

things haunted the man. He knew it was hopeless; and yet he could not tear himself away. Always the message of the dying boy was in his ears; always he seemed to hear himself promising solemnly—there amid the rattle of musketry and the shouts and cries of men—that he would do this thing he now found himself powerless to do.

For a couple of nights, in that next town to which they had gone, the Captain sat in the box he had secured, and watched the performance, and watched the child at the wings. And then, with the fortitude of the soldier, he told himself that he had done all that was possible, and that the matter was ended. He had tried and he had failed; he could do nothing more.

It was quite late at night, after that final visit to the music hall that the Captain sat in his private room at the hotel, writing a letter. It was addressed to Miss Fanny—he did not know her other name—of the Jolliffe Troupe; it gave her the name of his bankers, and assured her that if at any time anything might be wanted for the child a letter there would find him, and would receive attention. The Captain was in the very middle of the carefully-worded epistle when a waiter entered, after knocking somewhat agitatedly at the door.

"Well—what is it?" asked the Captain.

"Some—some ladies to see you, sir," stammered the man.

"There must be some mistake," said Captain Follett, with a glance at his watch. "Ladies?—at this hour?"

"Yes, sir; they asked for you by name, sir. Six ladies, sir."

The Captain started.

"Oh!—will you bring them up?" he asked. "I will see them at once."

As the man retired Captain Follett puzzled his brains to know what this visit could mean. Was it a protest against his following them from place to place—or what was it? Mechanically he hurried about the room, placing chairs for them; he threw his cigar into the fireplace.

They came in in a small procession. A very quiet procession, with not a word to say until the six of them were in the room, and the wondering waiter had retired and had closed the door. The eyes of the Captain, sweeping the six rapidly, saw nothing of the child; his heart, that had been foolishly beating, fell a little. He indicated the chairs, and the six, with glances at each other, seated themselves in them amid a painful silence.

"I—I am pleased to see you," said the Captain nervously.

It was Fanny of the black eyes who plunged into the business; she spoke in a hard voice, and with a little note of resentment in her tones.

"We've talked it all over, Captain Follett—laid awake at night, we've, some of us—especially when it 'appened to be each one's particular turn to take the baby with her. God knows, sir," went on the girl passionately grinding the knuckles of one hand into the palm of the other—"there was a time when we'd 'ave cut our 'earts out rather than let the little one go; but we've got to cave in. That's what we've come to say; that's what we're 'ere for."

Two of the little girls, whom the Captain dimly remembered as Queenie and Daisy, were surreptitiously dabbing their eyes with their handkerchiefs. The Captain turned away, and softly mended the fire.

"We've had to think of her mother, sir," went on Fanny, raising eyes that were suspiciously bright to him, "and when we've come to talk it over, we've felt that if she'd lived it would have been 'er wish. Ruby was always a bit more of a lady than what we were; and the girls don't mind my saying that. The little one will 'ave a chance we couldn't give her; she'll grow up to be a lady—and she'll forget."

"I will undertake that she shall not forget her old friends," exclaimed the Captain eagerly.

"Then you'll not be doing your duty by the baby," said Fanny sadly. "Don't you see that it's just the chance she

could never 'ave had in any other way; and she's young enough to forget all about us—and only to remember you. It's 'ard for us—but then life is mostly 'ard, if it comes to that. We haven't been like one mother to 'er—we've been like six; and when tomorrow she isn't there, it'll seem as though she'd taken a bit out of each our 'earts, and as if our arms were precious empty. There—I've done!" she exclaimed, getting up quickly and fiercely rubbing her eyes. "And I thought you told me, Queenie, that there was to be no blubbering over it," she added savagely.

The Captain stood looking at them a little awkwardly; there was so much he felt it so necessary to rearrange all his ideas of life and of people. That these common dancing girls could be moved as they were moved, and could have the power to shake his self-possession as it never had been shaken before, was remarkable; the Captain felt strangely humble.

"I think I understand—to some extent at least," he began lamely—"the sacrifice you are making. When I first came to you, ladies, I was brute enough—the word is hardly strong enough for my own self-condemnation—I was brute enough to suggest that the baby should be sent away to strangers who would look after her; I swear to you, by all I hold sacred, that that shall not be."

The girls exchanged quick glances and quick nods; they were listening eagerly.

"She is the child of my dead brother; I am a very lonely man," went on the Captain simply. "I—I am very fond of her; she shall be to me as she might have been had I, under happier circumstances, had a child of my own. She shall be brought up as my own; she shall have my name. By God's grace she shall grow up a rich and happy woman."

There was a long pause, and then Fanny, as though with the consent of

the others, came slowly across the room and stood before him.

"We knew we wasn't mistaken in you, Captain Follett, from the very first," she said softly. "It makes it easier for us—even though it makes it 'arder. She'll soon forget—"

"A child easily forgets," murmured the Captain. "May I ask when you will bring the child to me? Any arrangements I can make—"

"They're all made," answered the girl. "When we'd made up our minds, we knew it wasn't any good talking about it; so we brought her along tonight. We took the liberty of 'aving 'er put to bed; one of the chambermaids is looking after 'er. A 'er little things that we've made ourselves are in a tiny box; we brought that along too. Thank God, we've finished 'ere tonight, and we shall be miles away by the early train in the morning; I don't think we could 'ave stood it otherwise. Good-night, Captain Follett."

The girl held out her hand, and the Captain took it.

"If I might write to you—and tell you how she gets on," he faltered.

"Much better not," she answered firmly. "Say 'good-night' to the Captain, girls; we must be going."

Solemnly they shook hands with him—and solemnly they filed out.

The Captain saw the door close, and wondered for a moment why he had that sudden inclination to run after them and call them back. But he knew that was impossible; that he could not madly undo what he had done so well. He walked across to the window, and drew aside the curtain and looked out.

The deserted street of the little town lay bathed in moonlight below him. As he looked he saw a little group of figures—six in number—cross that moonlit space and disappear down an obscure side-street. But now they walked drearily and in silence; there was no high-pitched girlish chatter floating on the quiet night air, and no spring in their movements.

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