

last flare of the candle before it gutters black into the socket.

"Am I dying?" she cried, her voice a hoarse, thin shriek. "For God's sake let me die, then. Why are you trying to keep me alive—where their worm dieth not and their fire is not quenched—where did I hear that—it's true—true—true," the broken words rising to a wail, heart-piercing, nerve-shaking.

Adrian winced, Sir Neil clenched his hands in a strong man's shrinking from irremediable pain. Agatha Kenyon, crouched on one of the window seats, broke into helpless sobbing, while Lady Marchmont sat more stiffly erect, though amid her voluminous draperies her fragile little wisp of a figure seemed shrunken to the proportions of a child's.

Adrian turned to Sir Frank, his face wrung.

"If nothing can be done, if there is no chance, no hope, can't you give her an easier passage—if it must be." His voice was strained out of all likeness to its usual tones.

The great doctor nodded. "I sent at once—the motor should be back shortly. Poor child, I wish to heaven it were here!" for Alys was speaking again in that strange, thin, unnatural voice, which seemed already divorced from earthly sounds.

"If I were dead I should be at peace, shouldn't I?" turning her eyes upon Lesley, who was supporting the restless head. "I should feel nothing—know nothing—remember nothing—so they say. Oh, do you think I'll remember?" a sudden note of panic in the tenuous thread of voice, while the leap of her eyes towards Lesley was like the clutch of a desperate hand.

"Alys," said Lesley, in a low, shaken voice, "I believe that we shall feel—that we shall know—that we shall remember. If there is anything you fear to remember, lay it down, don't carry your burden with you—surely you've borne it long enough. Oh, Alys, is there one here would deny you forgiveness if you asked it? Is God less merciful than man?"

That this poor trembling soul should go out into the darkness with doubt upon her lips and despair in her heart, that she should carry her sin and her secret with her into the silence was anguish to Lesley.

"Forgiveness will take the sting from memory, the pang from death. Oh, Alys, beg for it now—man will hear—God will hear." Her eyes were a voiceless prayer more compelling than her entreating words.

"Where is Adrian?" breathed Alys.

He knelt on the other side of the couch.

"Alys, my poor child, there is no need to speak. I know what you would say—I have always known it. As some day my own sole need will be forgiveness, I do forgive what you did—for my sake."

A sudden strange flicker, which was no fever fire, lit the great hollow eyes. He who reads the

heart alone knew what lay behind that look. Love, jealousy, cruel as the grave, remorse—these were the three strands of the cord which still bound her to earth. Which would yield first, or would they snap only with the silver cord itself?

At last her look settled on Adrian's face, and slowly, slowly that "strange fire" sank and faded. There was a slight stir at the door. Sir Frank went to it, and then, coming back to the couch, put a glass to Alys's drawn lips.

"Drink this, my poor child; it will ease you," he said gently.

Alys seemed to divine his meaning. With what strength was left to her she turned her head away.

"No, no; I can't—I must speak—I must—there is no ease, no peace for me till I speak," her voice suddenly shrilling out again in a half-delirious note. "See, there is the brand of shame upon him; it was I who set it there." She would never lift hand again, but her look was like a finger pointing to that red scorch on Adrian's brow. "Don't let me die before I speak—if I do it may take it away."

"No, no; there is no need to speak—only drink this," said Sir Frank soothingly, pressing the glass again to her convulsed mouth.

Sir Neil caught his arm.

"For God's sake let her speak as long as she can—you don't know how much hangs on it," he muttered hoarsely. If Sir Frank did not know, Neil Wedderburne did, to the depths of his honest heart.

"Are they all here—all who were in the room that day?" went on Alys in the same high, strained key. "I thought I saw them," looking restlessly round with narrowed eyes, as if trying to pierce through gathering shadows, though the great room was bathed in a soft glow of light. "But tell them—tell them it was I—not you—I took the keys—I found the will—I forged"—the word was almost a shriek—"the name. It was for you—I thought it would give you back your own. I saw you knew—but I couldn't—I daren't confess—I tried—I did try."

The flame of life sank. Speech passed into confused and piteous moaning, though in hard-drawn gasps and with imploring eyes fixed upon her husband's face she still struggled for utterance. Now and again there came a stray articulate word.

"Forgive—mercy—God have—mercy!"

The tears had come with a sudden rush to Lesley's eyes, pain-scorned till now, and were falling thick upon the face which the heavy hand of Death was already moulding to his own likeness.

"Oh, Alys," she cried, "it was for love you did it—to her who loved much, much was forgiven."

Did she hear? There was a catch in the hard sobbing breath, a flicker of the dimming eyes still fastened on Adrian's face. He stooped nearer.

"Alys!" he breathed, and the eyes softened.

Lesley softly rose from beside the couch where she had knelt so long, and in silence the others followed, leaving husband and wife alone together in the nearing shadow of that infinite and awful Presence which men call Death, but which the wiser name Peace.

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"So you are alone again."

"Yes, Lesley and Lady Marchmont have gone back to Strode. I thought you would have come to say good-bye."

"I have said good-bye," said Sir Neil with grim significance.

They were in Mrs. Kenyon's pretty drawing-room—an airy background which always threw into full relief her brother's height and air of abundant vigour. The latter was as noticeable as ever, though the keen blue eyes might lack something of their vivid outlook.

