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A Living Prisoner;

Or, Friends in Name, Enemies at Heart.

CHAPTER XXV.—(Continued).

A tiny green caterpillar, frightened by her near proximity, rolled itself up into a little tight ball, and clung so motionless to the stem of a bending daisy that [illegible] swayed beneath their weight. And as she gazed, a profound sense of the large, the all-embracing character of the Universal Mother flooded her soul, making it keenly conscious of the nothingness of the flesh. And yet the poor nothings feel. They cannot help it. No philosophy ever succeeds in quelling the joys, loves, sorrows, hopes that spring eternal in the human breast. Man may realize the small place which individually he occupies in the scheme of Creation. The ant, the caterpillar, and the spider, are all akin to him, but his is the highest organization, and so long as he lives, his feeble body is acutely sensitive to pain, his heart lends itself to every emotion, and his brain forms a centre round which distracting thought revolves in wearying succession. What if feeling passes, and twenty, thirty, a hundred years hence, is engulphed in the sea of oblivion? Life, to poor struggling mortals, is very real and very sharp while it endures. We suffer in the Present, no matter how great and glorious the rewards of the Future.

As she looked at the green grasses, swarming with tiny, sentient creatures, as she gazed up at the still sky, and at the solemn mountains whose dark outlines were shrouded by gathering mists and resting clouds, the soul—the higher and imperishable portion of her being—spake aloud, crying out in sympathy with the beautiful, created World.

"Oh! God! oh, great first Cause! Oh, mighty principle of Life!" it said, "no matter by what name, or by what religions Thou art worshipped. Names are forgotten, religions die and give place to fresh ones; but Thou continuest. Man, thy most perfect work, acknowledges the presence of a force above and beyond his finite comprehension. Intellect cannot probe it. Science cannot destroy it, and at moments like these, that force makes us bow down in reverential worship, before the Power, the Deity, the What-you-will, which rules the universe. A presiding Spirit dwells in the air we breathe, on the earth we tread, in the unknown regions of space that confound our limited vision. Man, Doubter, Atheist, thou who scoffest at God, use thy eyes and look around thee. Nature will teach thee what a poor, weak puppet thou art, and how senseless and vainglorious are the words, 'I deny. I believe not.' I, I, I! What is 'I,' that great and large personality in the speaker's fancy? Only a few composite atoms, that soon are scattered to the dust. And yet these same atoms dare to set up their puny opinions against the grand fixed laws of which they know so little. Miserable fools, to whose hearts beauty and purity and calm cannot reach, and therefore fail to sink into them as God-like truths."

"No luck, Annie. I am tired to death, and out of temper into the bargain. Try and console me if you can."

It was Harry's voice that interrupted her meditations, and in one second recalled her to earth.

"I cannot console you," she said, wearily. "I want consoling myself."

The utter dejection of her tones moved him. He was sorry for her, very sorry. He felt that it might have been better if they had never met, and he was conscious of being unworthy of the passionate love he had inspired.

"Annie," he said, motioning to her to sit down under the lee of a great grey rock. "You are tired and consequently out of sorts. It has been my fault for keeping out so late. I am afraid I have been very selfish. Poor little girl," and he touched her hand. "You are quite cold, and I, big brute that I was, thought only of that horrid fishing."

A single kind word from him was sufficient to upset her. Throughout the evening her nerves had been in a high state of tension. They could endure the strain no longer.

"Harry—Harry," she cried, with a sudden outburst of emotion. "Don't be good to me. I can't bear it."

"But I'm not good. On the contrary I've been very thoughtless and inconsiderate. "Do you know what I wish?" she said in a low voice of concentrated passion.

"No. What is it?"

"I wish to goodness I were dead—that I could die now, this moment."

He was startled by the vehemence and earnestness with which she spoke; for she said the words as if she meant them, and they were painful ones to him, who in the last few months had begun to find life so pleasant, and who looked forward to deriving so much enjoyment from it.

"Hush, Annie. Why, oh! why do you say such terrible things?"

She looked at him. It was past midnight, but she could still see the shocked expression of his clear eyes. In another hour or two, dawn would begin to break, and dissipate the tender twilight that, even now, had scarce deepened into night. But there would be no Dawn for her, nothing but perpetual darkness. A rush of bitter thought flooded her being. The Future presented such an intolerable prospect.

