

solitude that old age procures; I am humiliated that I, who ought to have resources at all seasons, yearn for the cheerful circle of bright eyes and loving hearts at these great festivals."

"Woolton Court is not a long journey from Eagle Crag," said Lord Charleton, "I have come to fetch you to spend the Christmas in a circle, where Arthur and Violet can supply the bright eyes and your poor old Charleton the loving heart."

"I would accept this kind invitation," replied the duchess, "but for the following difficulties: I have always had with me two lady companions and one lady's maid; for this reason, that the one lady companion and the one lady's maid not having received the same education, could not be proper associates for each other, and would either each seek me, when I wished to be alone, or would endeavor to find sympathy of tastes abroad. When on a visit I have had my two maids only, leaving my two ladies together, or permitting them to visit their friends. But in visiting you, Lord Charleton, who have made yourself a separate dwelling from the young couple, I should be compelled, for propriety sake, old as we both are, to bring with me four women, who each like a separate room. Can you accommodate such a party?"

"Perfectly well," replied the earl. "Remember the size of two sides of a square, such as Woolton Court. The suite of rooms prepared for you is on the first floor: it consists of ante-room, drawing room, bed-room, dressing-room, bath room, before which, to the south, is a little conservatory, opening to a terrace on the leads, which will be good for exercise in damp weather. There is also in this suite the room of your immediate personal attendant. The two ladies and the other maids will be on the floor above. Will you come with me now in my carriage, and order that your own shall follow before night with the ladies and maids and whatever comforts you may require?"

"Can you wait an hour?" demanded she.

"Have I not waited at Eagle Crag many an hour?" returned he smiling.

"Well, then, I will give my orders, write my letter to George, and do as you wish."

In little more than an hour the carriage of the Earl of Charleton was slowly ascending a short but steep hill, at the top of which a high landmark notified the boundary of Eagle Crag. Often as the occupants of the carriage had each gazed separately on that well-remembered spot—the scene of the parting described by the old gardener—they had never, till now, viewed it together.

"Fifty years ago, Charleton."

"Yes, Emma; on this very day, by the calendar month, the 22d of November."

"And now, Emma, I am, at length, bearing you away from Eagle Crag to Woolton Court, never to leave it, as your home."

"My dear Lord Charleton, what are you saying?"

"I trust in the constancy of your friendship and affection, as I prove my own. That as Divine Providence has permitted me to conquer the adversity of our parting, and has left you without ties, and even desolate, we may never again part. I bring you to Woolton Court as absolute mistress of all I have retained of the mansion, before the arrival of our young bride, that you may receive her, not be received by her. Your high rank, your venerable age and your title to her respect, as her godmother, will induce Lady Violet to feel that when she visits me, as her grandfather, she is second to her whom I delight to honor as first in my house, as in my heart."

These were the last words spoken, until they reached the avenue of the causeway that led direct to the great

gateway of the court. There, in addition to the usual line of servants, in their gala liveries, presented themselves James Turner and Thomas Jenkins.

"Why, how is this?" said the butler; "there is no great number of visitors to-day to require a number of servers. Dinner is laid for only four persons."

"Hail Mr. Grainger," replied Turner, the usual spokesman of the two friends. "Just consider what a day it is. Here is the young earl, as was, bringing home the duchess as is."

"Home!" cried Grainger. "What, is this going to be her home?"

"Now just you watch and see," returned Jenkins, "whether she ever leaves this, except for a drive, before she goes to heaven."

No more could be said. The carriage passed through the entrance tower. The earl alighted, and, with stately tenderness, alone assisted the Duchess of Peterworth from the carriage; who, still in silence more eloquent than words, leaned passively on the arm of her old friend till they entered the hall.

"Perhaps you had better not mount the stairs just yet," said he. "Shall we go into the library or to the chapel?"

"To the chapel," was the reply.

In the evening the female followers arrived and arranged her grace's suite, as well as their own rooms, till they felt at home. The duchess had foreseen the difficulty and incongruity of bringing the liveries of the Duke of Peterworth under the obedience of the butler of the Earl of Charleton, or of keeping three men independent of all control but her own. The men-servants of her grace were, therefore, rewarded and discharged and two new footmen hired for the service of herself and ladies, who were to wear the livery of Woolton Court. All things proceeded thus in perfect order and harmony while awaiting the arrival of the bridal pair, who, after a little tour by the Sussex coast, reached Woolton Court early in December, the weather having proved most propitious.

Perhaps a happier young being than Violet could not be found, while folded alternately in the arms of her new grandfather and her ancient godmother.

"Oh, duchess!" cried she, while looking like a newly-descended angel from above, "what joy to find you here. It makes all look so like home. Arthur promised me that our first ride should be up to Eagle Crag; but how far better to find you here!"

"And to find her always here," added Lord Charleton. "The duchess has long wished to yield her hereditary property to her nephew, Lord Dartford. She has also the generosity to consent to take compassion on my old age and be my valued companion during the intervals of the Sunday visits of my grandchildren."

Lord Stanmore instantly perceived the whole truth. He gracefully took the hand of his grandfather and that of the duchess, and, bending, pressed them to his lips, while the Earl of Charleton passed the disengaged hand on his grandson's head, saying:

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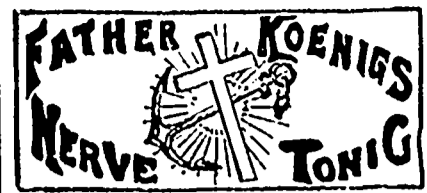
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