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LISHEEN

By Rev. P. A. Sheehan, D. D.
Author of "My New Curate," "Luke Delmege," "Lisheen," "Glenanaar," etc.

CHAPTER XXIX

SHAKESPEARIAN RECITALS

If Father Cosgrove was grievously troubled these days about the fate which hung over Brandon Hall, and the strangers who had become so dear to him, the mysterious agent, as he deemed it, of that Fate was no less grievously tormented.

Maxwell had heard from the old Major, in reply to his letter about Lisheen. The business details were easily settled. Colonel Bernards was only too glad to get such a troublesome place off his hands, and he sold his entire and unencumbered interest in it to Maxwell for three hundred pounds. But here arose the difficulty. How now could he carry out his hidden design not only to restore these poor people to their home, but to make that home a wonder and a surprise to them and their neighbors for ever? He had become deeply attached to them, and many a night he remained awake, planning a new farm-house, new furniture, new barns, fences perfect, gates of the most modern pattern, etc. He frequently pictured to himself (and found intense pleasure in the fancy) the wonder, the delight of these poor people, when on emerging from prison, and expecting only to see a ruined house and a desolate farm before them, they would find themselves reinstated in a place that would be absolutely luxurious by comparison. But how could he do it? He dared not show himself at Lisheen. The story of his supposed treachery to the McAuliffes had gone far and wide, and he would risk his life if he were seen about the place. He could have written to his agent, but he didn't care just yet to reveal his position, except where his secret could be kept. He thought of consulting Hamberton, but he shrank as yet from the revelation. And, let it be said, he wished to win Claire Moulton for his wife without the adventitious help that would arise from a knowledge of his real position. Yet, time was rushing by. In three months the McAuliffes would be released from prison, and then—his beautiful castle would topple over and fall.

The good old Major, too, had hinted rather brusquely that Mabel was not happy. Even his old, blind eyes had seen it. And he said little things, expressed little regrets, with here and there an "Alas!" and an "If," that signified much. Was Maxwell sorry and sympathetic? Hardly. For human pride is flattered when those who have spurned us have had reason to regret what they have done. Sometimes he would feel a little savage against the Major, against Mabel, but most of all against Outram, whom he had always disliked.

"The cad," he would mutter between his teeth, "I knew he would break her heart. Poor Mab! Queen Mab!"

He was in one of these moods when he received a letter from Outram demanding back the talisman—the ring with the strange intaglio, which was to be the pledge, and in some wise the guerdon, of Maxwell's banishment. Outram contended that as Maxwell has not kept his engagement to live as a farm labourer for twelve months, he should now resign the talisman and confess himself defeated in his Quixotic scheme. To this Maxwell sent the following reply:

Cabercon, April 30, 18—.

Dear Outram: I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter. I thought that Major Willoughby would have kept my present position and incognito secret, particularly from you. But quite possibly, the many troubles, domestic and others, there are now pressing on the Major's mind, and disturbing his peace, may have rendered him forgetful for the moment of the prudence that should have guarded my secret, especially from you. You are quite mistaken in supposing that I have not kept my engagement. I have had some grievous hardships, but I have received much illumination also; and I consider myself much a better man than when last I sat in your company in a Dublin club. I am still employed here as overseer and time-keeper, but also as farm-servant and labourer. I have served six months in much the same capacity, but under lower and more menial conditions. I have suffered much, but made no mistake; and shall continue my probation for a better life until the term agreed upon has expired. And until then, I shall retain the bauble you were good enough to lend me. The Gods will protect you.

Yours truly,
Robert Maxwell.

A letter which made Ralph Outram very uneasy. Cold and brutal and unfeeling, he felt the web of Fate closing around him; and with the intense superstitions that haunt such minds, he placed a hope in that little ring and its intaglio.