"Why?" she echoed, wringing her hands in anguish. "Listen, and I will tell you, why I would give everything I possess in this world, to be lying dead at your feet. Harry, I think I should be happy, even in Death, if I felt that you were near me. You have often wished to know the reason which induced me to become the wife of Mr. Thompson. Now that we are about to part, in all probability for ever, I am ready to gratify your curiosity."

"Don't tell me if it is painful to you," he interposed. "I would rather remain in ignorance than add to your distress."

"Painful! How can it be painful in comparison with my daily life, and with what I have to bear? And yet if all were to come over again, I should repeat the action that has embittered my days, and put an extinguisher on every hope and aspiration."

"You puzzle me," he said, with a bewildered air. "What do you mean?"

"When I first made Ebenezer's acquaintance, I had just returned from a finishing school, and was seventeen years of age. I disliked him from the first moment I saw him, and, although it is wicked to say so, have disliked him ever since. He is, and always was, intensely antipathetic to me. I tell you this so as not to conceal my faults. I wish you to know the worst of me. No doubt it would be more seemly to pretend to care for the man who is my husband, but to-night you shall hear nothing but the truth from my lips. I received a good education and was well brought up. Having no brothers and sisters, my parents never grudged me anything that money could purchase. My father was a mill owner, and resided in one of the chief manufacturing towns of Lancashire. In those days he appeared to be well off, and I, for one, never dreamt of the horrible events that in two short years were destined to take place. To make a long story short, he suffered severe losses, which followed each other in rapid succession. Things went from bad to worse. The mortgagees, to whom the mill virtually belonged, foreclosed, and one fine morning, the bailiffs entered our peaceful home, and seized all the furniture. What did my father do?" And she gave a little, hysterical laugh that rang out clear and penetrating. "He blew out his brains. He was a courageous man, but his mind had become weakened by disaster. He sank before our very eyes, and we were left alone, my mother and I, without a penny in the world. She had no jointure, no settlements, and nothing was saved out of the wreck. To my dying day I shall never forget that time." She paused a moment, as if recalling its horrors, then resumed in hurried utterances:

"We were indebted to friends for our daily bread. They took us in out of charity. We stayed with them a week, a month, but we could not live so for ever, besides we were both of us too proud to be dependent on others. I was young and strong, and there were people who thought me pretty. I hoped that my good looks, such as they were, would befriend me in my search for work. Alas! I found them an hindrance rather than otherwise. Everybody seemed to mistrust the combination of youth and an attractive appearance. Had I been plain or deformed, I might perhaps have succeeded in getting a situation, but my own sex looked upon me with suspicion. I went the round of all the agencies. I put my pride in my pocket, and tried in turn to get a place as nursery-governess, mother's help, and lady's maid. But the result was always the same. There were dozens of people eager to fill the posts I asked for, all of whom possessed far more experience, and were better qualified than myself. None but those who have been similarly situated can form an idea how hard it is for ladies, in reduced circumstances, to find work. They are of no use to anyone; their poor little accomplishments are scoffed at. All the things they can't do, they are expected to do, and all the ones they can, appear not to be required. The commonest woman, who knows how to baste a leg of mutton, roll a dumpling, or sweep a floor, is a mine of wealth in comparison with a girl, on whose education hundreds of pounds have been spent in finishing governesses or fashionable boarding schools. The former has a market value; the latter none. Her white hands can only tinkle the piano, or bring forth an indifferent water-color."

"What did you do?" asked Harry, struck by the force of her reasoning. "How did you manage to subsist?"

"I next visited the shops, many of them the very ones we had dealt with for years, and begged the owners out of pity to employ me. Pity!" and her young voice rang with scorn. "Where is such a thing to be found, when people have lost their money, and when every person you come across is afraid that you are going to beg? Your best friends shun you like the pestilence, or else invent a thousand excuses, the flimsiness of which is patent. No, no, pity is a fine sentiment to talk about, but it does not exist in reality."

"Oh! Annie, what a bitter experience you seem to have had of the world, already. And you are so young! Quite a child in point of years."

She sat upright, locked her hands over her knees, and gazed drearily out before her.

"Yes," she said in a subdued voice. "And yet, looking back on all my misfortunes, I don't think I ever was really unhappy until I married Ebenezer. Now," shooting a swift glance at her companion, "I know what it is to feel the sharpest pain that a woman can endure."

CHAPTER XXVI.

