh everything, and, if her revelation did not frighten him away, she would try to make him happy and to be happy herself. It would be painful to tell him, but oh! nothing compared with the agony of humiliation it cost her to prostrate herself morally before Errington. Still she would be glad when the confession was over; afterwards, feeling her destiny decided, she would be calmer and more resigned. Resigned? what a term to apply to her acceptance of an honest man’s hearty affection; for, whatever De Burgh’s life may have been, he had said he had done nothing he was ashamed of. By some unconscious impulse she dressed herself in black, and went down to the drawing-room with her knitting, that she might be ready to receive the man who, an hour later, might be her affianced husband.

On the stairs she met Ford, who informed her that Miss Trant was waiting for her. Katherine felt glad of any interruption to her thoughts, especially as she knew that the arrival of a visitor would be the signal for Rachel’s departure.

“I am so glad to see you,” exclaimed Katherine, “but how is it you have escaped so early?”

“I have been to the City to buy goods, and came round here to have a peep at you, for Miss Payne told me yesterday of your trouble about the boys.”

“How early you are! why, it is scarcely eleven. Yes, (sit down for a moment,) yes, I was dreadfully angry and upset;” and Katherine proceeded to describe Cecil’s letter, and her visit to the school.

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“I wish you could take them away,” said Rachel, thoughtfully.

“Perhaps, later on, I may be able, but I do not think there is any chance that poor Charlie will be punished again. He is never really naughty, but he has had a great shock.”

“So have you, I imagine, to judge from your looks.”

“Do I look shocked? And how have you been? It is so long since I was able to go and see you.”

“I have been, and am very well—very busy, and really succeeding. I have opened a banking account, and feel very proud of my cheque-book. Do you know that Mr. Newton has advanced me two hundred pounds? Just now it is worth a thousand, it lifts me over the waiting time. I have sent in my quarter’s accounts, and in a month the payments will begin to come in. I’ll make a good business yet.”

“I believe you will.”

“What a pretty room!” said Rachel, looking round. “How nice it is to know you are comfortable; by the time you are tired of your secretaryship, I hope to have a nice little sum laid by for you.”

“What a wonderful woman of business you are, Rachel,” said Katherine, admiringly.

“I ought to be! It is the only thing left to me, and I am thankful to say I get more and more——” she stopped, for the door opened and Lord de Burgh was announced.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

REPULSION.

Rachel started from her seat and stood facing the door. Her cheek flushed crimson, then grew deadly white, her lips parted as if she breathed with difficulty.

De Burgh, the moment his eyes fell on her, stopped as if suddenly arrested by an invisible hand; his eyes expressed horror and surprise, his dark face grew darker. Rachel quickly recovered. “I will call again,” she murmured, and passing him swiftly, noiselessly, left the room, closing the door behind her.

Like a flash of lightning, the meaning of this scene darted through Katherine’s brain. Clasping her hands with interlaced fingers, she pressed them against her breast.

“Ah!” she exclaimed (there was infinite pain in that “ah!”) “then *you* are the man?”

“What do you mean?” asked De Burgh, in a sullen tone, his thick brows almost meeting in a frown.

“The man she loved and lived with,” returned Katherine, the words were low and clear.

“I am!” he replied, defiantly. Then a dreadful silence fell upon them.

Katherine dropped into a chair, and, resting her elbows on the table, covered her face with her hands.

“My God!” exclaimed De Burgh, advancing a step nearer. “How does she come here?”

Katherine could not speak for a moment; at last, and still covering her eyes and with a low quick utterance as if overwhelmed, she said,

“I have known her for some time. I found her dying of despair! I was able to befriend her, to win her back to life, to something like hope. She told me everything, except the name. We have ceased to speak of the past! I little knew, I could not have dreamed—I never suspected;” her voice broke, and she burst into tears, irresistible tears which she struggled vainly to repress.

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“Why should you *not* suspect me!” exclaimed De Burgh, harshly. “Did you suppose me above or below other men?”

“Ah! poor Rachel! what a flood of unspeakable bitterness must have overwhelmed her, to find *you* here!”

De Burgh paced to and fro, bewildered, furious, not knowing how to defend himself or what to say.

“I am the most unfortunate devil that ever breathed!” he exclaimed at last, pausing beside the table and resting one hand on it. “Look here, Katherine, how can a girl like you—for, in spite of your mature airs, you are a mere girl—how can you judge the—the temptations and ways of a world of which you know nothing?”

“Temptations!” she murmured; “did Rachel ask *you* to take her to live with you?”

“No, of course not,” angrily, “she is rather a superior creature, I admit; but I deny that I ever deceived or deserted her! She was perfectly aware I never Intended to marry her, and I was awfully put out when she disappeared. I did my best to find her. But the fact is, when she did *not* reappear, I not unnaturally supposed she had gone off with some other man.”

Katherine looked upon him suddenly with such tragic, horrified eyes that De Burgh was startled; then she slightly raised her hands with an expressive gesture, again covering her face.

“Yes, yes,” De Burgh went on, impatiently, “I see you think me a brute for suspecting her capable of such a thing, but how was I to know she was different from others? It is too infernally provoking that such an affair should came to your notice! You are quite unable to judge fairly;” and he resumed his agitated walk. “I swear I am no worse than my neighbors. Ask any woman of the world, ask Mrs. Needham—they will tell you I am not an unpardonable sinner! I will do anything on earth for Rachel that you think right. Just remember her position and mine, it was not as if—It is impossible to explain to you, but there was no reason, had she been a little sensible, why such an episode should have spoiled her life! Lots of women—” he stopped, and with a muttered curse paused opposite her.

“And *could* you have been her companion so long, without perceiving the strength and pride and tenderness of the woman who gave up all hoping to keep the love you no doubt ardently expressed? Ah! if you could have seen her as she was when I found her!”

“How was I to know she was staking her gold against my counters?” returned De Burgh, obstinately, though a dark flush passed over his face at Katherine’s words.

“Lord de Burgh! I did not think you could be so cruel,” cried Katherine, rising. “I will not speak to you any longer.”