The night for the Shakespearian recitals came round rapidly. Maxwell had drilled some young village lads to take subordinate parts in the entertainment, but he reserved the main characters for Claire Moulton and himself. There were many rehearsals, held in the loft over the marble stores, but now transformed into a theatre with lights, and an improvised stage, drop curtains, side scenes and all. The more Claire Moulton saw of him during these rehearsals, although she studied him closely under the light of a dark suspicion, the more she became convinced that, whatever was his history, two things were clear—he was of gentle birth and had had a liberal education, and he was not only an honourable man, but had a peculiar tenderness in his character which marked him as one of Nature's nobility. For if the hall-mark of nobility in the eyes of the noble is unemotional serenity, the hall-mark of nobility of Nature is gentleness and tenderness towards all, even the most humble. Yet she thought sometimes—it is suffering that has made him thus; but this rather increased than diminished her interest in him, now rapidly growing into something more deep and tender.

There was a crowded house, for the people gathered in from all quarters to see the novelty. It would be difficult to conjecture what they expected, but it is to be feared that if they thought the programme was intended to be purely educational, they would not have been to eager to come. "Fun and frolic," "Panem et circenses," are still our cry. But nothing was more foreign to Maxwell's intentions. He had a mission of elevation, of pushing up these gifted people, who were, alas, unconscious of their gifts, to higher levels; and he knew no other way of effecting this than by submitting to them the masterpieces of the world's literary master.

He was delighted beyond measure of his success. The long hall looked well in the lamplight. The rude, bare rafters were wrapped in festoons of ivy and long tendrils of woodbine, just then breaking into leaf. The stage was rude, and the benches were rude, but the former was covered with plants and flowers, the latter filled with an eager and, as events proved, a most appreciative and intelligent audience. Hamberton sat in the front bench, more moody than cynical, for he knew that behind the mock tragedy on the stage there was a more real and terrible tragedy impending.

The proceedings commenced with the singing of one or two of Shakespeare's lyrics, and then came the murder scene in Macbeth. The two leading characters were so disguised that the simple peasantry failed to recognize them, and this made the awful scene more impressive. It would have flattered Claire Moulton exceedindly, at least in her dramatic role, could she have heard the comments that were made by this impressionable and emotional audience upon her impersonation of Lady Macbeth. It was simply marvellous how they caught up the thread of the story—the weakness and vacillation of Macbeth, the more than masculine determination of his wife, his dispair:

"She's the divil out an' out," whispered one.

"She'd do it herself, only she thought she saw her father," said another.

Wondher that same shtopped her," said a third. But there was universal contempt for Macbeth. A murderer was bad enough, but a weak murderer, and one who would place the guilt on innocent men, was beyond all human forgiveness.

In the last scene of the second part of the programme, the murder of Desdemona, rustic feelings ran very high. The callousness of Othello, and his short, brutal answers to Desdemona's plaintive and piteous appeals for mercy, seemed to wind the people up to a pitch of desperation. Their contempt for the "nigger," their pity for his beautiful wife, and the excellent acting of both, infuriated the people, until they quite lost themselves, forgot it was a drama, and thought they were face to face with a zeal tragedy. The women were moaning and crying, the children were yelling with fright, and, at the moment when the Moor went over and placed the fatal pillow on the lips of the unhappy woman, there was a general rising of the men, which would have issued badly for Othello had not Hamberton risen and with one motion of his hand quelled the emotions of the people. They sat down quivering with excitement, which was only stilled when Othello drove the dagger into his own breast. This appeared to relieve their feelings.

"Bad ind to the ruffian. Sure it was only what he desarved."

"Where's the good of his sorra? They're always sorry whin it can't be remedied."

"Yerra, shure 'twas only play actin' they wor."

"Yerra, av coorse, didn't ye hear the Masther say so?"

"Begor thin,' 'twas quare play acthin'. Didn't ye see him smother the poor girl? An' drive the soord into his own stumac?"

"Yerra, sure they say 'twas Miss Claire, and that she isn't dead at all."

"Miss Claire? Be this an' that, av I thought 'twas Miss Claire, I'd have settled that chap before he sot a wet finger upon her."

The realism, indeed, was but too perfect, and Maxwell became the butt of that truculent amusement with which crowds often pursue a victim who has merely assumed alpart. If you wear a lion's skin you must expect a lion's measure of fear or reprobation. And in Ireland, where a witty judge has said, everything is *Opera Bouffe*, a man must suffer for whatever ipart he assumes in the curious melodrama.

