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Out of the Darkness

"Come, Garton, you must go now." She put out a soft hand again, and half led, half drew the excited young man to the door. She let him out herself into the wind and storm. It might have rained showers of roses on them both. A shy goodnight followed him through the darkness. Garton, turning round in the garden-path, saw her still standing, with flowing dress and hair on the doorstep, with the silver lamp in her hand. The radiant figure haunted him all night long.

Rotha went up to Meg when she had let out Garton. Meg was not asleep when she entered. The elder woman knew at once by the girl's kisses and silence that something had happened. She drew her into her arms without a word, and let her cry softly to herself. Rotha shed a few tears of wonder, and happiness, and excitement on Meg's shoulder. The strain and flurry of the last few hours had worn her out. This natural outburst and relief, by and by she sat up and told her friend all.

Meg was not much surprised; she lay and listened with a throbbing head to the shy recital. How strange and yet how familiar it all sounded! A hot quiver of pain darted through Meg's temples as she thought how she had known it all. Meg lost herself once in the midst of the girl's eager talk; the pine logs fell asunder, sending out a shower of sparkling fragments. A cricket came out and chirped upon the hearth; the room was full of a clear ruddy light. Meg is back again in the shabby parlor of Chatham Place. There she is, a tall ungainly figure, with faded pink in her belt. She is playing on the cracked old piano; the cool evening through the wire blinds, the room is filled with warm spicy smells; there is a bowl of dull red carnations. "Encore, encore!" cries somebody from a distance. "Play that again, Magge!" says a sweet old voice. A wrinkled hand beats time softly. "Ay, do Magge, it is my favorite!" A tall figure blocks up the light. Hand-some Jack Carruthers is standing behind her; a dark intense face leans down to hers. Are her tears splashing on the ivory keys? "Ay, Jack, for better, for worse; nay, for worse, worse only!" Meg wakes up with a start and shiver, and a dull shadow seems creeping over the room.

"Do you love him? Are you sure you are happy? He is very good, but not good enough for my darling," says Meg, when Rotha had finished.

"Good! I wish I were half as good as he is," thought Rotha, when she went up to her room. She was a little disappointed at Mrs. Carruthers' reception of her news. Meg had said very little, but she had kissed Rotha and wept over her.

"It is too late to ask my advice now," Meg had said very solemnly, "and per-

haps, after all, I should not have cared to give it. You have accepted Garton's love, and I pray that he may be worthy of my darling's choice, but I would have her be very sure of herself and of him, too."

Rotha had gone upstairs with these words ringing in her ears. In spite of her happiness they had a little sobered her. It was clear that Meg had been thinking of her own unhappy choice. To her such a subject must always be more or less invested with gloom. Nevertheless the words had been said, and Rotha had felt herself somewhat sobered by them.

"Do you love him? Are you sure you are happy?" Meg had asked, anxiously, and then she had averred it as her conviction that he was hardly worthy of her friend's love. Doubtless it was rather chilling to the girl's enthusiasm; she sat down a little troubled as she pondered over Meg's words. "Was I sure?" Of course, she was. Rotha repelled the doubt indignantly. Was he not the best, the noblest, the dearest? Her breast heaved, her eyes filled with tears, as a hundred recollections of the young man's goodness crossed her mind. Rotha was right when she felt that she loved him dearly. Nevertheless, Meg was right, too. Mrs. Carruthers had grasped the truth actively when she told herself that Rotha's affection for Garton was a sentiment rather than a passion, and that the imagination had as much to do with it as the heart.

"Proximity has much to do with such cases. One remembers the quaint old name that Shakespeare has given to the pangs — 'and maidens call it Love in Idleness.' How many a girl and boy fancy has grown out of summer's wanderings and the dolce far niente of holiday-time—youth, spring-time, and love joining hand in hand! In after years things are different. Damon is not forever plying to his Chloe; a little honey may refresh the eyes, but palate for all that, Adam, as he delivers in the sweat of his brow, is not always thinking of his future Eve. One who has lately gone from us, and who gave his all of earthly love to one woman, as child and girl and wedded wife, once said, 'Love is the business, but not the sole business of a man's life.'"

