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THE NEW MAGDALEN.

BY WILKIE COLLINS.

SECOND SCENE—*Mablethorpe House.*CHAPTER XXVII.—*Continued.*

"For three happy years I lived under that friendly roof. I was between fifteen and sixteen years of age when the fatal inheritance from my mother cast its first shadow on my life. One miserable day the wife's motherly love for me changed, in an instant, to the jealous hatred that never forgives. Can you guess the reason? The husband fell in love with me.

"I was innocent; I was blameless. He owned it himself to the clergyman who was with him at his death. By that time years had passed—it was too late to justify me.

"He was at an age (when I was under his care) when men are usually supposed to regard women with tranquillity, if not with indifference. It had been the habit of years with me, to look on him as my second father. In my innocent ignorance of the feeling which really inspired him, I permitted him to indulge in little paternal familiarities with me, which inflamed his guilty passion. His wife discovered him—not I. No words can describe my astonishment and horror when the first outbreak of her indignation forced on me the knowledge of the truth. On my knees I declared myself guiltless. On my knees I implored her to do justice to my purity and my youth. At other times the sweetest and the most considerate of women, jealousy had now transformed her to a perfect fury. She accused me of deliberately encouraging him; she declared she would turn me out of the house with her own hands. Like other easy-tempered men, her husband had reserves of anger in him which it was dangerous to provoke. When his wife lifted her hand against me he lost all self-control on his side. He openly told her that life was worth nothing to him, without me; he openly avowed his resolution to go with me when I left the house. The maddened woman seized him by the arm—I saw that, and saw no more. I ran out into the street, panic-stricken. A cab was passing. I got into it, before he could open the house door, and drove to the only place of refuge I could think of—a small shop, kept by the widowed sister of one of our servants. Here I obtained shelter for the night. The next day he discovered me. He made his vile proposals; he offered me the whole of his fortune; he declared his resolution, say what I might, to return the next day. That night, by help of the good woman who had taken care of me—under cover of the darkness, as if I had been to blame—I was secretly removed to the East End of London, and placed under the charge of a trustworthy person who lived in a very humble way, by letting lodgings.

"Here, in a little back garret at the top of the house, I was thrown again on the world at an age when it was doubly perilous for me to be left to my own resources to earn the bread I eat, and the roof that covered me.

"I claim no credit to myself—young as I was; placed as I was between the easy life of Vice and the hard life of Virtue—for acting as I did. The man simply horrified me; my natural impulse was to escape from him. But let it be remembered, before I approach the saddest part of my sad story, that I was an innocent girl, and that I was at least not to blame.

"Forgive me for dwelling as I have done on my early years. I shrink from speaking of the events that are still to come.

"In losing the esteem of my first benefactress, I had, in my friendless position, lost all hold on an honest life—except the one frail hold of needlework. The only reference of which I could now dispose was the recommendation of me by my landlady to a place of business which largely employed expert needlewomen. It is needless for me to tell you how miserably work of that sort is remunerated—you have read about it in the newspapers. As long as my health lasted, I contrived to live and to keep out of debt. Few girls could have resisted as long as I did the slowly-poisoning influences of crowded work-rooms, insufficient nourishment, and almost total privation of exercise. My life as a child had been a life in the open air—it had helped to strengthen a constitution naturally hardy, naturally free from all taint of hereditary disease. But my time came at last. Under the cruel stress laid on it my health gave way. I was struck down by low fever, and sentence was pronounced on me by my fellow-lodgers: 'Ah, poor thing, her troubles will soon be at an end!'

"The prediction might have proved true—I might never have committed the errors and endured the sufferings of after-years—if I had fallen ill in another house.

"But it was my good, or my evil fortune—I dare not say which—to have interested in myself and my sorrows an actress at a suburban theatre, who occupied the room under

mine. Except when her stage-duties took her away for two or three hours in the evening, this noble creature never left my bedside. Ill as she could afford it, her purse paid my inevitable expenses while I lay helpless. The landlady, moved by her example, accepted half the weekly rent of my room. The doctor, with the Christian kindness of his profession, would take no fees. All that the tenderest care could accomplish was lavished on me; my youth and my constitution did the rest. I struggled back to life—and then I took up my needle again.