And so Othello, in his white tunic and red tasselled girdle, was pursued by a hooting crowd to his own door, when the recitals were over.

"Ss—ss—ss—sh—sh—sh! Look at him, the dirty nigger, who smothered his wife! Begar, what a beauty you wor that she should take a fancy to you! 'Twas jealousy, my dear! Sure he thought no wan as handsome as himself! He'll want another now to settle her agin! Bah! Bah! Ss—ss—ss—ss!"

More or less terrified and disguised, and yet half pleased with the unconscious flattery of the mob, he murmured to himself:

"Clearly, the work of educating these people is no child's play."

He was hot and fatigued from his exertions and was slowly washing off the burnt cork that disguised him, when Mrs. Donegan, who was his maid-of-all-work, came in and said:

"There are two gentlemen waiting to see you outside."

"Let them wait," he said impatiently.

But they didn't. They came in, without fuss or excitement, and the foremost said:

"Your name is Maxwell? Robert Maxwell?"

"Yes," said Maxwell, brusquely. "What do you want?"

"I've come to arrest you," said the man, "on a charge, or rather a suspicion, of being concerned in the murder of a girl."

The thought of Desdemona and the part he had just taken towards her was so uppermost in Maxwell's mind that he was quite sure the officer referred to her, and he said angrily:

"You d—d fool, don't you know that it was but a Shakesperian dialogue. It's bad enough to be hooted by that ignorant mob outside, but you should know better."

"It has nothing to do with that," said the officer. "The charge is a more serious one, I regret to say. Come with us."

"Allow me," said Maxwell, seeing that the thing looked serious. "There is some stupid and abominable mistake. You say I'm charged with murder, or camplicity in murder. Where, and when?"

"I'd advise you," said the officer, "for your own sake to say no more. This is my warrant, if you care to see it. We've been looking for you for some time."

"I tell you there is some infernal mistake somewhere," said Maxwell. "I never had anything to do with violence except on the stage. Or is this all a partial joke?"

"Come, come," said the officer. "We can't delay. We have a car waiting. If you use any violence or show resistance, I shall have to handcuff you."

Utterly dazed and bewildered at the sudden turn in his affairs, yet perfectly conscious of his innocence, Maxwell swiftly made his toilet, and called in Mrs. Donegan, bidding her see after his affairs during a short absence. Then, turning to the officers, he said, coldly, but politely:

"You are making a serious mistake for which I shall make you pay. But I cannot resist you. Please take me before Mr. Hamberton. I must see him."

Hamberton was in his dining-room at supper when the visitors were announced. Claire Moulton, still habited as Desdemona, was with him. They were talking over the events of the evening, and laughing at the unconscious flattery of the people towards Maxwell, when the latter entered, accompanied by the officers.

"You must forgive this unwarrantable intrusion, Mr. Hamberton," he said, in a voice somewhat unsteady from emotion, "but our stage fictions have had a curious ending. These gentlemen charge me with actual murder."

Hamberton was silent, looking down at the table, and toying with his knife. Maxwell gulped down something and went on:

"I have not the faintest idea to what they refer, and they refuse to give any information. They seem to think they are conceding a high privilege in not having handcuffed me. There is some stupid mistake somewhere, but at least it has one good result. It solves a difficulty for me, and compels me to make a revelation to you, which otherwise I should have no excuse for doing."

Hamberton was still silent, but manifested more interest here. Claire Moulton was devouring Maxwell with her eyes. The latter went on, simply and quietly, as if he were telling some one else's story:

"My name is Maxwell, Robert Maxwell. I am the landlord of this district, and therefore your landlord."

Hamberton now stood up. Claire Moulton looked at him meaningly, and a smile of pleasure and triumph stole over her features.

