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HAWTHORNDEN

A STORY OF EVERY DAY LIFE

BY MRS. CLARA M. THOMPSON

CHAPTER XVIII.

REVELATIONS

The first breach of the silence with respect to Miss Marten took place one evening just after the family had comfortably arranged themselves, each intent upon their own business; the Doctor, with pipe and last Medical Journal, seated near Rosine, who would occasionally apply to him for the solution of some difficult problem; the Colonel with his daily paper, and Mrs. Hartland with the last number of Harper, and her knitting, without which she would have felt that she was idle, when a servant came in with a note for Colonel Hartland, containing a request from Sister Agnes, that he would call at the House of the Infant Jesus as soon as convenient.

"I wonder what's the matter there!" he exclaimed, reading the note aloud. "Don't go, sir," replied his son. "Laura Marten is there, and you may depend this is some of her management; don't go."

A very gentlemanly response to the good Sister's polite request! he said, turning upon his son. "What on earth could Laura Marten want of me? I don't believe in this senseless talk of an engagement between her and Aleck, though Ross here tries to convince me."

Rosine, who had sat with both hands pressed against her ears pouring over a proposition she was to learn by heart, looked around at the sound of her name which came to her dimly.

"What is it?" she inquired, the conversation having been lost on her. "Here it is," replied the Colonel, giving her the note.

"O, do go," she said, rising and coming towards him as she took in the contents of the note. "You will go?"

He drew her down upon his knee and replied, "Yes, my blessed little daughter. Did you ever know me to refuse the request of a lady. I leave that for Ned."

"I really wish you would go, husband," said Mrs. Hartland, energetically, and with a sharp glance at Rosine; "I wish this matter settled, and Laura Marten made to understand that we do not, and will not acknowledge the engagement."

"If you would delegate me, sir, in your stead," spoke the Doctor, rising in his excitement, "I'd soon nail Laura Marten's pretensions to the mast. The unprincipled, impertinent—"

"Stop, Ned," said the father, bringing his hand forcibly down upon the table; "Laura ought to have an opportunity to speak for herself. I'll go at once; it may prevent you, my boy, from saying many things you may wish unsaid."

Mrs. Hartland, taking this opportunity to call on a friend with whom she would remain till the Colonel returned, Rosine was left alone with the Doctor. She was gaining in decision of character and force; the timidity of her childhood was beginning to wear off, though she could not as yet control her color.

"Ned," she said, as she took her seat again for her lesson, "you are very revengeful toward Laura."

"You don't know anything about it," he replied; "she has done wickedly."

"We all come under that commendation," he replied, timidly. "Don't say that, child," he retorted. "I hate cant. Don't put yourself on a level with Laura Marten."

"She has had no mother," continued Rosine, turning about toward him, and speaking earnestly, "no brother to tell her what was wrong. I have had both," she added, with tears in her eyes. "If she has cried more than I, it is because I have been kept by friends and home influences from the temptations she has met; besides, if thy brother offend against thee seven times, and seven times turn again, saying, I repent, thou shalt forgive him, and Sister Agnes says she is so penitent."

This was unanswerable. Dr. Hartland wanted to say "stuff," but he had too much respect for Rosine's religious principles, so he puffed away without a reply, while she turned again to her books, and was soon absorbed in her studies.

"Rosie, Sister Rosie," he commenced, after a half hour's silence, "come, leave those dull books, I wish to speak to you. Wouldn't it be more profitable to be looking after Dora Greenwood than seeking Laura Marten?"

"O, dear Miss Dora!" she exclaimed, without turning from her books. "I long to see her; but how can I? She has never called here."

"And probably never will," he interrupted, with a shrug of his shoulders. "The Colonel might put you in the way of seeing her, if it wasn't for the Commodore."

"Are not thy friends?" exclaimed Rosine. "I always thought the Colonel was friendly with every one."

"It is an old story," replied the Doctor, "and is not worth the ashes," he added, knocking the ashes from his meerschaum. "The old story! Blood between the army and the navy. Mrs. Army looks down on Mrs. Navy, and Mrs. Navy snaps her fingers in the face of Mrs. Army. Besides, he suspects the Commodore

of preventing Aleck's promotion, and the Commodore hates the Colonel for telling him plainly he was a fool to force Harry into the naval service against his inclination; so they go, I'm glad I am not in the mess."

Colonel Hartland found Sister Agnes alone in the little parlor of the Orphan's Home. "I have sent for you," she said, after the first kindly salutation, "to see Miss Marten; she has something of importance to communicate. You and I both know that her conduct has been very indiscreet—nay, I must speak the truth, very wicked; but it is my satisfaction to you, I can truly say she gives evidence of her deep, earnest penitence for her folly, she is entirely willing to leave the matter with you; she would have seen you before this, but that her delicate health required that she should be kept free from excitement."