He did not ask her what she meant. Perhaps he guessed, for a lump rose up in his throat. She was silent a second or two, then again continued:

"To be brief, we supported ourselves after a fashion by taking in plain needlework. We worked like slaves for ten, twelve hours a day, in order to gain the barest livelihood. I often think of those days when I hear Ebenezer grumbling at his food, and remember how frequently we went supperless to bed. Rich people have no idea what privations the poor undergo. Not one in a hundred knows what the sensation of real hunger is like. I adored my mother, and it was terrible to me to see her suffering from positive want—she, who, since her childhood upwards, had been accustomed to the refinements and luxuries of life. She never uttered a word of complaint, but her health began to fail, and I knew that she required comforts, beyond my power to give. To watch her growing daily thinner and paler, as she bent in unremitting toil over that hateful work, filled me with a kind of savage despair. All this while Ebenezer was constant in his attentions. To do him justice, he did not desert us, as so many of our friends did, on account of our poverty. On the contrary, during the next few months he proposed three or four times, but I could not bring myself to accept him, for though touched by his constancy, I loathed the very sight of his little bilious face. It inspired me with the same feeling as does a repulsive reptile. He, however, would never take no for an answer, and as we grew poorer and poorer, I began to feel as if the web of Fate were being tightly drawn around me. It was a horrible sensation. You felt just as you might do if you were being sucked down by that whirlpool, yonder." And she pointed to the dark, revolving water, boiling weird-like at her feet.

"Yes; yes, I can imagine it," said Harry, deeply interested. "Pray go on."

"One day," resumed Annie, "I returned to our miserable lodgings, after a fruitless search for work. I was weary and dejected, all the world seemed against us, and as the months dragged away one by one, I lost courage. The future frightened me, for I did not see how we could possibly keep the wolf from our door. Well! I reached home, only to find my mother fainting on the floor. Do you know what was the matter with her?" and Annie's dark eyes dilated. "She was starving! Of course, many people have starved to death before now, but starvation is an awful thing to witness in the person of one you love. Something seemed to go snap within me, and from that moment I was a different being. I made up my mind there and then that I would marry Ebenezer, subject to certain conditions. Those conditions were, that he should give my mother a home as long as she lived, and not let her want for anything. He accepted my sacrifice, though, doubtless, I ought not to owe him a grudge on that account. It was a pure bargain. He had eight hundred a year, with prospects of an increased salary. So you see," lifting up her large, luminous eyes to his, "I told you the truth, when I said I married for money."

"I should say you married for actual food," he said shortly, "and from sheer necessity."

She gave a little, bitter laugh, full of pain that she no longer sought to disguise.

"Necessity. Ah! how many girls have been driven to marry men they dislike, from a similar cause? Numbers of us have indeed no choice. It is beggary or matrimony, and if in desperation we choose the latter, then we are taunted as being mercenary. Lucky is the woman who has it in her power to select the husband of her heart, for from one reason or another we are continually being forced into selling ourselves, however much we may hate the proceeding. We are so weak, so dreadfully handicapped in the struggle for existence. Our physical organization, and our miserable, flimsy education, combine to weigh us down when we must work for a living. Men have so much the best of it in this world, and so thoroughly understand the art of oppressing the weak. But I am wandering from my story. Once settled, I hurried on my marriage with indecent haste. There was, indeed, nothing to wait for, and luckily Ebenezer was willing. A fortnight later I became his wife. You know how long I have been married. Already," and her voice grew tremulous with a scorn too deep-rooted for words, "he talks of breaking his promise, and loses no opportunity of reminding me that I was a beggar when he took compassion on me, and would still be one, were it not for his bounty."

"The brute," ejaculated Harry, with clenched teeth. "He deserves a good hiding."

"I might have grown to be fond of him in time," she went on, with gathering emotion, "if only I could have respected him. But how can you love a man, whom you distrust thoroughly? It is not possible. Still that forms no excuse for me. Because I could not care for him, there was no reason why I should care for anyone else." And the color suddenly flamed up into her face. "My life would have been far, far easier had only my heart remained silent. But it was not to be. Ebenezer destroyed every germ of love when he hinted at repudiating his part of our contract, and now I"—shuddering violently—"I feel very often as if I should repudiate mine also. His baseness makes my folly seem less great, and yet, I know, I know that this is not the proper way to look at things. It only shows how I have fallen." Here her voice broke, and she burst into a storm of passionate tears.

Harry was deeply shocked and distressed by the narrative she had confided to his ears.

"Don't cry, Annie," he said, putting his arm round her waist, and drawing her to him. "Don't cry, my poor little darling. You have indeed had terrible hard lines, but pray God, the worst is over."

