

At the Eleventh Hour!

CHAPTER XX.

IN THE PRISON CELL.

Myrtle drew her mother gently from the room, and then Lynette and Mrs. Beckett sat down side by side. The girl's fear and timidity were swept away by a torrent of feeling. Still clinging to the elder lady's hand, she continued tenderly:

"Oh, I am so glad to see you again, and to have you look at me kindly! I have been so unhappy since my visit to you, and it seems years and years, the time went so slow. Then I was ill—did you know I nearly died? Oh, you cannot guess how dearly I loved you—all! Her eyes fell, and a rosy color, like the heart of a seashell, dyed her cheeks, as she wondered if she had said too much. But she gathered courage and continued: "Edgar is coming this afternoon, and I am so glad—so glad! I have a secret I wish to tell you—but perhaps it is better to wait till Edgar comes. Then the cruel suspense will be over. Will you let me come to you some day soon—after Edgar comes—and tell you all the truth?"

"Yes, dear, come when you wish," returned the lady, won in spite of herself by the winning character, and when she met the eager, wistful gaze of the pathetic dark eyes, she bent her stately head, and gave what they mutually invited—a tender kiss.

"Perhaps I was wrong, but she seemed so repentant and so sweet," she said, when she told her daughter of it that evening.

But they were both vexed that Lynette had, as they phrased it, "imposed on her kindness of heart."

"She only wished to be on good terms with you again, and to get forgiveness for her outrageous behavior," Mrs. Caskey said bitterly.

"Do not tell Stephen when you go to see him to-morrow. It can do no good to revive her memory in his heart," said Mrs. Llewellyn, the younger sister, on whom Stephen's silence had imposed till she believed he was forgetting his love.

Lynette and Myrtle had dinner with Myrtle's parents, and then they prepared to go to Roncove to meet Edgar. And who could blame Myrtle if she took extra pains with her toilet, and made her fair blond loveliness more charming than ever, while her blue eyes beamed with joy of her heart?

Myrtle's pony flew quickly over the road, and in half an hour they reached

Midgie Station, N. B.—One can hardly believe this as it is not natural, but it was my case. For ten months I suffered from suppression. I had tried different doctors, tried different medicines, but none helped me. My friends told me I would go into a decline. One day a lady friend told me what your medicine had done for her, so I wrote you for advice and received your reply with pleasure.

I started taking Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, and at the second bottle showed improvement. Now I am regular and never was so well in my life, thanks to Mrs. Pinkham's medicine.

Please publish my letter for the benefit of others.—Mrs. JOSEPH W. HICKS, Midgie Station, N. B.

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ed Roncove and the railway station. On the platform they saw Mr. Lewis pacing to and fro, and he waved his hand at them to wait. Coming to the side of the little cart, he said:

"Don't be scared now, Lynette, but as soon as I got here I found a telegram waiting for me. Edgar is ill, and cannot come till to-morrow or Thursday."

Both the beautiful faces grew pale with dread, and Lynette cried: "Let me see it!"

"Don't you believe me?" he cried rather roughly.

"Let me see it!" she repeated imperiously, and most reluctantly he obeyed.

She and Myrtle read together: "JOHN LEWIS, ESQ.: Taken suddenly ill, and cannot come until Wednesday or Thursday. Postpone the marriage till I come."

EDGAR PAGE LEWIS, "Ah-h!" breathed Lynette, in a tone of relief, but her uncle frowned.

"It's foolish—that talk of putting off the marriage—and I'm certain Prentiss won't hear to it!" he exclaimed.

Lynette said nothing, but as he scanned her face anxiously he saw that danger-signal in her eyes that had frightened him several days before. He said to himself:

"That wifful girl is up to some mischief. I know by her eye. What is it?"

But in her inscrutable expression he could read no answer to the troubled question. It irritated him, and he said curtly:

"No use waiting for the train. I have the carriage here, and you'd better hop out now and come home with me."

"Very well," she replied, with apparent resignation; and when he went around to bring the carriage, she found time to whisper to her friend:

"I am in despair. What if Edgar fails to come, and they force me to a marriage on Thursday?"

"You must stand firm against them, Lynette."

"How can I when I have not a friend to stand up with me and take my part? Oh, Myrtle, I am such a coward. I do not know how to uphold my own rights. This disappointment over Edgar's coming is terrible. Perhaps he is ill, very ill. Perhaps he may die!"

"Do not think of anything so terrible, dear. He will come to-morrow," said Myrtle, keeping back threatening tears, though her own voice trembled with apprehension.