"It may surprise you that I should have failed (having an actress for my dearest friend) to use the means of introduction thus offered me to try the stage—especially as my childish training had given me, in some small degree, a familiarity with the Art.

"I had only one motive for shrinking from an appearance at the theatre; but it was strong enough to induce me to submit to any alternative that remained, no matter how hopeless it might be. If I showed myself on the public stage, my discovery by the man from whom I had escaped would be only a question of time. I knew him to be habitually a play-goer, and a subscriber to a theatrical newspaper. I had even heard him speak of the theatre to which my friend was attached, and compare it advantageously with places of amusement of far higher pretensions. Sooner or later, if I joined the company, he would be certain to go and see 'the new actress.' The bare thought of it reconciled me to returning to my needle. Before I was strong enough to endure the atmosphere of the crowded work-room, I obtained permission, as a favour, to resume my occupation at home."

"Surely my choice was the choice of a virtuous girl? And yet, the day when I returned to my needle was the fatal day of my life.

"I had now not only to provide for the wants of the passing hour—I had my debts to pay. It was only to be done by toiling harder than ever, and by living more poorly than ever. I soon paid the penalty, in my weakened state, of leading such a life as this. One evening my head turned suddenly giddy; my heart throbbed frightfully. I managed to open the window, and to let the fresh air into the room; and I felt better. But I was not sufficiently recovered to be able to thread my needle. I thought to myself, 'If I go out for half an hour, a little exercise may put me right again.' I had not, as I suppose, been out more than ten minutes, when the attack from which I had suffered in my room was renewed. There was no shop near in which I could take refuge. I tried to ring the bell of the nearest house-door. Before I could reach it, I fainted in the street.

"How long hunger and weakness left me at the mercy of the first stranger who might pass by, it is impossible for me to say.

"When I partially recovered my senses I was conscious of being under shelter somewhere, and of having a wine glass containing some cordial drink held to my lips by a man. I managed to swallow—I don't know how little, or how much. The stimulant had a very strange effect on me. Reviving me at first, it ended in stupefying me. I lost my senses once more.

"When I next recovered myself the day was breaking. I was in a bed, in a strange room. A nameless terror seized me. I called out. Three or four women came in, whose faces betrayed even to my inexperienced eyes the shameless infamy of their lives. I started up in my bed; I implored them to tell me where I was and what had happened—

"Spare me! I can say no more. Not long since, you heard Miss Roseberry call me an outcast from the streets. Now you know—as God is my judge I am speaking the truth!—now you know what made me an outcast, and in what measure I deserved my disgrace."

Her voice faltered, her resolution failed her, for the first time.

"Give me a few minutes," she said, in low, pleading tones. "If I try to go on now, I am afraid I shall cry."

She took the chair which Julian had placed for her, turning her face aside so that neither of the men could see it. One of her hands was pressed over her bosom, the other hung listlessly at her side.

Julian rose from the place that he had occupied. Horace neither moved nor spoke. His head was on his breast; the traces of tears on his cheeks owned mutely that she had touched his heart. Would he forgive her? Julian passed on, and approached Mercy's chair.

In silence he took the hand which hung at her side. In silence he lifted it to his lips and kissed it, as her brother might have kissed it. She started, but she never looked up. Some strange fear of discovery seemed to possess her. "Horace," she whispered timidly, Julian made no reply. He went back to his place, and allowed her to think it was Horace. The sacrifice was immense enough—feeling towards her as he felt—to be worthy of the man who made it.

A few minutes had been all she asked for. In a few minutes she turned towards them again. Her sweet voice was steady once more; her eyes rested softly on Horace as she went on.

"What was it possible for a friendless girl

in my position to do, when the full knowledge of the outrage had been revealed to me?