“Cruel!” he exclaimed, placing himself between her and the door. “How can I be just or generous, when this most unfortunate encounter has put me in such a hopeless position? Katherine, will you let this miserable mistake of the past rob me of my best hopes, my most ardently cherished desires——”

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“It is but two or three years since you spoke in the same tone, possibly the same words, to Rachel! At least, knowing her as I do, I feel sure she would have yielded to no common amount of persuasion. She was mad, weak to a degree to listen to you; but she was alone, and love is so sweet.”

“It is,” cried De Burgh, passionately. “Why will you turn from love as true, as intense as ever was offered to woman, merely because I let myself fall into an error but too common—”

“Is it not a mere accident of our respective positions that you happen to seek me as your *wife*?” said Katherine, a slight curl on her lip; “and how can I feel sure that in time you will not weary of me as you did of her?”

“The cases are utterly unlike. So long as the world lasts, men and women too will act as Rachel Trant and I did; Nature is too strong for social laws and religious maxims.”

“And you said you had never done anything to be ashamed of?” she exclaimed, bitterly.

“Nor have I!” said De Burgh, stoutly, “if I were tried by the standard of our world. How can you know—how can you judge?”

“I do not judge, I have no right to judge,” said Katherine, brokenly. “I only know that, when I saw your eyes meet Rachel’s I felt a great gulf had suddenly opened between us, a gulf that cannot be bridged. I do not understand and cannot judge, as you say, and I am sorry for you too; but if life is to be this miserable shuffling of chances, this jumble of injustice, I would rather die than live. No, Lord de Burgh, I *will* go.”

“Good Heavens! Katherine, you are trembling; you can hardly stand. I am a brute to keep you; but I cannot help clutching my only chance of happiness. You are an angel! Dispose of me as you will; but in mercy give me some hope. I’ll wait; I’ll do anything.”

“Oh, no, no. It is impossible. I am so fond of *her*; and you will find many to whom your past will be nothing; for me it is irrevocable. The world seems intolerable; let me go;” and she burst into such bitter sobs that her whole frame shook.

“I must not keep you now; but I shall *not* give you up. I will write. Oh, Katherine, you would not destroy me!” He seized and passionately kissed her hand, which she tore from him, and fled from the room.

When Rachel Trant escaped from the presence of her dearest friend and her ex-lover, she could scarcely see or stand. Thankful not to meet anyone, she hastily left the house, and, somewhat revived by the air, she made her way to a secluded part of the Kensington Gardens. Here she found a seat, and, still palpitating with the shock she had sustained, strove to reduce the chaotic whirl of her thoughts to something like order.

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She divined by instinct why De Burgh was at Mrs. Needham's. She knew, how she could not tell, that he was seeking Katherine as eagerly as he had sought herself; but with what a different object! The sight of De Burgh was as the thrust of a poisoned dagger through the delicate veins and articulations of her moral system. To see the dark face and sombre eyes she had loved so passionately—had!—still loved!—was almost physical agony. It was as if some beloved form had been brought back from another world, but animated by a spirit that knew her not, regarded her not at all. Oh, the bitterness of such an estrangement, of this expulsion from the paradise of warmth and tenderness where she had been cherished for a while—a heavenly place which should know her no more.

"I brought it all upon myself," was the sentence of her strong stern sense. "Losing self-respect, what hold can any woman have upon a lover?—yet how many men are faithful even to death without the legal tie! I do not love him now, but how fondly, how intensely I loved the man I thought he was! Oh, fool, fool, fool, to believe that I could ever tighten my hold upon a man who had gained all he wished unconditionally! I have deserved all—all."

Yet she had no hatred against the real De Burgh, neither had she any angelic desire to forgive him, or to do him good or convert him; what he was now, he would ever be. He might even make a fairly good husband. The episode of his connection with herself would in no way interfere with *his* moral harmony. But he was not worthy of Katherine; no unbreakable tie would make him more constant; and, though his faithlessness could not touch her social position, he might crush her heart all the same. Rachel was far too human, too passionate, not to shrink with unutterable pain from the idea of this man's entrancing love being lavished on another, yet her true, devoted affection for her benefactress remained untouched. Katherine stood before everything. Rachel did not wish to injure De Burgh—her heart had simply grown strong, and she would not hesitate for a moment to save Katherine from trouble at any cost to him.

What then should she do?—continue to withhold the name of the man of whom she had so often spoken, or let Katherine know the whole truth and judge for herself? If she decided on the latter, it would break up her friendship with Katherine, and De Burgh would attribute her action to revenge. Should that deter her? No; so long as she was sure of herself, what were opinions to her? The one thing in life to which she clung now was Katherine's affection and esteem; for her she would sacrifice much, but she would not flatter her into a fool's paradise of trust and wedded love with De Burgh by concealing anything, neither would she counsel her against the desperate experiment, should she be inclined to risk it. He might be a very different man to a wife.

A certain amount of composure came to her with decision, though a second death seemed to have laid its icy hand upon her heart; she rose and made her way towards her own abode, determining to await a visit or some communication from Katherine before she touched the poisoned tract which lay between them.

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Rachel had scarcely reached the Broad Walk when she was accosted by a little girl, who ran towards her, calling loudly,

“Miss Trant, Miss Trant, don’t you know me?”

She was a slight, willowy creature with black eyes, profuse dark hair, and sallow complexion. Her dress was costly, though simple, and she was followed at a more sober pace by a lady-like but foreign-looking girl, apparently her governess.

“Well, Miss Liddell, are you taking a morning walk?” asked Rachel, as the child took her hand.

“I am going to see papa. I am to have dinner with him. He has a bad cold, and he sent for me.”

“Then you must cheer him up, and tell him what you have been learning.”

“I haven’t learnt much yet; it is so tiresome.”

“Come, Mademoiselle Marie, you must not tease Miss Trant,” said the foreign-looking lady, whom Rachel recognized as one of the governesses who sometimes escorted George Liddell’s daughter “to be tried on.”