Her own heart was sinking with grief, but she must give no expression to it. She must not let even his sister know how dear he was, since to the world they were only friends.

spurred away to some evil fate. She felt certain that Edgar's failure to come would not stop the marriage, if her uncle could prevail on her to consent to its going on.

Myrtle spent a very restless night, both on account of her fears for Lynette and her uneasiness over Edgar's illness.

"What if he should die?" she thought, in bitter anguish.

The next day she was so worried that she decided to meet Edgar at the train, but Mr. Lewis was there before her and again, with a telegram: "Too ill to start to-day. Hope to come Thursday eve." Postpone the wedding till I come.

"Shall you do as he commands?" she asked the farmer anxiously.

"No," he said bluntly. "If he ain't here Thursday eve, the wedding will go on all the same. Prentiss won't hear to no postponement. It's unlucky, he says, and besides it would disarrange all the plans. The supper's ready, the invitations sent, and Gillian and Vida, too, are dead set against putting the thing off at all."

CHAPTER XXI. "Will That To-morrow Ever Be?" Uncle Jack dreaded to go home to Lynette with the second disappointment about her brother, but he braced up his courage, saying to himself: "I've got to face the music, that's all, and a fellow what's in the army ain't no call to be a coward, I take it. But confound the fellow! What made him get sick at this particular time? Didn't I have fuss enough on my hands already?"

He feared that Lynette might make a scene about postponing the marriage, and he had all a man's horror of scenes, while his uneasy feelings over the high hand he was carrying with Lynette were held down by the arguments of his wily wife, and his equally cunning niece, who boasted unceasingly of the great advantages of the match.

Lynette grew very impatient as the time came for him to arrive from the station so at last she wrapped herself up warmly, and walked out to meet the carriage.

Uncle Jack saw her coming and groaned.

When Lynette saw that her uncle and Erastus were alone in the carriage, her sweet mouth quivered and tears sprang to her eyes.

"Edgar's coming to-morrow!" the old man sang out cheerily, and then they halted by the roadside to take her in.

"Let me see the telegram," she said faintly, as the boy whipped up his horses and started off again.

"What's the use?" he said uneasily, but she persisted, and he had to yield.

"Oh, Uncle Jack, Edgar may be very ill—even dying! I ought to go to him right away."

"Nonsense! Edgar says he will be here Thursday eve."

"He will not—I feel that he will not!" she sobbed in keen distress, and Lewis added soothingly:

"If he doesn't come, you can go down to Richmond on Friday, and see what he himself says. You will be married then, and Graham can take you."

"Married! You see that my brother insists on postponing that till he comes!" she almost shrieked, in her dismay.

"Nonsense!" he returned roughly and decisively; and in that word the poor girl read her fate.

They would force her to the altar to wed the man whose she now loathed so bitterly. She had given her promise, and they would not let her slip. Uncle Jack was her guardian, and would use his absolute power to make her obey his behests.

All hope seemed to die from the poor girl's heart since Edgar's failure to come.

"Neither will he come to-morrow," she thought. "Or, if he should, it would be too late. They would be dressing me for the wedding, they would keep him away from me, and persuade him to let it go on. I am

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all alone in my trouble, with no one to help me, and I must think of some way to help myself. They shall never drag me to the altar with Graham Prentiss.

She said not another word to her uncle, and he was relieved at the apparent submission with which she had received his dictum.

"She is giving in. I sha'n't have so much trouble as I feared, only I don't quite like the look in her eyes, he told himself.

Graham Prentiss came to call that evening, and was outwardly grieved and inwardly jubilant that Edgar had not come. He did not care to have Lynette's clear-eyed brother come on the scene and investigate matters.

He had an uneasy fear that something would occur to snatch his lovely prize from him at the eleventh hour.

She was cold and different to him as usual; but he bore it well, saying to himself angrily:

"In twenty-four hours I shall be her master. Then I will teach my princess better manners."

(To be continued.)

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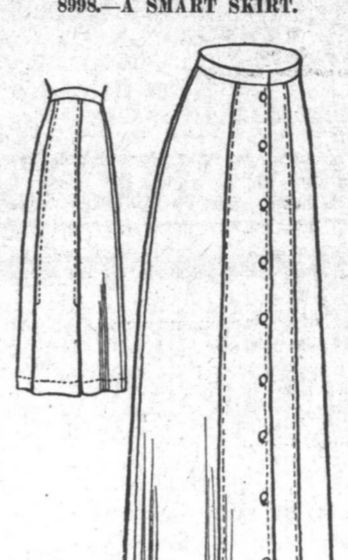
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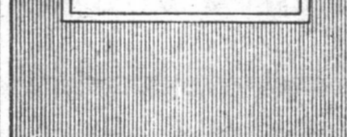
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