"I am a Trinity man," Maxwell continued, "an M. A. of Trinity, and I have read long and deeply. That's why I am here. I could have done like all my college associates and compeers—killed so many foxes, shot so many brace of partridge or pheasants, evicted so many tenants, and remained an honored and respected member of the aristocracy, but I read and read and understood that life has finer issues than these, and that I was called to a more arduous and lofty mission. I read somewhere that sooner or later every spirit is tested, and an alternative placed before it, to ascend the summit of being, and find in its cold, clear atmosphere its rightful place, or to remain deep down in the valleys of Paphos, and pursue an easy, voluptuous existence, sanctioned by the usages of society, but condemned by my conscience. I made up my mind. I was the owner of broad acres, and I held the lives and happiness of many toilers and workers in my hands—"

"Pardon, one moment," said Hamberton. Then, turning to the officers of the law, he said:

"You see you have made a grim mistake, my men. Perhaps, however, you would wait outside, until I clear the matter up."

"If you can guarantee, sir — I fear there is a mistake, and that this is the 'mad landlord' some of us have been questing for. But we must do our duty."

"All right! That's all right," said Hamberton, impatiently. "But I promise you he won't escape through the window. Don't you see he's a gentleman?"

And the officers went out.

"Go on, Mr. Maxwell," said Hamberton. "This grows interesting."

"I was saying," said Maxwell, flushed and excited, "that I held the lives and happiness of many poor earth-diggers and spade-slaves in my hands, and I could if I had chosen, unrebuked by the customs of the age and society, have extracted their sweat, and coined it for my own selfish use. But, as I tell you, I had read wisely or unwisely; and I felt I had duties towards these serfs, as well as rights over their wretched labor. I felt that someone was called to raise up this wretched and teeming population above chronic conditions of starvation and ignorance, and I knew this could not be done from outside. They would suspect the motive of the benefaction, and they would have reason to suspect it, and my toil would be in vain. I determined to go down amongst them to become one of themselves. The idea was floating for a long time before my mind, but only took shape when I was taunted about it in a Dublin club. I took fire. I was challenged to do what everyone deemed impracticable, and even insane. There was one man especially there, a returned Indian, who was conspicuously contemptuous. I had reason to dislike him and suspect him. He continued to taunt me. He wore a ring—an intaglio, to which he attached superstitious importance. I suddenly conceived an idea. I made a promise to go down and become a day-laborer amongst the peasantry, and to live their lives for twelve months, but I demanded that ring in return. He would have refused, but he was shamed into it. This is the ring."

He handed it carelessly to Hamberton, who examined it closely, and passed it on to Claire, who studied it also, and then unconsciously retained it.

"It is not much," said Hamberton, "One of those talismans which Arabian Mussulmen wear. It is phosphorescent, is it not?"

"Yes," said Maxwell. "Well, at last, he consented, and I took up my strange role and came down here to Lisheen. I had tried several farmers for employment, but met refusals everywhere. I was too genteel a tramp, I suppose. At last, footsore and weary and hungry and in despair, I came to Lisheen. The poor old woman was alone in her kitchen when I entered and made the usual appeal of a beggar. She took me in, gave me food and lodging and such sympathy as a poor, starved tramp alone can appreciate. Her husband came in, her son, her daughter. It was all alike. I asked for work, and got it. Need I say, it was nominal on my part. My limbs ached under a pressure that was merely pleasant to these athletes of Nature. Yet I was not dismissed. They treated me as one of themselves, only that they worked and I was idle. At last, I made up my mind to depart, and had actually gone, when they forced me back. The young girl, Debbie, came after me and ordered me back. It was well for me. That night I was down with rheumatic fever, and was ill for three weeks, during which they nursed me with infinite solicitude and care. Was I grateful? God knows I was. The time has come for proving my gratitude now. You know all. How they struggled against an impossible rent, how Netterville took his revenge—"

"I understand all," said Hamberton. "But I cannot make out why you prevented a settlement with the sheriff that day. You know they resented it and the whole country-side with them."