At Morelands Agatha Kenyon had cried her kind heart out in pity and sympathy for the dead and the living, but her keenest regrets found utterance now in her faltered:

"My poor Neil—it's horribly hard on you—what—what will you do now?"

"Does it matter much?" with a shrug. Then he faced round from the window out of which he had been intently if absently gazing. "You've been a good friend and done your best for me, Agatha, but—well, it won't be to-morrow, nor the next day, nor likely for many a day to come, but Time is bound to do his work by and by, and two people who are made for each other—valiantly—are bound to find that out too, and all the sooner if they get a fair field to do it in. Wedderburne can look after itself for a bit. Lesley's trustees are discharged; her cousin is the one she should naturally turn to if she wants advice, so I think I'll have a try at Thibet and the mountain sheep. I've always been hankering to have a shot at one, and as they're uncommon shy beasts and very few of them left, by the time I've secured a good head, well—with a courageous smile—"things will likely have settled down at Strode."

"Lesley is losing a brave gentleman, Neil!" exclaimed Agatha Kenyon, breaking into a sudden sob and throwing her arms round her tall brother, in spite of his known objections to such demonstrations.

"Oh, come, Agatha," he said awkwardly, though for once he suffered the embrace; then reality broke through reserve for once. "It's all that's left to me, but it's precious little for a man to do for the woman he—loves—only to take himself out of her way. I wonder how many of us would do and suffer what Adrian Skene did, and for a woman, whom, poor soul, he didn't love."

THE END.

THE ROMANCE OF SELINA KING

A Story of Cross-Purposes and Reconciliation

By EDITH GWYNNE

FOR more years than she cared to remember Selina King had been the most patronised milliner in Sheldon, and was, indeed, the authority on hats for the whole community. She preserved her independence of Grant & Company, the enterprising firm which had signally failed to secure Miss Selina as head milliner, and had sent to Toronto for Miss Belmer, whom they advertised as "A lady who has studied her art in the best establishments of Paris."

But Miss Selina saw with calmness the advent of the Parisian student of headgear, for hers was the assurance of genius. No one else could transform wire and chiffon into such marvels of grace and beauty as could Miss Selina, and she had a kindly, tender way of receiving a battered old bonnet of two years' wearing, and saying brightly, "Well, I'll see if something can't be made of this, Mrs. Brown. The ribbon looks as if it could be freshened up."

Poor Mrs. Brown, whose economies were heart-rending, but who had a true woman's love for finery beneath her rusty garments, could hardly believe her eyes when she saw the new shape with revived ribbons and a bunch of violets nestling coyly at the left side, and the bill only one dollar and a half.

Miss Selina's fame had gone abroad through the country, and more than once she had received flattering offers from city firms, for commercial travellers had long admired the hat-making skill of the little woman, whose brown eyes were as bright as the iridescent trimming of which she was so fond. But

she had remained firm in her allegiance to Sheldon and the little white cottage with green blinds, which half-witted Sophie Waggs kept as spotless as a pan of new milk.

Millie King, her only brother's daughter, lived with Miss Selina, and was going to the Sheldon High School, and her aunt cherished hopes that her niece would "learn the business." She often said: "Now, remember, Millie, that there's a way of doing it that just belongs to you like a taste for music, or a head for figures. You certainly seem to have the right twist to a ribbon, and next year we'll see if you haven't a knack for covering shapes. There's some that can never get things smooth. There's Sarah Hunter, now. That girl fairly drives me wild. She would have made even that man Job say words that he'd be sorry for."

Miss Selina's consternation may be imagined when, one freezing February night, as she and Millie sat before the sitting-room coal-stove and enjoyed "Northern spies," the latter suddenly said: "Aunt Selina, do you know that I believe I'll get married, after all, instead of learning the millinery next spring."

"Millie King, are you clean crazy? Why, you're only sixteen, and don't know anything about the ways of a house, let alone the queer ways of a man. If I just catch you flirting with Tom Pringle, or any other boy at that school, you'll go straight back

to your father and the farm, although your step-mother is a woman I never could stand."

"I'm not flirting with any one," said Millie demurely, "there isn't a boy in the school with any style except Harold Jordan, and he's going away to Montreal next month to be in his uncle's railroad office. But I've thought it all out, and some day or other I'm going to get married to someone who will take me away from Sheldon. I intend," continued Millie with solemnity, "to see the world."

Her aunt gazed at her in alarm, for Millie was usually a retiring young person, but she had the King will, which meant accomplishment of purpose.

"You've been reading some fool love stories in my fashion magazines," she said in dismay.

"No, I haven't. In fact, Aunt Selina," said this sage of sixteen, "I don't believe much in love. It seems to get people into a great deal of trouble. But if I marry a man who can afford to buy me hats it will be much easier than trimming them for other people."

Her aunt was more puzzled than ever; sentimentality would be bad enough, but this cold-blooded commercialism was remarkably ungirlish.

"Of course," Millie continued, "you have done just splendid by not getting married, and you're putting money in the bank every week. It's much nicer than being the wife of a poor man like Mr. Brown, or a drunkard like Jack Sloane. But I've made up my mind that if a rich man comes along I'd rather have him than trim hats."

"Millicent King, you've no business to talk about