“She does not tease me,” returned Rachel, who had rather taken a fancy to the child.

“Won’t you come and see papa with me?” continued the little heiress. “I wish you would, and he will tell you to make me another pretty frock—I love pretty frocks.”

“Not to-day; I must go home and make frocks for other people.”

“Then I will bring him to see you—I will, I will; he does whatever I like. Good-bye,” springing up to kiss her. “I may come and see you soon?”

“Whenever you like, my dear,” said Rachel, feeling strangely comforted by the child’s warm kisses; and they parted, going in different directions, to meet again soon.

Mrs. Needham had been sorely tried on that fatal day when De Burgh had suddenly departed, after a comparatively short interval, and Katherine had disappeared into the depths of her own room.

She had anticipated entertaining the bridegroom-elect at luncheon, and had ordered lobster-cream and an *epigramme d’agneau a la Russe* as suitable delicacies; she expected confidential consultation and delightful plans; she had even speculated on so managing that the double event:—Angela Bradley’s marriage with Errington and Katherine’s with Lord de Burgh,—might come off on the same day, even in the same

church: that would be a culmination of excitement! Now some mysterious blight had fallen on all her schemes. What had happened? What could they have quarrelled about? Then when Katherine emerged from her refuge she was hopelessly mysterious; there was no penetrating the reserve in which she wrapped herself.

“There is no one in whom I should more readily confide than in you, dear Mrs. Needham, but a serious difference *has arisen* between Lord de Burgh and myself, respecting which I cannot speak to *anyone*. I regret being obliged to keep it to myself, but I must.”

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“My dear, if you adopt that tone I have nothing more to say, but it is horribly provoking and disappointing. I am quite sure people began to expect it—that you would marry Lord de Burgh, I mean, and what a position you have thrown away. You can’t expect a man like him to be a saint. There is no use trying men by our standard; in short, it’s not much matter what standard we have, we must always come down a step or two if we mean to make both ends meet; but you see, when a man has money and right principles, he can atone for a lot.”

Katherine gazed at her astonished. How was it that she had found the scent which led so near the real track?

“No money,” she said, gravely, “could in any way affect the matters in dispute between Lord de Burgh and myself, so I will not speak any more on the subject. It has all been very painful, and the worst part is that I cannot tell you.”

“Well, it must be bad,” observed Mrs. Needham, in a complaining tone, “but I suppose I must just hold my tongue.”

So Katherine was left in comparative peace. But it was a hard passage to her; she could not shake off the sickening sense of wrong and sorrow, the painful consciousness of being humiliated which the revelation inflicted on her, the feeling that she was, in some inexplicable way, touched by the evil-doing of those who were so near her.

A slight cold, caught she knew not how, aggravated the fever induced by distress of mind, and next day Mrs. Needham thought her so unwell that she insisted on sending for the doctor, who condemned Katherine to her bed, a composing draught, and solitude.

The doctor, however, could not forbid letters, and Katherine’s seclusion was much disturbed by a long, rambling, impassioned epistle from De Burgh, in which, though he promised not to intrude upon her at present, he refused to give up all hope, as he could not believe that she would always maintain her present exaggerated and unreasonable frame of mind—a letter that did him no good in Katherine’s estimation. Then she tried to resume her work. But Mrs. Needham, returning from one of her “rapid acts” of inspection and negotiation in and out divers and sundry warehouses, dismissed her peremptorily to lie down on the sofa in the drawing-room, in reality to get her out of the way, as she was expecting a visit from Miss Payne, with whom she wanted a little private conversation.

“Can you throw any light on this mysterious quarrel between Katherine and Lord de Burgh?” she asked, abruptly, as soon as Miss Payne was seated in the study.

“Quarrel? have they quarrelled? I know nothing about it. When did they quarrel?”

“About three days ago. He came here to propose for her, I know he did, they were talking together for—oh!—barely a quarter-of-an-hour in the drawing-room, when I heard her fly up stairs, and he rushed away, slamming the door as if he would take the front of the house out. Katherine has never been herself since. It is my firm belief she is strongly attached to him,—what do you think?”

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“I don’t know what to think; they were very good friends, but I do not think Katherine was in love with him. She is a curious girl. I often am tempted to fancy she has something on her mind.”

“Nonsense, my dear Miss Payne. I never met a finer, truer nature than Katherine Liddell’s,” cried Mrs. Needham, an affectionate smile lighting up her handsome, kindly face. “The worst of it is, I do not know whom to blame, and Katherine has put me on honor not to ask her.”

“I cannot help you,” said Miss Payne; and she fell into a thoughtful silence, while Mrs. Needham watched her eagerly.

“I am going away for a few weeks,” resumed Miss Payne. “I have let my house, and I shall go to Sandbourne; the weather seems settled, and it will be pleasant there. If you can spare her, I will ask Katherine to come with me, she liked the place, and perhaps in the intimacy of every-day life she may tell me what happened; but, remember, *I’ll* not tell you unless she gives me leave.”

“No, no, of course not; but I am sure she would trust *me* as soon as anyone.’

“Very likely. It will just depend upon who is near her when she is in a confidential mood.”

“Perhaps. I am sure it would do her good; and Sandbourne is not far. If De Burgh wants to make it up, he can easily run down there.”

“Yes, he knows his way. I am not sure that he is the right man, though,” said Miss Payne, reflectively; “he is too ready to ride rough-shod over everyone and everything.”

“Do you think so? I must say I thought him a delightful person, so natural and good-natured.”

“Well, let me go and see Katherine. I am anxious to take her away with me.”

Katherine was most willing to accept Miss Payne’s proposition. She was soothed and gratified by the thoughtful kindness shown her by both her friends, and anxious to refresh her mind and recruit her strength before taking up her life again.

“You are so good to think of taking me with you,” she cried, when Miss Payne ceased speaking. “I should like greatly to go, if Mrs. Needham can spare me.”

“Of course I can. You will come back a better secretary than ever,” exclaimed that lady, cheerfully. “I will try to run down and see you some Saturday. It is rather a new place, this Sandbourne, isn’t it?”