Rotha had always had a pleasant liking for Garton; his society had become a sort of necessity to her. Those three days of his absence had seemed a break in her life; he had fallen out of her daily existence, and Rotha had been restless. Garton was away from her, unhappy and miserable, and all the sweetness had gone out of everything in consequence.

And after that it had all come so suddenly on her, "and maidens called it Love in Idleness," or, as Meg would have said, love in pity or out of pity,

When Rotha questioned her heart in the presence of Garton its answer appeared conclusive. She put out her hand to him with a great throb of pity and love, with genuine blushes, with a little burst of honest frankness. She would make him happy; it must all come right, she thought. Poor Garton's passionate protestations awoke responsive thrills.

Rotha was in a great measure blind to Garton's failings. The faults that provoked others were to her but the errors of circumstances. In some degree he was glorified in her eyes. The stern or ascetic side of Garton's nature, which Mrs. Carruthers found so grievous, was simply admirable to the young girl, who would have gone through fire and water for those she loved. She looked at Garton through the glamour of her own imagination. She invested him with a hundred imaginary attributes. Garton, with all his clumsy honesty and his tender heart, would have fallen far short of this standard, for no one knew his own faults better than Garton.

As she thought about it now, Meg's doubts ceased to harass her. "He will owe everything to me. I shall make up to him for all his disappointments and his wasted life," she said to herself. "I need not fear that he does not love me for myself now. How noble of him to go away without asking for anything, and now he will have it all!"

When Bunley woods are green with summer sap, when the red leaves of autumn flame deep in windy hollows, or when the winter snows are crisp and untrodden in the bosky dells, how will Rotha remember that she has promised to be Garton's wife?

CHAPTER XXIX.

As for Garton, he went home through the wind and rain as though he were treading on air. He came back once and put his lips to the stone where the silver lamp had been gleaming. He murmured a thousand blessings as he looked up at the curtained window, where the firelight was still playing on the blind. He imagined her still sitting there in her gray dress, with downcast eyes, thinking of him. He would have lingered there, heaven knows how long. In the rain and darkness, keeping watch and ward over that hallowed threshold, but for Rotha's little Skye terrier Fidgets, who flew barking at him round a corner. He quitted the dim garden-walks with reluctance. Rotha would have wondered if she had seen him pacing up and down underneath the soaking evergreens. Garton would have paced on there quite happily for hours, entirely oblivious of his outer man, but for Fidgets' annoying attentions. The dog positively refused to recognize his friend. He growled at Garton's wet overcoat, till Garton gave up the contest and retired.

He performed a few more acts of worship, however, in the front of the house, leaning on the gate which Rotha and he had so often entered. Was Rotha or he the happier now? "Oh, God bless her for all her dear love and goodness to me!" cried Garton, lifting his hat in his youthful chivalry. How many more delicious things he would have said and done are doubtful, but

Fidgets found him out again and came grumbling through an aperture in the wall. Jack and Jasper from the vicarage joined in the duet inside, and all the village dogs took up the chorus, while Garton, baffled by the canine music, took himself and his raptures to the seawall, till he felt sober enough to get back to Robert.

The study looked very cozy when Garton entered. The fire was blazing, the lamp freshly trimmed, and the vicar sat in the arm-chair which Garton usually occupied opposite Robert, with Cinders comfortably curled up on his knee. Garton could hear their voices as he climbed up the dark staircase. The cheerful light almost dazzled him coming in from the gloom outside.

Robert broke off directly at Garton's entrance. His face looked flushed and excited, his eyes sparkling, his whole appearance and manner changed. The vicar also looked beaming. The two confronted him with some curiosity. Garton, with his radiant face, his wet coat and muddy boots, presented a strange appearance to his two brothers. Austin put his hand on his wet shoulder rather anxiously, and Robert exclaimed in surprise:

"Why, where have you been, Gar? It is nearly 11 o'clock, and my dear fellow, just look at your boots!"

