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THE MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

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It was midnight—the moon was shining clear and bright, and her soft and shadowy light fell upon one of the stately old mansions of England: a casement window in that mansion was open, and standing upon the terrace, her hand grasping the carved railing for support, was its noble lady. She was of high name, and lofty lineage; and of rare and surpassing loveliness; but there was sorrow stamped upon the brow of Aline Everard, and the long raven lashes were heavy with tears; the glossy blackness of the curls scattered over her snowy cheek, contrasted almost strangely with its exceeding whiteness; the small delicately curved lips were tremulous with emotion, and ever as that lady thought of the past, and the fearful present, her stately form was bowed with the anguish of bitter and contending feelings. A step sounded in the distance, and as she heard it, the colour came again into her pale cheek; a voice sounded in her ear, whose tones were as softest music—an arm was around her, and Aline Everard repulsed it not, though she was the wife of another! and he said,

“Aline! all is ready—will you go with me now?”

Yet, as she spoke, that lady's hands closed in her agony, till the slender nails pierced the flesh, and the blue veins stood out like small cords upon the white forehead. Then she turned to the window, and her voice was low and broken as she murmured, “Let me look upon my child once more!”

Alfred Delavel stood with her over the bed of the sleeping babe, and as he looked upon its soft and gentle beauty, he recoiled from the wrong they were about to inflict upon its head—but memory of that infant's father came over his better feelings, and they withdrew as a flower before the hot wind of the desert. Aline knelt down and she wept long and bitterly. Delavel drew her arm within his own, and they went forth. Ay—she went forth, that wife and mother! Shame and remorse were struggling for mastery in her heart, the curse of her stern husband seemed already upon her; she had looked upon her tender baby of a year old—yet she had gone; but in her bosom were the signs of an accusing conscience, and they pierced to death!

Aline Everard had been betrothed in early life to Alfred Delavel; her attachment had been sanctioned by her parents, but a change in Delavel's fortunes had induced her father to withdraw his consent. No entreaties availed to change the determination of the obdurate parent, and insults the most unmerited were heaped upon the head of Delavel, till maddened, and desperate, he ceased from further importunity, and left the country. She was hurried into dissipation; and the weary round of pleasure over for a season, was forced into a marriage with Louis Everard. She came to her husband, dowered with rank, and wealth, and peerless beauty—but with loathing, and scorn, and proud contempt for the man who would wed her, when her heart was in the keeping of another. Louis Everard was a stern, haughty, but honourable man, his own attachment to Aline, which was far stronger than she dreamed of, and the misrepresentations of her father had blinded him to the truth. He knew little of women; his life had been given to study, he considered Aline a child, did not appreciate her character, and conceived her only like the rest of her sex, in being wilful and capricious. When the film dropped from his eyes, and he knew if his young wife had a feeling towards him it was hate, he never by words of tenderness or acts of kindness, strove to win her to the path of love and duty. Disappointment hardened into stone all the softer feelings of his nature, he became harsh, gloomy, and suspicious, and life became a burden unto his wife, almost heavier than she could bear. Unexpectedly to both, Delavel and Aline met. From that hour to the night of their elopement he never swerved from his purpose, to make her his own. “Alas! for Aline—she knew but little of the high principle that should have restrained and supported her, and made her strong in the path of duty.”

When Louis Everard returned to his forsaken home, his wrath was fierce, and for a time ungovernable, and he vowed in the bitterness of his soul, that his daughter should grow up to curse the name, and hate the memory of her mother. The fugitives were beyond his reach; he could obtain no tidings of them; he sought a divorce and obtained it. “Soon after, he received a newspaper, containing the account of Aline's marriage to her lover, and under the announcement was written—“Delavel,” evidently in his own handwriting. Everard crushed the paper in his clenched hand, and his teeth ground together, while over his face spread that ashen and deadly hue, that is so fearful in the strong man, moved by great and agonizing emotion; but he spoke not; whatever he endured, it was in silence.