"I do," said Maxwell, smilling. "But I wanted them to touch the very bedrock of trouble, in order to build on it more permanently, and I wanted to show another example to the world of what an Irish agent can do. And now you have to help me. This unfortunate arrest, or rather ridiculous and stupid blunder, has precipitated matters. So much the better. Here are the title-deeds—the fee-simple of that farm at Lisheen, which I have purchased from the landlord and made over to the McAuliffes for ever. I want you, knowing your benevolence, to arrange for me, whilst I am away, to have that farmhouse rebuilt on the newest and most modern plans of comfort, retaining all its old homely features. I want the byres to have seven cows feeding in them when these poor people come out of prison. I want to have ten sheep on the fields. I want all the fences repaired, new gates hung up, the land tilled and sown. You can get the Land League to do it. They'll do anything for you. They'd shoot me. In a word, I want everything done for them that can be done, down to the pot on the fire, and the hens in the coop, and the pig in her stye, and I rely on you to do it. Need I say I shall bear the expense?"

He stopped. Claire Moulton, though, in tears looked smilingly at her guardian.

"Tis a strange, weird story," said Hamberton, walking up and down the room. "One of the things that would be impossible out of Ireland, I would say, if I had not seen it. But my dear fellow, when you have conquered these kingdoms, what do you propose to do?"

"To sell my property, liberate my slaves, and settle down here to work for humanity with you."

"Tut, tut, nonsense," said Hamberton, "You could never settle down here alone."

"Not quite alone, uncle," said Claire Moulton, coming over and standing near Maxwell. Her eyes were red from weeping at the singular tale she had heard, and which Maxwell had already partly revealed to her. "With your consent, I have promised Mr. Maxwell to be his wife."

"Hallo! is that the way the land lies?" said Hamberton. "Is that how you have kept your promise to me?"

"I didn't break it uncle," she said, "until I knew all."

"Of course, of course," said Hamberton. "The old story, the old story. But I must clear up one thing. Hello, there!" he cried to the officers.

They came in.

"Your prisoner is now ready, and perhaps this young lady may accompany him. But, sergeant, look here. There must have been depositions before a warrant could be issued. On whose depositions have you made the frightful blunder of arresting this gentleman who owns half Kerry?"

"The young girl who was arrested at Lisheen at the eviction," said the officer.

"Debbie McAuliffe?" said Maxwell in amazement.

"That's her name, I think, sir."

"But what could have put such an idea in the girl's head?" reflected Maxwell. "I suppose she was angry about the eviction."

"I suppose so," said Hamberton, looking at Claire. "But her revenge was rather tragic. And how could she have conceived the idea of murder?"

"I don't know," said Maxwell. "They all took me for an army deserter, except this girl, who from the first maintained a different opinion. However, I had better go on and clear matters up. There's something gained, for they say every decent man in Ireland must go to goal some time or another. Au revoir!" He held out his hand to Hamberton. "You undertake to do all I require about Lisheen?"

"Ye-es," said Hamberton. "I think it it Quixotic, but everything you have done hitherto is so. You only want the pot for a helmet and your equipment is complete."

"Well, I have found my Dulcinea," said Maxwell, laughing.

"And Claire has found her hero," said Hamberton. "But what will Father Cosgrove say, I wonder."

CHAPTER XXX

A LEPER

When Outram tapped at his wife's door and uninvited entered, he found the room in complete darkness. He could not distinguish Mabel's figure, and said hesitatingly:

"Mabel, are you here?"

"Yes," she said firmly. "I am here. What do you seek?"

"Let me ring for a light. There's something wrong. What is it?"

"You have come into my room," she said, "unasked. You have something to say, or seek. Better say it in the darkness than in the light. What is it?"

"Mabel," he said, "there's something evidently wrong. This is unusual. Are you coming down to dinner? Or, look here—" he said, as if suddenly struck by a new idea, "will you let me send for Dr. Bellingham? Clearly, you are not well.

He had come over, guided by her voice and by the faint gleam of pallor from her face, and stood over her, as she sat by the window.

"Again, I repeat," she said, "you have come here unsolicited. Futhermore, you are acting a part, and acting it badly. You have something to say; say it. If you have naught to say, leave me."

He still kept a firm hold on his rising temper, though he felt his hands trembling.