"Yes, I know," returned Garton, not looking at them, however, and shaking himself like a water-spaniel. "I have been with a friend a part of the evening, and since then I have been taking a walk by myself on the seawall."

He did not add that his friend had been Rotha, and if Robert had any suspicion as to the cause of his radiant looks he did not say so.

Austin was the next to speak. "Making the most of your liberty, eh? Now I'll be bound your friend was Rube Armstrong, and that you were both making a night of it up at Bryn. Here have Robert and I been waiting out patience waiting for you. Mary has sent in once to know when I was coming, but I would not go till Robert had told you the news."

"What news! It ought to be pleasant to judge by Bob's face," replied Gar dreamily. He wondered with a sort of pride if they could guess how little their news could affect him. It was something to see Robert look happy, however. "Is Belle better?" he asked, with a consciousness that this news must be about her.

"Better. No, I can't say that she is," replied the vicar, becoming a little grave at the question, "Mary will tell it that she gets gradually worse."

"Oh, Mary is always croaking," interrupted Robert hastily.

"It is natural that she should be anxious about her only sister," returned Garton, opening his eyes. "I cannot turn the vicar mildly. 'I cannot bear to see her worry herself so; it is making her quite thin. You know you were getting anxious yourself, Robert.'"

"Yes, but this will make all the difference; it will put a stop to the unsettled state of things; and then the change of climate you know."

"You think, then, of arranging it before May?" inquired the vicar significantly.

Robert nodded and then looked at

Garton.

"We have not told him your news yet. Look here, Gar; we are talking in hieroglyphics, old fellow. What should you say if you had not to go to New Zealand after all?"

Gar stared at him stupidly. Not to go? Of course he was not going now; but how did they know? Robert took up his brother's parable rather impatiently.

"That is not the way to begin, Austin. Gar will never understand us like that. Listen to me, Gar. You recollect Aunt Charlotte's oldest friend, Mr. Ramsay, of Stretton?"

"Remember him? Of course, I do. Emma Ramsay was a pretty girl, too," he added mischievously for his brother's benefit, and, for a wonder, Robert did not resent the joke.

"Well, she is Emma Tregarthen now—Lady Tregarthen, I should say; and is prettier than she ever was, only rather stout. Well, what should you say, Garton, at Mr. Ramsay sending for me early this morning in quite a friendly way and telling me that he had accidentally heard that I was managing clerk at Broughton & Clayton's, and not getting on so well as I ought in the world, and then making me the most brilliant offer you ever imagined?"

"I should say he was a jolly old fellow and no end of a brick," cried Garton rapturously. "Is he going to take you into the works at Stretton?"

"No, Bob. The star of the Odds is rising now, and boyish as ever, he clipped his brother's name on the shoulder. "No nonsense, Gar; you have not heard me out. He can't take me in at Stretton, though I see he wants me, because Carter refuses to be superannuated, and very sensible, too, of Carter. By the by, he told me, Austin, that he had always hoped to see me at the head of that concern, in poor Bob Ramsay's place, but, of course, the fates would not have it. He moralized Robert, looking very handsome and sentimental, as befores a man who had to choose between two beautiful girls."

"That was when he hoped you would be his son-in-law," returned the vicar, smiling. "It is getting late, my dear fellow, and you are leaving Garton a long time in the dark."

"Not in the dark now," answered Gar, with a happy laugh, but, of course, his brother misunderstood him.

"What do you guess?" asked Robert in surprise. "I was utterly taken aback when Mr. Ramsay told me that, knowing how my abilities were thrown away, he had taken the liberty to recommend me to the house of Fullgrave & Barton, old correspondents of his, who had applied to him for a well-qualified English manager."

"An American house!" exclaimed Garton, opening his eyes.