"If I had possessed near and dear relatives to protect and advise me, the wretches into whose hands I had fallen might have felt the penalty of the law. I know no more of the formalities which set the law in motion than a child. But I had another alternative (you will say). Charitable societies would have received me and helped me, if I had stated my case to them. I knew no more of the charitable societies than I knew of the law. At least, then, I might have gone back to the honest people among whom I had lived? When I recovered my freedom, after an interval of some days, I was ashamed to go back to the honest people. Helplessly and hopelessly, without sin or choice of mine, I drifted, as thousands of other women have drifted, into the life which set a mark on me for the rest of my days.

"Are you surprised at the ignorance which this confession reveals?

"You, who have your solicitors to inform you of legal remedies, and your newspapers, circulars, and active friends, to sound the praises of charitable institutions continually in your ears—you, who possess these advantages, have no idea of the outer world of ignorance in which your lost fellow-creatures live. They know nothing (unless they are rogues accustomed to prey on society) of your benevolent schemes to help them. The purpose of public charities, and the way to discover and apply to them, ought to be posted at the corner of every street. What do we know of public dinners and eloquent sermons and neatly-printed circulars? Every now and then the case of some forlorn creature (generally of a woman), who has committed suicide, within five minutes' walk, perhaps, of an institution which would have opened its doors to her, appears in the newspapers, shocks you dreadfully, and is then forgotten again. Take as much pains to make charities and asylums known among the people without money, as are taken to make a new play, a new journal, or a new medicine known among the people with money, and you will save many a lost creature who is perishing now.

"You will forgive and understand me if I say no more of this period of my life. Let me pass to the new incident in my career which brought me for the second time before the public notice in a court of law.

"Sad as my experience has been, it has not taught me to think ill of human nature. I had found kind hearts to feel for me in my former troubles; and I had friends—faithful, self-denying, generous friends—among my sisters in adversity now. One of these poor women (she has gone, I am glad to think, from the world that used her so hardly) especially attracted my sympathies. She was the gentlest, the most unselfish creature I have ever met with. We lived together like sisters. More than once, in the dark hours when the thought of self-destruction comes to a desperate woman, the image of my poor devoted friend, left to suffer alone, rose in my mind and restrained me. You will hardly understand it, but even we had our happy days. When she or I had a few shillings to spare, we used to offer one another little presents, and enjoy our simple pleasure in giving and receiving as keenly as if we had been the most reputable women living.

"One day I took my friend into a shop to buy her a ribbon—only a bow for her dress. She was to choose it, and I was to pay for it, and it was to be the prettiest ribbon that money could buy.

"The shop was full; we had to wait a little before we could be served.

"Next to me, as I stood at the counter with my companion, was a gaudily-dressed woman, looking at some handkerchiefs. The handkerchiefs were finely embroidered, but the smart lady was hard to please. She tumbled them up disdainfully in a heap, and asked for other specimens from the stock in the shop. The man, in clearing the handkerchiefs out of the way, suddenly missed one. He was quite sure of it, from a peculiarity in the embroidery which made the handkerchief especially noticeable. I was poorly dressed, and I was close to the handkerchiefs. After one look at me he shouted to the superintendent, 'Shut the door! There is a thief in the shop!'

"The door was closed; the lost handkerchief was vainly sought for on the counter and on the floor. A robbery had been committed, and I was accused of being the thief.

"I will say nothing of what I felt—I will only tell you what happened.

"I was searched, and the handkerchief was discovered on me. The woman who had stood next to me, on finding herself threatened with discovery, had, no doubt, contrived to slip the stolen handkerchief into my pocket. Only an accomplished thief could have escaped detection in that way, without my knowledge. It was useless, in the face of the facts, to declare my innocence. I had no character to appeal to. My friend tried to speak for me; but what was she? Only a lost woman like myself. My landlady's evidence in favour of my honesty produced no effect; it was against her that she let lodgings to people in my position. I was prosecuted and found guilty. The tale of my disgrace is now complete, Mr. Hoop-o-mo. No matter whether

I was innocent or not, the shame of it remains—I have been imprisoned for theft.