"For God's sake, Mab," he said, "let nothing come between us now. We are too recently yoked to quarrel. There will be misunderstandings, I suppose, for ever, between married people, but as a rule, they are easily cleared up. Now, it is clear, we both have tempers. We can't help that. But, for God's sake, let us give and take. We have to consult for each other's happiness, or at least, peace. And there's the old man, your father, to consider. I know he doesn't like this kind of thing, and he's troubled—"

"Yes," she said, "he is troubled, and why?"

"Why? Because you are giving way to nerves, or temper, or something feminine, which we men don't understand."

"He understands," she said, "too much, but not all."

"What then does he understand?" said Outram. "Come, let us have explanations. There's nothing like clearing the air."

"He understands," said Mabel, slowly, but with terrible distinctness, "that he and I have made the blunder of our lives. He understands that I have paid, for my partial disobedience to his wishes, a fearful penalty. He understands that on the day, I, in my girlish folly and ambition, promised to be your wife, it would have been better if he had seen me dead. He understands that partly for him, altogether for me, there is no more peace or happiness any more forever."

"Not very complimentary," said Outram, "but at least you will be pleased to remember that I did not force myself on you in any undue or unbecoming manner. You are not pleased with me—I, at least, conjecture that to be your meaning—but you married position, and power, and a certain place in society. You still retain these, and you have no reason to complain."

The words were cutting because they were so terribly true. Mabel dared not deny them. He was encouraged.

"You could have married," he went on, "that idiotic cousin of yours, and been now a diary-maid in Kerry, instead of being one of the recognised queens of such society as we have here, but you chose better. Why do you complain?"

"Because I didn't know," she said with contrition, "the penalty of such pride, the terrible conditions attaching to it."

"You mean my personality?"

She hesitated to say the offensive word. But he persisted.

"It is I who am the horror. Is it not?"

She muttered a feeble yes.

"Of course," he said bitterly, "I am not the Adonis you imagined. The Lord didn't make me a Count d'Orsay, a padded creature of stays and corsets to catch the eye of a silly girl. But you have all you anticipated otherwise. Surely, you didn't expect love in the bargain?"

She was silent. He knew his advantage, and went on mercilessly:

"You bartered your happiness deliberately for other things," he said. "But you did no more than every other woman in society. People may read novels, but even the most silly of schoolmisses doesn't believe in them. Their good mammas take care of that. Girls marry in these unpoetical and prosaic days for money, position, a place in society, and they are prepared to take with such things their disadvantages. For Nature is impartial, *ma cherie*. Where she gives beauty, she balances it with idiocy, where she gives intelligence, she retrieves the gift with ugliness or moral malformation. Your Adonis is always a fool. Now, most women believe and understand this, and are content with a few of the gifts of fortune. You want all."

"I wanted at least as much as I gave," she said. "When a girl gives up everything she expects some return."

"Well said, my dear," he cried with a tone of triumph. "Now, we are beginning to understand. You see there is nothing like an academic argument, like this, to throw light on matters, although this seems slightly out of place in such Cimmerian gloom. Now, let us pursue this train of thought, which you have so admirably started. You looked on our marriage as a bargain, as a contract, where there should be a fair interchange of goods. Neither of us pretended then, or pretends now, to any sentimentality on the matter. Now, it does not reflect credit on my business tact or talent to have to admit that I think you have had decidedly the best of the bargain. You married for position, ease, social rank, etc., etc., I married that I might have a handsome woman, whom I could call my wife, and who would be known in society as Mrs. Ralph Outram. I obtained that desire. Mrs. Ralph Outram is the queen of fashion, the cynosure of all eyes in the drawing-room, at the theatre, at the ball; and I am rewarded when I hear one eye-glassed idiot say after another: 'What a demd handsome woman! Who is she?' And the reply is: 'Mrs. Ralph Outram—Outram, you know, who is aide-de-camp, etc.' It is a poor compensation, I admit, but *que voulez-vous?* I say to myself. You couldn't have done better. But, my dear Mabel, don't you see the balance is on your side? Position, wealth, social rank, admiration, envy on your side; and, on mine, the poor compensation of being ranked as Mrs. Outram's husband. Now, fie! fie! When a girl has made such a tremendous bargain, why should she rail against fortune?"