"Yes, I should have preferred England, if only for Belle's sake. Of course, I know she will be willing to accompany me," he continued, with a smile; "still it is hard parting her and Mary. It is all arranged; Mr. Ramsay has the power to arm me with full credentials. I have given Broughton & Clayton three months' notice. My salary is to be six or seven hundred a year, and I trust, before two months are out, Belle will be well enough to

marry me. Mr. Ramsay says there can be no objection to my taking a wife out, as we are to have a house rent free on the premises. So Belle will be quite a rich woman," finished Robert; but his voice was a little husky as he thought how late, how very late, all these good things had come to them. More than once the fear had crossed his mind that evening that Belle was hardly fit for the new duties she was taken on herself.

"Have you told her?" asked Gar excitedly. "No, I have not told Belle yet; Mary begged me to say nothing tonight, Garton, you don't look half surprised enough, and you don't ask me why you are not to go to New Zealand."

"No," returned Garton, trying to suppress his impatience; "I forgot all about that part of it, Robert."

"Well, I am coming to it now. Mr. Ramsay did not send for me this morning only to tell me this news, but because he thought I should be a likely person to assist him in a sudden difficulty; he has no sons, as you know, and his staff, though efficient, is somewhat small, and he wants a trustworthy person with a fair amount of brains to discharge rather a delicate commission for him."

"Well!" ejaculated Garton. Robert was decidedly prosy in his happiness; these particulars were not at all interesting to Garton; he began to think of Rotha standing out in the dark with a silver lamp in her hand; he could hear the sweet goodnight echoing among the trees; he shifted his place and moved restlessly, somewhat to Austin's amusement, as Robert went on with his explanations.

"You see he is rather in a fix just now, as the Yankees say; he has just heard from very reliable sources that the Vera Cruz mines in South America are not yielding profits to the shareholders; that, in fact, there are rumors of immense losses. Mr. Ramsay is not one of the directors, but he has dabbed very largely in shares; and the person he has appointed to watch his interests over there has not quite come up to the mark. Some of the most influential shareholders have been selling out, a panic has been the result, and the directors want to hush it up; in fact, Mr. Ramsay cannot satisfy himself whether there is any cause for alarm or not;—do you follow me?"

"Of course, I do," returned Garton impatiently; he could not understand what Robert was driving at, or why these lengthy particulars should be interesting to him. The vicar was watching him, exchanged a droll smile with Robert.

"It does not strike you as particularly interesting, does it? Well, it will soon; don't be in a hurry, Gar; it is coming presently. Well, Mr. Ramsay would go over himself, but he is not as young as he was, and he dreads the voyage; but he asked me if I knew of anyone tolerably trustworthy who would go over there, and who would watch the whole thing for him and keep his eyes and ears open. His principal business would be to seek out a certain retired Spanish merchant, of whom Mr. Ramsay has lost sight of for many years; this Don Gomez would give you—I mean the person in question—every reliable information that was to

be had. You see it is very simple. The only thing is there's not a moment to be lost; Mr. Ramsay wants immediate action."

It was evident Garton was getting very restive; he understood now, at what Robert was aiming; he would have to bring out his news in a very different way than he intended; this long business talk was intolerable. (To Be Continued.)

LOCAL OPTION IN KENTUCKY.

There are, we believe, only nine counties in Kentucky where liquor is legally sold, and in most of these it is only at the county seat. So far as practical prohibition is concerned, reports indicate that there is much less liquor sold at retail in Kentucky than in the prohibition State of Maine. On Tuesday, Richmond, county seat of the oldest county in the state, voted "dry." This is near the spot where Boone made his first fort and conducted operations against the Indians. In Kentucky there is a law which permits any voting precinct, even a ward of a city, to vote out saloons by popular voice, and it also permits a county to do so. The curious part of the whole matter is that in Kentucky prohibition seems to prohibit more perfectly than almost anywhere else—Philadelphia Inquirer.

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