"The matron of the prison was the next person who took an interest in me. She reported favourably of my behaviour to the authorities, and when I had served my time (as the phrase was among us) she gave me a letter to the kind friend and guardian of my later years—to the lady who is coming here to take me back with her to the Refuge.

"From this time the story of my life is little more than the story of a woman's vain efforts to recover her lost place in the world.

"The matron, on receiving me into the Refuge frankly acknowledged that there were terrible obstacles in my way. But she saw that I was sincere, and she felt a good woman's sympathy and compassion for me. On my side, I did not shrink from beginning the slow and weary journey back again to a reputable life, from the humblest starting-point—from domestic service. After first earning my new character in the Refuge, I obtained a trial in a respectable house. I worked hard and uncomplainingly, but my mother's fatal legacy was against me from the first. My personal appearance excited remarks; my manners and habits were not the manners and habits of the women among whom my lot was cast. I tried one place after another, always with the same result. Suspicion and jealousy I could endure, but I was defenceless when curiosity assailed me in its turn. Sooner or later inquiry led to discovery. Sometimes the servants threatened to give warning in a body—and I was obliged to go. Sometimes, where there was a young man in the family, scandal pointed at me and at him—and again I was obliged to go. If you care to know it, Miss Roseberry can tell you the story of those sad days. I confided it to her on the memorable night when we met in the French cottage. I have no heart to repeat it now. After a while I wearied of the hopeless struggle. Despair laid its hold on me—I lost all hope in the mercy of God. More than once I walked to one or other of the bridges and looked over the parapet at the river, and said to myself, 'Other women have done it, why shouldn't I?'

"You saved me at that time, Mr. Gray—as you have saved me since. I was one of your congregation when you preached in the chapel of the Refuge. You reconciled others besides me to our hard pilgrimage. In their name and in mine, sir, I thank you.

"I forget how long it was after the bright day when you comforted and sustained us that the war broke out between France and Germany. But I can never forget the evening when the matron sent for me into her own room, and said, 'My dear, your life here is a wasted life. If you have courage enough left to try it, I can give you another chance.'

"I passed through a month of probation in a London hospital. A week after that I wore the red cross of the Geneva Convention—I was appointed nurse in a French ambulance. When you first saw me, Mr. Holmroft, I still had my nurse's dress on, hidden from you and from everybody under a grey cloak.

"You know what the next event was, you know how I entered this house.

(To be continued.)

Varieties.

A clergyman in the vicinity of Hartford advertises for "six enthusiastic church members to set the other six hundred on fire."

Arkansas newspaper correspondents in the Legislature make assertions and back 'em up by saying: "I've got six bullets which says it's so."

The following concise and comprehensive note was sent to an Illinois merchant by a neighboring farmer the other day: "Send me a trace-chain and two hinges. Jane had a baby last night—also two pallocks."

"'Twas ever thus; from childhood's hour I've seen my fondest hopes take flight, I never held a harbored bower, But some one took it with the right."

An eccentric old fellow, who lives alongside of a graveyard, was asked if it was not an unpleasant location. "No," said he, "I never find places in all my life with a set of neighbors that muddled their business so studdly as they do."

They are experts on all manner of subjects in these days of litigation. A woman testified at Norwich, the other day, in a turkey case, and declared she knew these turkeys "by their walk, their countenance, and their manner of roosting."

This is the way a delighted Michigan "local" puts it:—Brighter days are coming—just think of it. Blue birds, dandelions, caravans, self-sorghers, artichokes, violets and hand-organs, will soon sing, shine, show, sharpen, scent and shriek that Spring has come.

A very unpleasant fix was that of the gent on Saturday night, who struggled manfully but hopelessly to enclose himself within a pair of tight boots while a dog-fight was going on around the corner. He finally got out there in his stocking feet, but the fight was over.—*Danbury News.*

All who see Jacobs' Liquid recommend it!