Mabel sat crouched in her sofa under the terrible words. Thy were uttered so cynically, so coolly, that she could not reply; and, above all, they were *true!* She sold herself in the marriage-market, and she had no reason to complain of the price. She could only feebly say:

"When people repent of their bargain, they are sometimes allowed to revoke it. Have you any objection?"

"The greatest, my dear. I could not think of revoking such an important contract, and one so advantageous to you on any terms. You see I am disinterested. I do not consider myself. All the gain is on your side; and I have such a deep interest in you that I should consider myself ungenerous were I to take advantage of your offer. No! my dear *wife*," he laid terrible emphasis on the word, "we are linked together for good or ill, and must remain so. And now, one little word! You are very innocent if you don't know that these little differences of temperament do exist in all married circles. They do. Men of the world, like myself, understand this well; and, when they see more than the usual demonstrations of of affection between married people, they shrug their shoulders, and say something about Mrs. Candle's Lectures. But they are wise enough to keep their secrets to themselves. Now, this is what I want you to do. Whatever happens, you must understand that the social *convenances* shall not, and must not, be put aside. In polite circles, emotionalism is a crime. Anything but that. You may be angry, or discontented, or envious, or unhappy; but you must not show it. We do not love each other; and I suppose never shall—?"

He stopped as if questioning her.

"Never," she said solemnly.

"Very good. *Tant mieux*. But at least, let us not have scenes. Now, that little scene last night was not quite becoming. It hurts people. And, what is worse, it makes people talk, and conjecture, and form opinions."

"What do you refer to?" she asked, feeling at last that he was plunging beyond his depth, out of the region where his cynicism made him safe.

"I mean your collapse, your fainting-fit, your ungoverned emotion in that drawing-room. It was unguarded, and unbecoming."

"I could not help it," she said, drawing him into deeper depths.

"Oh, yes! you could. There was really no necessity for it."

"It was a dread revelation to a woman, to a wife," she said.

"What? You don't mean that any woman would regard a little excess as an unforgivable offence in her husband?"

"Quite the reverse," she answered. "I regarded it as a blessing."

"As a blessing?"

"Quite so!"

"How?"

"Because for the first time you told the truth, and revealed yourself."

"How? I don't understand," he said. The darkness shut out the sight of pallid lips and whitened face. But Mabel knew that her moment of triumph had come. Yet she hesitated. The truth was too terrible to be spoken. Even to such a callous and unfeeling wretch, it was hard to speak so bitter a word. But she felt it was an opportunity that once lost would never be recovered. She recalled for a moment all his stinging words to fortify her lest her woman's heart should fail her. She repeated them, over and over in her mind; and yet so swiftly that the pause seemed unnoticed. The bitter language stung and smote her into a passionate desire for revenge. She yearned to say the one word that would kill him. But, she had discretion enough left to allow him to drag the fatal word forth.

"You told a strange story," she said. "It was sensational enough for a new magazine."

"Yes when it made you faint and swoon," he replied.

"It was well invented," she said.

"I'm glad to hear you say so," he said. "It reflects credit on my imagination. It so excited the fancy of that professor over his whiskey, that he should have it again over his tea."

"It cleared up one or two mysteries for me," said Mabel.

"Indeed?"

"Yes! The Sanscrit writing that came with the porphyry vase." Then she added, as in a tone of unconcern:

"The porphyry vase is broken!"

He started back, and muttered in a tone of alarm:

"Hell! Who broke it?"

"I," she said. "The green snake stirred in the bottom of the vase, and I thought it might have stung me. I struck is with the heavy steel shell, and the snake was crushed into powder; and the vase parted in two."

"You have done an evil thing," he replied. "You have summoned and defied your, Fate, and you will rue it. Come now. Let us see the mischief you have wrought!"

He put down his hand in the darkness, as if to reach her shoulder. He touched her cheek rudely. She sprang instantly to her feet, and flung him aside.