“Yes; it is not crowded yet.”

“When do you go down there?”

“On Saturday afternoon,” returned Miss Payne. “I have taken rooms at Marine Cottage; you know, it is at the end of the parade, near an old house.”

“Yes, quite well; it is a nice little place.”

“I will write to secure another bedroom; and let us meet at the station on Saturday. I go by the 2.50 train.” A few more preliminaries and the affair was settled.

Previous to leaving town, however, Katherine felt she must see Rachel Trant, though she half dreaded meeting her. It must have been an awful blow to meet De Burgh as she did. Would she divine what brought him there? Katherine felt she had been cold and remiss in having kept silence towards her friend so long, and, when Miss Payne left, she walked with her across the park to Rachel’s abode, in spite of Mrs. Needham’s assurances that it would be too much for her, and retard the recovery of her nervous forces, *etc*., *etc*.

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Katherine was not kept long waiting in the neat little back parlor, which was Miss Trant's private room. Rachel came to her looking very white, while she breathed quickly. She paused just within the door, in a hesitating, uncertain way, which seemed to Katherine very pathetic.

"Oh! Rachel," she cried, her soft brown eyes suffused with tears as she tenderly kissed her brow, "I know everything, and—I will never see him again."

"He is not all bad," said Rachel, in a low tone, as she clasped Katherine's hand in both her own.

"No, I am sure he is not; but he has passed out of our lives; let us speak of him no more."

"I should be glad not to do so; but he has written me a letter I should like you to see. He seems grieved for the past and makes munificent offers."

"I should rather not see it, Rachel. I want to forget. Did you reply?"

"I did, very gravely, very shortly. I told him I wanted nothing, that the best friend I ever had had put me in the way perhaps to make my fortune, and—and, dearest Miss Liddell, if you care for——"

"But I do not, I did not," interrupted Katherine. "Oh! thank God I do not. How could I have borne what has come to my knowledge if I did? Now, let the past bury its dead."

"Is it not amazing that we should be so strangely linked together?" murmured Rachel.

Katherine made no reply. After a short silence, as if they stood by a still open grave, Katherine began to speak of her intended visit to Miss Payne, and before they parted, though both were hushed and grave, they had glided into their usual confidential, affectionate tone. Business, however, was not mentioned.

"I wish you could see your cousin's little daughter," said Rachel, rather abruptly, as Katherine rose to bid her good-bye. "She's an interesting, naughty little creature, small of her age, but in some ways precocious. I am fond of her, partly, I suppose, because she likes me. There is something familiar to me in her face, yet I cannot say that she actually resembles anyone."

"I should like to see her," returned Katherine; and soon after she left her friend, relieved and calmed by the feeling that the explanation was over.

"Well, my dear," cried Mrs. Needham, when they met at dinner. "I have a great piece of news for you: Mr. Errington is to be the new editor of *The Cycle*. A capital thing for him! and that accounts for the announcement of the marriage being held back, just to let

people get accustomed to the first start. It shows what Bradley thinks of him. It is really a grand triumph to get such an appointment after so short an apprenticeship."

"I am glad of it, very glad," returned Katherine, thoughtfully. "I suppose he is considered very clever."

"A first-rate man, quite first-rate, for all serious tough subjects. I think, dear, if I could run down on Saturday week till Monday it would be an immense refreshment;" and Mrs. Needham wandered off into the discussion of a variety of schemes.

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On the Saturday following, Katherine and her faithful chaperon set out for their holiday with mutual satisfaction and a hope that they left their troubles behind them.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

RECONCILIATION.

The change to Sandbourne did Katherine good; she grew calmer, more resigned, though still profoundly sad. The sense of having been brought in touch with one of the most cruel problems of society affected her deeply, and the contrast between the present and past of a year ago, when she had the boys with her, forced her to review her mental conditions since the great change in her fortunes wrought by her own act.

She had ample time for thought. Miss Payne was suffering from touches of rheumatism, which made long walks impossible; so Katherine wandered about alone.

The weather was bright, but, although it was the beginning of May, not warm enough to sit amongst the rocks at the point. Katherine, however, often walked to and fro recalling De Burgh's looks and tones the day he had opened his heart to her there. He was not a bad fellow—no, far from it; indeed, she knew that, if her heart had not been filled with Errington, she could have loved De Burgh. How was it that a man of feeling, of so-called honor, with a certain degree of discrimination between right and wrong, could have broken the moral law and been so callous as he had shown himself?

There was no use in thinking about it; it was beyond her comprehension. All she hoped was that time might efface the cruel lines which sorrow and remorse had cut deep into Rachel's heart.

With Miss Payne, Katherine was cheerful and companionable. They spoke much of Bertie. His decision to take orders would have given his sister unqualified satisfaction had he also sought preferment in England.

"A clergyman's position is excellent," she said, confidentially, as they sat together in the drawing-room window one blustery afternoon, when Katherine was not tempted to go out. "Bertie is just the stuff to make a popular preacher of, and so long as he is properly ordained I don't care how he preaches, but I don't like him to be classed with ranting, roaring vagabonds! Then, you see, there are no men who have such opportunities as clergymen of picking up well-dowered wives. I believe women are ready to propose themselves rather than not catch what some of them are pleased to term "a priest." It's a weakness I never could understand. What induces him to run off among the heathen?—can't he find heathen enough at home? If he gets into these outlandish places, I shall never see him again, and, between you and me, he is the only creature I

care for. He thinks he is inspired by the love of God, but I know he is driven by the love of *you*."

"Of me, Miss Payne?" exclaimed Katherine, startled and greatly pained.

"Yes, you; and I wish you could see your way to marry him. It would be no great match for either of you, but he would be another and a happier man; and, as for you, your rejection of Lord de Burgh (I suppose you *did* refuse him) shows you do not care for riches."

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“But, Miss Payne, I have no right to think your brother ever wished to marry me.”

“Then you must be very dull. I wonder he has not written before. Oh, here is the postman!”

Katherine stepped through the window and took the letters from him.