The Colonel bowed, thanked Sister Agnes for her communication, and Laura had planned how she should meet this interview, and what she should say, for many weary sleepless nights, but the words choked her, or fled from her memory when she attempted to utter them. "I don't deserve any thing," she said at length, in a low husky voice, her eyes cast down and her hands clasped—"any thing from you or your family, but contempt." She had begun where she intended to end her speech. "But," she continued, "I will endure any punishment, even separation from all of you, but I must tell you—"

She paused and trembled, and her face became deadly pale, the Colonel sprang forward. "No I shall not faint," she said, recovering herself and stepping back, she gave into his hand a paper she held, the same she had shown Sister Agnes in her sick room; it was worn and blistered with tears. She turned away from the Colonel as he opened it, and laid her face in the folds of the curtain. The Colonel put up his eye-glass and read:

This certifies that Lieut. Alexander Hartland and Laura Marten were united by me in the bonds of marriage in the Church, P.—, April 20, 18—, according to the laws of the State of—

ABEL STEPHENS, Rector. MARY A. STEPHENS, MARY A. STEPHENS, HELEN STEPHENS, Witnesses

The Colonel dropped his eye-glass and looked fixedly at Laura. "Married!" he exclaimed, as if Aleck married! He glanced again at the paper, took a memorandum book from his pocket and copied it. "Laura, does your father know of this?" he said at length.

"Yes, sir, I told him this morning."

"Where are his lodgings? I will see him at once."

He found the stout old Captain wholly unprepared to compromise or blush upon matters, but boldly declared his intention to publish the marriage in the morning papers.

The Colonel wished to investigate, to be sure there was no mistake, to hear from Aleck before the thing was made public. "Laura had behaved very improperly, and there could be no harm in waiting awhile longer," but the Captain swore roundly that "Laura had done no more than forty respectable married women he could name; she promised well for the future, and indeed he believed in letting bygones be bygones; as to mistakes, there was the marriage certificate, which could be easily proved valid, if that was what the Colonel wanted." They parted much excited, Colonel Hartland hurrying home, forgetting his wife; but she, wearied with waiting, had taken a carriage and reached home before him. Unlike his usual light hearted cheerful comings, he went to his own private parlor instead of joining the family circle, or even looking in upon them.

"Father's in trouble; waterlogged!" said the Doctor, shaking his head; "he heaved the door closed after him; something goes against the grain. You never find father going into such close quarters without a denouement. As a youngster, I always trembled when the Colonel took to his private room, for I expected something serious after it. I was sure he had heard of my youthful delinquencies, and was prepared to give me what I deserved."

As he spoke, a servant entered with a summons from the Colonel to his son. Rosine smiled, and the Doctor putting on a distressed look, went out of the room humming.

"O, would I were a boy again."

"It is worse than I thought, Edward," (he never called him Edward except upon very serious occasions,) "it is worse than I thought," said the Colonel before the Doctor could fairly close the door after him, "they are married!"

Dr. Hartland's face became intensely pale for a moment, and he stopped short in his advance, as if he had been struck. "Where—when—by whom? I demand proof!" he said as soon as he could speak.

"She has the marriage certificate—here is a copy—examine it."

Dr. Hartland took the slip of paper into his hands. "Last April," he soliloquized, "while she was with her aunt. Well, sir," he said giving back the paper, "all I can say (if

this be genuine,) is that Aleck deserves dishonor for such a contemptible piece of trickery. But even if it be true, it must not be made public till he returns."

"We can't help ourselves," said the Colonel, "the Captain vows he will have the marriage in the morning papers; the question now seems to be, shall we make Laura one of the family, as will be expected by the world."

"Excuse me, sir," exclaimed the Doctor, impatiently, "but who cares for the world, or what the world expects?"

"Everybody of sense, Ned; nobody more than yourself, only your world is narrower than that of most people. Yes, the opinion of the honorable, right-minded portion of the world is worth regarding. If Laura is Aleck's lawful wedded wife, she is my daughter and your sister, and as such, has a claim upon us for protection. If the matter had only been done honorably, all this commotion with Le Compté would have been omitted, as I should have put a stop to the proceedings. The question now is, what are we to do, as things are? If Aleck is recalled for these Mexican troubles, he may be home sooner than he is; that is—his voice trembled, "if the poor boy comes out of it alive. By the way, Ned, I heard down town today that Harry Greenwood had thrown up his commission rather than fight the Mexicans."

"Good!" replied the Doctor, "I expected it when I heard his ship was ordered home to prepare for the Gulf of Mexico. What will the old Commodore do now?"

"They say he is almost frantic, fretting and fuming, and swears he will disown him, forbids Dora to speak his name."

"Infatuated girl!" said the Doctor, with a half sigh; "a life of constant slavery, when she might have had love and freedom."

"Yes," replied the Colonel; "how strange, so different from our anticipations. Here is Dora, whom we once longed to take to our hearts, would not come; while Laura, whom we regret to accept, is ours without asking."

"Don't mention Dora Greenwood and Laura Marten in the same breath," exclaimed his son sharply; "if it is your fixed resolve to receive this woman as one of your family, it is perhaps not any place to remonstrate, but I will only beg, for Rosine's sake, that you will consider the influence of so equivocal a character on her young mind."

"Look here, Ned, one would think Laura was your own wife, by the way you bristle up when she is mentioned. I only wish to do right," he added, "and your mother must be consulted."

It was with reluctance that Colonel Hartland revealed the discovery he had made, and he did so with her just indignation with the deceitful course of the young couple, as well as the real misery it would cause her to be so thwarted in her own earnest wish to keep her son's affections all for herself. The Doctor had often troubled her, once seriously, in these matters, but Aleck had never caused her a moment's uneasiness; she was as sure of him as she was of the Colonel. Her husband, with all his knowledge of her, was hardly prepared for the blank look of distress, and the gust of tears with which the self-control met this intelligence; but with the prudence of a woman of the world, she restrained her tongue, and only requested the Doctor to desist from the vituperation which he heaped upon Laura. 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