"How dare you touch me," she said, "you—a leper? How dare you come into a respectable family, that has never had a physical or moral blot or stain for generations on their family history, and bring your loathsome presence there? You, an unknown adventurer, whose secret and awful record is only now being revealed; you, a drunkard and a profligate; you the companion and confidant of occult and loathsome things over there in India; you, the hypocrite, carrying your slimy ways into decent society at which you rail and cry out in order to hide your own moral deformity and you, once a leper by your own confession, and therefore a leper for ever; how could you have the courage, how could you have the heart, you unclean thing to steal into our home and bring with you such moral and physical loathsomeness? You have given me position, wealth, social position? Take them! Take them! and give me back my innocence, my ignorance. But you cannot. Oh, my God! you cannot. The evil is done, and not God Himself can undo it! And I am betrayed and lost! I, Mabel Willoughby, who couldn't bear on my finger-tips the presence of an ink spot, nor on my garments the pin-point of a spect; I, who would shudder at a prick of a needle, and thought myself polluted if a fly rested on my hand—I have to bear your presence, to sit with you at table, drinking in the pollution of your presence, and the hateful contagion that you breathe. You unclean brute! there is no punishment on earth sufficient for your crime! But go! Go where you please; and carry with you the curse and the despair of the wrecked and ruined girl you have betrayed!"

Whilst she uttered this last word, she heard the door opening, and saw by the reflection of the gas-jets outside the miserable creature creeping from the room. Then she threw herself back on the sofa, murmuring:

"Father! Oh, Father!"

She was suddenly startled by a fearful crash on the stairs, and the sound of a heavy body falling. She held her breath, divining what it was. There was a rush of feet, the stifled screams of servants, the rustling and pushing of people vainly trying to lift something weighty. Then a tap at her door.

"Mr. Outram has a fit, ma'am, on the stairs. Will you come and see him?"

She came forth, and her wild pale face startled the servants. She came slowly down into the lobby, shading her eyes from the gas-light, until she stood over the prostrate body of her husband. The butler and footman were trying to lift the insnimate form, whilst the girl-servants helped. Mabel stood still as a statue, looking down on the wretched creature she had dismissed from her side for ever. They had torn open his collar to give him room to breathe freely. There was a gash on his forehead, where he had struck against some sharp projection when falling. He was quite unconscious. The dining-room bell was ringing furiously, where the old, feeble, chair-tied Major was clamouring to know the cause of the disturbance. Mabel coldly ordered the servants to take the prostrate and bleeding form into the breakfast parlor on the ground floor. She swiftly ordered the doctor to be sent for; and then went in to speak to her father.

"Ralph has had a fall or a heavy fit," she said. "I have sent for the doctor."

"How—how did it happen?" asked her father, watching with some curiosity her white, drawn face.

"I don't know. I think it was what they call 'a visitation of Providence.'"

"Where was he? Where was he coming from?"

"From my room. We had some explanations. Father," she suddenly cried, "this is the hand of God; and we must flee, flee from this dreadful place."

"Calm yourself, Mabel," said the old man. "Above all, show nothing to these servants. You know how servants talk."

"I do. But is it better to have to bear everything in silence, than to be talked about?"

"Yes, oh yes!" said her father. "Family secrets, you know, family secrets. And then, your own pride! You must never let on that you have made a mistake. That would never do. It would be an admission of defeat, you know. And think of the position you occupy; and how all your friends would exult over your unhappiness."

"Yes, yes. 'Tis all position, and rank, and secrecy. Oh, if we could only go away somewhere; and be our own natural selves. Father?"

"Yes, dear!"

"If anything happens to Ralph—to Mr. Outram, you and I must go away—away—away—anywhere; the more remote the better. We'll take some old castle in Scotland where there's no one within a hundred miles, or go to Brittany, or—somewhere, anywhere out of the world!"

"Very well, my dear. But I must have some kind of doctor near me. There now, go see after Ralph. The servants will talk if you keep away from him just now."

She returned to the room where her husband lay insensible on the sofa; and after giving some slight orders, she went upstairs to her room. As she passed through the lobby, she saw that the pedestal on which the porphyry vase stood had fallen; and that the vase itself lay shattered into shreds and fragments on the floor. Clearly, it was against one of the sharp, broken fragments her husband had fallen, after he had stumbled and toppled over the pedestal and vase.

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