“Only one for you and two for me,” she said, returning. “One, I see, is from Ada.” Opening it, she read as follows:

“DEAREST KATHERINE,

“I write in great anxiety and surprise, as I see among the fashionable intelligence of the *Morning Post* that Lord de Burgh is on the point of leaving England for a tour in the Ural Mountains (of all places!) and will probably be absent for several months. Can this be true? and, if so, what is the reason of it? Is it possible that you have been so cruel, so insane, so wicked as to fly in the face of providence and refuse him? You should remember your own poverty-stricken existence, and think of the boys. Marriage with a man of De Burgh’s rank and fortune would be the making of them. I have hidden away the paper, for, if the colonel saw it, it would drive him frantic. Do write and let me mediate between you and De Burgh, if you are so mad as to have quarrelled with him. I am feeling quite ill with all this excitement and worry. I don’t think many women have been so sorely tried as myself. Ever yours,

“ADA ORMONDE.”

Having glanced through this composition, she handed it with a smile to Miss Payne, and opened the other letter, which was from Rachel. This was very short and very mysterious.

“I have been introduced to your relative, Mr. George Liddell,” she wrote, “by his daughter. We have had a conversation respecting you and other matters. I cannot go into this now—I only write to say that Mr. Liddell is going down to see you to-morrow or next day, and I earnestly trust you may be reconciled. I am always your devoted RACHEL.”

“This is very extraordinary,” cried Katherine, when she had read it aloud. “What can she mean by sending him down here! I rather dread seeing him.”

“Nonsense,” returned Miss Payne, sternly. “If that dressmaking friend of yours brings about a reconciliation between you and your very wrong-headed cousin, she will do a good deed. I anticipate some important results from this interview—you must see Mr. Liddell alone.”

“I suppose so. I am sure I hope he will not snap my head off.”

“You are not the sort of girl to allow people to snap your head off. But I am immensely puzzled to imagine what Miss Trant can have said or done to send this bush-ranger down here. How did Mr. Liddell come to know her?”

“I can only suppose that his little girl, to whom I believe he is devoted, brought him to Rachel’s to get a dress tried on or to choose one.”

“It is very odd,” observed Miss Payne, thoughtfully. “My letter,” she went on, after a moment’s pause, “is from my new tenant; he wants some additional furniture, which is just nonsense. He has as much as is good for him; I’ll write and say I shall be in town on Monday, and call at Wilton Street to discuss matters.”

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“*Are* you going to town on Monday?”

“Yes, I made up my mind when I read this,” tapping the letter.

“I suppose you don’t object to be left alone? And there is the chance of Mrs. Needham coming down; probably she will stay over Monday.”

“I fear that is not very likely.”

No more was said on the subject then, but Katherine could not get her mind free from the idea of George Liddell’s anticipated visit. She was quite willing to make friends with him, though his ungenerous and unreasonable conduct towards herself had impressed her most unfavorably.

The day passed over, however, without any visitor, nor was it until the following afternoon that Katherine was startled, in spite of her preparation, by the announcement that a gentleman wished to see Miss Liddell.

“I’ll go,” exclaimed Miss Payne, gathering up her knitting and a book, and she vanished swiftly in spite of rheumatic difficulties.

In another moment George Liddell stood before his dispossessed kinswoman, a tall, gaunt figure with grizzled hair and sunken eyes. He took the hand she offered in silence, and then exclaimed, abruptly,

“You knew I was coming?”

“Yes, Rachel Trant told me. Will you not sit down?”

He drew a chair beside her work-table, and looking at her for a minute exclaimed, in harsh tones which yet showed emotion,

“You are a good woman!”

“How have you found that out?” asked Katherine, smiling.

“I will answer by a long, cruel story!” he returned with a sigh; “a story I would tell to none but you.” Again he paused, looking down as if collecting his thoughts, while the brown, bony, sinewy hand he laid on the table was tightly clenched. “You knew my father,” he began, suddenly raising his dark suspicious eyes to her, “and therefore can understand what an exacting tyrant he could be to those who were in his power. As a mere child I feared him and shrank from him; my earliest recollection was of my mother’s care in keeping me from him. He was not violent to her—I don’t suppose he ever struck her, but he treated her with cold contempt, why, I never understood, except that she cost him money, and brought him none. I won’t unman myself by describing what her life was, or

how passionately I loved her; we clung to each other as desolate, persecuted creatures only do! He grudged us the food we ate, the clothes—rather the rags—we wore. One day playing in Regent's Park I fell into the canal, and was nearly drowned. A gentleman went in after me and saved me. He took me home, he gave me to my mother, he often met us after. He gave me treats and money,—I can't dwell on this time. He won my mother's love, chiefly through me. He was going away to the new world. He persuaded her to leave her wretched home, to take me,—we escaped. I shall never forget the joy of those few days! Then my father (as we might have known he would) put

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out his torturing hand and seized *me*. My mother had hoped that his miserly nature would have disposed him to let me go, if he could thereby escape the cost of my maintenance. But revenge was too sweet to be foregone. I was dragged away. He did not want *her* back. He hoped her lover would desert her after awhile, and so accomplish her punishment; but he was true! No, I can never forget my mother's agony when I was torn from her!" he rose and walked to the window, and returned. "The hideous picture had grown faint," he said, "but as I speak it grows clear and black! You can imagine my life after this! It was well calculated to turn a moody, passionate boy into a devil! I was nearly eleven when I lost my mother, and I never heard of her or from her after; yet I never doubted that she loved me and tried to communicate with me, but my father's infernal spite kept us apart. At sixteen I ran away. Your father was friendly to me and tried to persuade me against what he called rashness; but I always fancied he might have helped my mother, backed her up more, and I did not heed him. I went through a rough training, as you may suppose, and never saw my father's face again."

"I can imagine that he could be terrible," murmured Katherine. "I was dreadfully afraid of him, but I did not know he had been so cruel."

George Liddell did not seem to hear her, he was lost in thought.

"You wonder, I daresay, why I tell you this long story," he resumed; "you will see what it leads up to presently."