"Over!" she sighed. "No; it is only beginning. The sharpest part of the fight has to come." And then she rested her head on his shoulder, and sobbed aloud. She could not help it. It seemed so hard when things might have gone well with her instead of badly, and when a single stroke of Fortune's wheel might have made all the difference between happiness and misery.

The sight of her agitated him. He was not one to witness a woman's tears, especially when, as in the present case, he could make a pretty shrewd guess at their cause. The only way he could think of to dry them was by kissing them away, and this he did very effectually.

The heavy clouds seemed to wrap both him and Annie in a clinging embrace that, combined with the languorous air, and the splashing, falling water, served to intoxicate their senses.

She yielded herself up to the sweetness of his lips. They sent a warm thrill of delight through her frame, and every nerve quivered in response. It was the last time—the last time. So she silenced her scruples. For the rest of her life she could atone for this one great wrong, by being additionally proper and well-behaved. What sophistry! when it was the wrong she intended garnering up in her heart like a treasure, not the good. How cunningly and curiously people delude themselves, how tortuously they reason, in order to justify evil.

Nevertheless Annie could not succeed in silencing the still small voice within her. With all her faults, she possessed too many noble qualities for the baser ones to obtain an easy victory.

As his kisses grew hotter and fiercer she shrank away from them, and a great horror, a species of vehement self-loathing, filled her being. The barrier that rendered their love unlawful rose up like a prison wall.

"Oh!" she cried suddenly, freeing herself from his grasp. "Don't, don't. I am not altogether bad, although you treat me as if I were, and I don't wonder at it. But I know what is right all the same. My mother," with a choking sob, "is a good, pure woman, and it would break her heart if she saw me at this moment. It does not follow that one is wholly wicked, because, because—Oh! can't you understand? Harry," and she held out both her hands with a beseeching gesture, "go away. Leave me. You and I must part, and never meet again, unless—" But she did not finish the sentence.

(To be continued.)

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A Natural Question.

Mother—Don't ask so many questions, child. Curiosity killed the cat.

Willie—What did the cat want to know.

Before the Party.

"Better shave, old man."

"Why?"

"I expect they will play kissing games, and if so, you may find yourself disqualified for roughness."

B.C.'s ATTORNEY-GENERAL.

How Mr. Bowser Was "Hoist By His Own Petard."

Hon. W. J. Bowser is Attorney-General of British Columbia, and if any man in the Province is not aware of the fact it must be because his habitation is far up in the Rockies where the telegraph wires do not go. Assuredly it is not Mr. Bowser's fault. No other Attorney-General in the history of British Columbia has enforced the law half so majestically as he. It is not for nothing that his fellows in the Legislature have named him Napoleon.

But there is one man in Victoria, a chauffeur, who occasionally unfolds a tale of a collision between Mr. Bowser and the law.

Concluding his part of a public

function at Esquimalt, the historic naval base on the pretty little harbor about three miles from the border of Victoria, Mr. Bowser, who was to attend an important meeting in Vancouver the same evening, hastened into a taxicab and instructed the chauffeur to drive him to the C.P.R. wharf in Victoria Harbor.

"There is just time to catch the steamer if you hurry," said the Attorney-General.

Hon. W. J. Bowser.

"Yes, sir."

Half way to the wharf Mr. Bowser looked at his watch.

"I said I wanted to catch the steamer to Vancouver," said Mr. Bowser incisively.

"Yes, sir," the chauffeur replied, but he neglected to do anything to accelerate the speed of the taxi.

A little later Mr. Bowser again consulted his watch.

"There are just three minutes left," he shouted, able to contain himself no longer. "Why don't you hurry?"

"I must not drive any faster," said the chauffeur. "I am making ten miles an hour, and that is the speed limit in Victoria."

"Oh bother the speed limit. Never mind the regulations. I am the Attorney-General," thundered Mr. Bowser.

"I can't help that sir; I know the law," replied the chauffeur, glancing at a blue uniform as he passed a corner and recalling a fine for speeding a few days before.

When the chauffeur deposited fare at the wharf, the steamer two cable-lengths out. Thus came to pass that the speed re lations of Victoria were still int but Mr. Bowser missed an im tant political meeting in Van ver.

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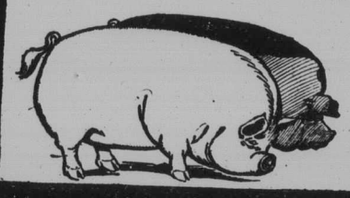

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