"I am greatly interested," returned Katherine.

"You will be more so! From what I told Newton, you know enough of my career in Australia, but you do *not* know that I married a sweet, delicate woman, who, after the birth of our little Marie, fell into bad health. If I could have taken her away for a long voyage, it might have saved her, but I was in full swing making my pile, and could not tear myself away; that must have been about the time my father died. Had I known I was his heir, I should have sent my wife home. But fool that I was! I was too wrapped up making money (for the tide had just turned, and I was floating to fortune) to see that she was slipping from me. I never dreamed my father would die intestate. I always thought he would take care of his precious gold. It was well for me he destroyed his will."

Katherine felt her cheeks glow; but she did not speak.

"Well, I felt furious to think you had been enjoying my money when I did not even know that my father was dead; but I have changed."

“Why?” asked Katherine, who could not imagine what was his motive for telling her his history.

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“You shall hear. You know I placed my little Marie at school. The school-mistress employed a dressmaker to whom the child took a fancy; she insisted on taking me to see her, and to choose some fal-lals.” He stopped again, his mouth twitched, his fingers played with his watch-chain. “When the young woman came into the room,” he resumed, “I thought I should have dropped. She was the living image of my poor mother, only younger. I could not speak for a minute. At last, when the child had kissed her and chatted a bit, I managed to ask if I might come back and speak to her alone, as she was so like a lady I once knew, that I wanted to put a few questions to her. She seemed a little disturbed; but told me I might come in the evening. I went. I asked her about her parentage; she knew very little, save that she had been born in South America. She offered, however, to show me her mother’s picture, and, when she brought it, I not only saw it was *my* mother’s likeness, but a picture I knew well. Her initials were on the case, R. L. Then I told her everything. I proved to her that I was her half-brother. How bitterly she cried when I described a little brooch with my hair in it, which Rachel still keeps. She has seen our mother kiss it and weep over it. My heart went out to her; she is second now only to my child. Then, Katherine, she told me her own sad story, and the part you played in it. How you saved her, and gave her hope and strength. Give me your hand! I’ll never forget this service. It binds me more, a hundredfold more, than if you had done it for myself. But neither entreaties nor reproaches could induce her to tell me the name of the villain who—has she told you?” he interrupted himself to ask sternly.

“She never named his name to me,” cried Katherine. “It is cruel to ask her. And of what possible advantage would the knowledge be? Any inquiry, any disturbance, would only punish her.”

Liddell started up, and walked to and fro hastily. “That’s true,” he exclaimed; “but I wish I had my hand on his throat.”

“That is natural; but you must think of Rachel, she has suffered so much.”

“She has!” said George Liddell, throwing himself into his chair again. “But you don’t know the sort of pain and sweetness it is to talk of my poor mother to her daughter! It makes a different and a better man of me. Rachel is a strong woman,” he added, after a moment’s thought; “she wishes our relationship to be kept secret. It is no credit to anyone, she says, and might be injurious to little Marie; we can be friends, and she need never want a few hundreds to help on her business. It seems that to please his people her father, on returning to England, only used his second name, which I never knew. It is a sorrowful tale for you to listen to—you are white and trembling, my girl,” he added, with sudden familiarity,—“but I haven’t done yet; you have laid me under obligations I can never repay. I could not offer a woman like you

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money; but I will pay you in kind. You have saved my dear sister, I will provide for the nephews that are dear to you. I have already seen Newton and my own solicitor, and laid my propositions before them. I don't pretend to munificence for them, besides, I shall not forget either you or them in my will, but they shall have means for a right good education and a good start in life. Now I want you to forgive my brutality when we first met, and, more, I want you to be my daughter's friend." He grasped her hand.

Katherine's eyes had already brimmed over.

"Forgive you!" she repeated. "I am quite ready to forgive. I was vexed, of course, that you should be unreasonably prejudiced against me; but I am deeply grateful for your generosity to the boys. If you knew the joy, the relief you have given me, it would, I am sure, gladden you. But let us try to make Rachel happy too. I wish——"

"She is happiest in her own way. Work is the only cure for ills like hers," interrupted Liddell. "Time will do wonders, and her wish to keep our relationship secret is wise." There was a pause; then Liddell, looking steadily at Katherine, exclaimed, "You are a real true, good-hearted woman; the world would be a better place if there were a few more like you in it." He then passed on to his plans for the future; his projects for his daughter's education, opening his mind with a degree of confidence which amazed Katherine, considering that two days before he was an enemy.

Presently he ceased to speak, and, after a moment's thought, stood up.

"Now I have said my say, and I must go," he exclaimed. "I only came to explain myself to you, for the less of such a story committed to paper the better. I am due in town to-morrow morning; write to Rachel, and come and see her as soon as you can. I wish," he added, with a searching glance, "that I had a woman like you to regulate matters and take care of my little Marie; then I could keep her with me."

"She is far better at school," returned Katherine, a little startled by this suggestive speech. "But will you not have some luncheon before you go?"

"No, thank you. I had some before coming on here. I need very little food, and scarcely anything gives me pleasure; but I like you, my cousin, and I want your friendship for the child."

"She shall have it, I promise."

After a few more words, George Liddell bid her good-bye. She stood a few minutes in deep thought before going to tell her good news to Miss Payne, reflecting that she must not betray the real motive of his change towards herself; the less she said the better. While she thought, Miss Payne came in looking unusually eager.

“Wouldn’t he stay and have a bit to eat?” she exclaimed. “I saw him going out of the gate from my room.”

“No, he is in a hurry to get back to town. Ah! my dear Miss Payne, he came down to make his peace with me, and he is going to provide for the boys.”

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“Why, what has happened to him? I can hardly believe my ears.”

“I am sure I could hardly believe mine. I suppose as he grew accustomed to feel that everything was in his hands, and that I had given him no trouble, he saw that he had been unnecessarily severe. Then his little girl took him to Rachel Trant’s, and they evidently spoke of me; probably she gave a highly colored description of my goodness, and, being an impulsive man, he said he would come and see me, whereupon she wrote to warn me.”

“That’s all possible; but somehow I feel there is more in it than I quite understand.”

“I am sure I do not care to understand the wherefore, if only my cousin carries out his good intentions as regards Cis and Charlie.”

“Just so; that is the main point. If he does, what a burden will be lifted off your shoulders!”

“And what a change in the boys’ fortunes!” returned Katherine; adding, after a short pause, “I think I will go to town with you on Monday and pay them a visit, while you arrange your affairs with your tenant. Mrs. Needham will put me up for a night or two.”

In truth, Katherine longed to see and talk with Rachel, to discuss the curious turn in her changeful fortunes, and build up pleasant palaces in the airy realms of the future.

The following day brought her a letter from De Burgh. It was dated from Paris, and told her of his intention to be absent from England for some time; he pleaded earnestly for pardon with a certain rough eloquence, and repeated the arguments he had previously urged, evidently thinking that his punishment was greatly disproportionate to his offence.

Katherine was much moved by this epistle; she could not help being sorry for him, though she hoped not to meet him again. The association of ideas was too painful; she was ashamed too to remember how near she had come to marrying him, in a sort of despair of the future. She answered this letter at once, frankly and kindly, setting forth the unalterable nature of her decision, and begging him not to put her to unnecessary pain by trying to renew their acquaintance at any future time.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE END.

The project of going to town, however, was not carried out. Miss Payne caught a severe cold, owing to the unusual circumstance of having forgotten her umbrella, and, in consequence, getting wet through by a sudden heavy shower.

Instead, therefore, of speeding London-wards on Monday, Miss Payne spent the weary hours in bed with a racking headache and Katherine in close attendance.

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Next day, however, she was considerably better, and even talked of coming downstairs in the evening when the house was shut up. She insisted on sending her kind nurse out for air and exercise, as she was looking pallid and heavy-eyed; nor was Katherine reluctant to go, for she enjoyed being alone to meditate on the curious interweaving of fate's warp and woof which had made Rachel the means of reconciliation between George Liddell and herself. She ought now to take up her life again with courage and energy. The boys provided for, she had nothing to fear, while, if the future held out no brilliant prospect of personal happiness, much quiet content probably lay in the humble sufficiency which was now hers. The interest she would take in the careers of Cis and Charlie would renew her youth, and keep her in touch with active life, while, as the impression of her various troubles wore away under the swift-flowing stream of time, she would feel more and more the restful excellence of peace. It was not a bad outlook, yet Katherine felt sad as she contemplated it. Finding her self-commune less cheering than she anticipated, she turned her steps homeward, and entered the house through the window of the drawing-room which opened on a rustic veranda. Coming from strong sunlight into comparative darkness, she took off her hat, and pushed back her hair from her brow before she perceived that a gentleman had risen from the chair where he sat reading.

"You see I have dared to take possession of the premises in your absence," he said.

"Mr. Errington?" cried Katherine, her heart suddenly bounding, and then beating so violently she could hardly speak. "How—where—did you come from?"

"From London, to enjoy a brief breathing-space from pressure of work—welcome as it generally is! I am sorry to find that your friend Miss Payne is invalided, as she was not visible, I ventured to wait for you."

"I am very glad to see you," returned Katherine, placing herself on the sofa as far from the window as she could, for she felt herself changing color in a provoking way.

"I saw Mrs. Needham yesterday, who gave me your address and sundry messages, one to the effect that she hopes to pay you a visit next Saturday; the rest I do not remember accurately, for she was much excited and not very distinct."

"We shall be delighted to see her, she is so bright and sympathetic. What was the immediate cause of her excitement?"

"The marriage of Miss Bradley in about a fortnight."

"Indeed!" cried Katherine, thinking this way of announcing it rather odd, but never doubting it was his own marriage also. "Then accept my warm congratulations; you have no well-wisher more sincere than myself."

Errington looked up surprised.

“Why do you congratulate me? I certainly was of some use in bringing it about, but sooner or later they would certainly have married.”

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“They? who—whom is she going to marry?”

“My old friend Major Urquhart. It is a very old attachment, but Mr. Bradley objected to his want of fortune; then, as Bradley’s wealth increased, Urquhart felt reluctant to come forward again. Accident revealed the state of the case to me. I went to see Urquhart, who had just returned from India, and was in Edinburgh. I persuaded him to return with me, and once the lovers met, matters swiftly arranged themselves. Finally, Bradley gave his consent. Now the air is resonant with the coming chime of wedding bells.”

“I am greatly surprised,” said Katherine, and it was some minutes before she could speak again. Her horizon seemed suddenly suffused with light; she felt dizzy with a strange delightful glow, and confused with a sense of shame at her own unreasoning, irrational joy. What difference could Errington’s marriage or no marriage make to her?

“I suppose,” resumed Errington, after looking earnestly at her speaking face, “that the intimacy which arose between Mr. Bradley and myself in consequence of my connection with *The Cycle* suggested the rumor of my engagement with his daughter; but no such idea ever entered my head or Angela’s. You know, I suppose, I am now *de facto* editor of *The Cycle*. It is a good appointment, and enables me to hope for possibilities, though I dare not say probabilities.”

“I am sure you will be an admirable editor,” said Katherine, pulling herself together, and trying to speak lightly.

“Why?” asked Errington, smiling.

“You are just, and—and careful, and must be a good judge of the subjects such a periodical treats of.”

“Thank you.” He paused; then, looking down, he continued, “Mrs. Needham tells me you have been troubled about your nephews.”

“Yes, I was very much troubled, but I think they are safe and well now; later I should put them to a better school, as I now hope to do.” She stopped to think how she should best explain George Liddell’s unexpected generosity, and Errington exclaimed.

“These boys are a heavy charge to you! yet I suppose you could not bring yourself to give them up?”

“How could I? their mother can really do nothing for them, and it would be cruel to hand them over to Colonel Ormonde’s charity.”

“It would! you are right,” said Errington, hastily. “Poor little fellows! to lose you would be too terrible a trial for them.”

Katherine raised her eyes to his; they were moist with gratitude for his sympathy, and seemed to draw him magnetically to her. He changed his place to the sofa; leaning one arm on the back, he rested his head on his hand, and looked gravely down upon her.

“Will you forgive me if I ask an intrusive question? You know we agreed to be friends, yet our friendship does not seem to thrive, it is dying of starvation because we so rarely meet; still, for the sake of our shadowy friendship, answer me: may I put the natural construction on De Burgh’s sudden departure from England?”

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Katherine hesitated; she did not like to say in so many words that she had refused him, a curious, half-remorseful feeling made her especially considerate towards him.

“I do not like to speak of Lord de Burgh,” she said at length.

“When does he return?

“I do not know. I know nothing of his plans.”

“Then you sent him empty away?” said Errington, smiling.

“I very nearly married him!” she exclaimed, frankly. “He was kind and generous, and would have been good to the boys; but at last I could not. Oh! I could *not*!”

“I am sorry for De Burgh,” said Errington, thoughtfully, “but you were right; your wisdom is more of the heart than the head. Do you remember that day (how vividly I remember it!) when you came to me and told me your strange story? It was the turning-point of my life. When I confessed I knew nothing of the deep, warm, tender affection that actuated *you*, you said that for me wisdom was from one entrance quite shut out.”

“I can remember nothing clearly of that dreadful day, only that you were very forgiving and good,” returned Katherine, pressing her hands together to still their trembling.

“Well, from the moment you spoke those words, the light of the wisdom you meant dawned upon me, and grew stronger and brighter, till my whole being was flooded with the love you inspired. You opened a new world to me; your voice was always in my ears, your eyes looking into mine.” He spoke in a low, earnest, but composed tone, as if he had made up his mind to the fullest utterance. Katherine covered her face with her hands with the unconscious instinct to hide the emotion she felt it would express. “Many things kept me silent. Fear that the sight of me was painful to you; the dread of seeming to seek your fortune; my own uncertain position. Then, when all was taken from you, and I was by my own act deprived of the power to help you, you were so brave and patient that profound esteem mingled with the strange, sweet, wild fire you had kindled! Am I so painfully associated in your mind that you cannot give me something of the wealth of love stored in your heart? You have taught me what love is, will you not reward so apt a pupil?”

“Mr. Errington,” said Katherine, letting him take her cold trembling hand, “is it possible you can love and trust a woman who has acted a lie for years as I have?”

“I cannot help both loving and trusting you, utterly,” he returned, holding her hand tenderly in both his own. “I believe in your truth as I believe in the reality of the sun’s light, and if you can love me I believe I can make you happy. I have but a humble lot to offer you, yet I think it is—it will be a tranquil and secure one. I can help you in bringing up those boys, I will never quarrel with you for clinging to them, and will do the best I

can for them! You know *I* have a creditor's claim; Roman law gave the debtor over into the hands of the creditor," continued Errington, growing bolder as he felt how her hand trembled in his grasp; "you must pay me by the surrender of yourself, by accepting a life for a life. Katherine——"

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“Ah! how can I answer you? If indeed you can trust and respect me, I can and will love you well,” she exclaimed, with the sweet frankness which always enchanted him.

“Will you love me with the whole unstinted love of your rich nature? I cannot spare a grain,” said Errington, jealously.

“But I do love you,” murmured Katherine; “I am almost frightened at loving you so much.”

Could it be cold, composed, immovable Errington who strained her so closely to his heart, whose lips clung so passionately to hers?

“I have a great deal to tell you,” began Katherine, when she had extricated herself and recovered some composure. “But I must go and see poor Miss Payne; she will wonder what has become of me.”

“Tell her you are obliged to talk to me of business, and come back soon. I have much to consult you about, and I can only remain till to-morrow evening—do not stay away.”

And Katherine returned very soon.

“Miss Payne is dreadfully puzzled,” she said, smiling and blushing, quivering in every vein with the strange, almost awful happiness which overwhelmed her.

“Now, what have you to tell me?” asked Errington, and she gave him a full description of George Liddell’s visit and proposal to provide for Cis and Charlie.

Errington was too happy to heed the details much, he only remarked that he was glad Liddell had come to his right mind.

“I want you to tell Miss Payne as soon as possible our new plans; she is coming downstairs this evening, you say? Let me break the news to her. I think she will give us her blessing; and, Katherine, my sweet Katherine, there is no reason to delay our marriage. You have no fixed home; the sooner you make one for yourself and me the better. The idea is intoxicating. Our poverty sets us free from the trammels of conventionality; we have nothing to wait for.”

So they were married.

Here ought to come “Finis!” yet real life had only begun for them. Were they happy? Yes. For under the wild sweetness of warmest passionate love lay the lasting rock of comprehension and genial companionship. Fuller knowledge brought deeper esteem, and the only secret Katherine ever kept from her husband was the true history of Rachel Trant.

A severe attack of fever, brought on by overstudy, immediately after Katherine's marriage, prevented Bertie Payne from carrying out his missionary scheme. He was reluctantly obliged to put up with the East-End heathen, "who," as Miss Payne observed, "were bad enough to satisfy the largest appetite for sinners."

There his faithful sister established herself to make a home for him, renouncing her comfortable West-End abode, and finding ample interest in the pursuits she affected to treat as fads.

"Altogether everything has turned out in the most extraordinary and unexpected manner," as Mrs. Ormonde observed to Mrs. Needham, whom she encountered at one of Lady Mary Vincent's receptions. "Katherine seems quite proud to settle down in a suburban villa away in St. John's Wood as Mrs. Errington, while she might have made a figure at court as Lady de Burgh. By the way, I see your friend, Mrs. Urquhart, was presented at the last drawing-room."

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“Yes, and was one of the handsomest women there.—But I don’t suppose Mrs. Errington ever gives a thought to drawing-room or Buckingham Palace balls.—You see she is in a way always at court, for her king is always beside her,” returned Mrs. Needham, with a becoming smile. “Good-night, Mrs. Ormonde.”

THE END