Twenty years are gone, and she who slept an infant in the cradle, when her mother forsook her home and husband, has grown into years of womanhood. And very beautiful was Leora Everard! Household love was around the path of Leora, and it guarded her with an unseen, but powerful spell, from all things that could shadow her happiness. To the father that child was dearer than life, and all that rendered life of value. None might sound the depths of his love, the pent-up feelings of a lifetime were poured into this only channel, and the stream was mighty and strong; yet even as he cherished her, did he hate the mother, and he never forgot the determination he had formed in the first moments of vengeance. He taught his child, as part of her duty, to himself, to hate, also, and Leora, who loved all created things, from the tiny flower by the way side, to the father and guardian of her youth, turned with feelings of horror and dislike, from all mention of the name and memory of her mother. The widowed sister of Everard, Mrs. Castlemore, had supplied to Leora her place. As proud as her brother, Mrs. Castlemore could never forgive the shame brought upon their house, by the guilty wife, she never palliated or excused her conduct, and on the mind of Leora a strong impression was made by this course of conduct.

Everard became a politician; his opponent, and often a successful one, too, was Morton Clare, who lived in the same neighbourhood; bitter feelings were engendered in the minds of both, by their constant and fierce rivalry, and these feelings were strengthened into something very like hate, in the bosom of Everard, by the ostentatious and vulgar triumphs of Clare. Leora and Mrs. Castlemore left England on a visit to Italy. The health of the latter had been for some time previous in, rather a precarious state, travelling, instead of benefitting, was found to be injurious, and at length in Florence a furnished house was rented, and something of a home feeling came over the wanderers, as English friends gathered around to bid them welcome.

Among their earliest visitors was Frederic Clare, the only son of Morton Clare; he shared in none of his father's feelings of animosity, and had always been a visitor, though a rare one at the Everards. Political strife, fierce rivalry, too frequently bordering upon personal insult, had caused the hate of Everard to the elder Clare, and he was ashamed to acknowledge to those around him, how strongly they influenced him to dislike the unoffending son. His very advantages as the son of Morton Clare, only rendered him more obnoxious; and while he admitted to himself that meeting man to man, he should have liked and admired him, being what he was; he hated him, though in secret. Frederic Clare was a welcome visitor to the Everards, he came direct from England, and local news was most acceptable to them; he had indeed come to escape the election; much of his father's conduct he disapproved of, without possessing influence over him to change it, and to Morton Clare it was rather a relief to have him out of the way at that particular time.

The tones of Leora's voice were as sweet as the music of the singing bird; but glad and joyous as the merriest maid's beneath the skies of sunny Italy! Her eye sparkled as brightly; her step bounded as lightly, and her slight form was away among the trees and flowers, as a very child, in her bounding sense of enjoyment. The young loved and trusted her; the old smiled upon her; and the poor blessed her, as they named her the fair English maiden of the open heart. To Frederic Clare she was a study and a marvel, it was strange to him that the world had not destroyed the child-like innocence and purity of her character. He did not know how carefully the father and aunt had guarded against such a consequence—Leora had not been allowed to mingle indiscriminately in gay society, encountering the “painted sepulchres” in woman's form, that tarnish and destroy the fair structure of social intercourse. Her associations were limited, and in her own choice of intimate companions, principles had been her guide.

“I have found one, like unto my mother, when I had given up the task as hopeless,” was the inward thought of Clare; and his heart reproached him that he had ever dared to doubt Leora. In the world deceit had encountered him at every step—the bright and beautiful, the proud, the high born, the cringing, and the base, had all alike deceived; the world had taught him to doubt, but not to disbelieve in virtue; knowledge of his mother saved him from that last and fatal error.

Pass three months; the time spent in Florence. The health of Mrs. Castlemore was entirely re-established, and Louis Everard was almost hourly expected from England. He had communicated to his family, without comment, the result of the election—“Morton Clare was the successful candidate”—all the fiery passions of his nature had been roused into action during that fierce contest, he would have given life itself for victory—terrible and

overwhelming was the disappointment, this spirit was for a season crushed beneath the stroke. The evening before he arrived in Florence, Frederic Clare and Leora were alone together, they were sitting upon a balcony running along the second story, in front of the mansion; the moon rode pale, and clear, and high beyond them, like some vestal queen, surrounded by her myriad worshippers, the stars. A change had come over the maiden—a deeper tenderness was in the large, dark, sliving eyes—a softer, more subdued, yet happier glance; and over Clare there had passed a change also; long and tenderly his eye rested upon Leora, and there was mingled in its glad expression, trust and confidence—he was loved at last! How often had he dreamed of some such hour as this, and in waking moments stifled the hope as vain and improbable! Yet was she his, in her youth and rare loveliness; in her innocence and truth; he had read her mind as that of a child, ere it has learned the meaning of disguise, and the heart of Frederic Clare was at rest. Of many things they spoke, as they sat there together, and often of the absent Everard; it is true, there were moments when misgivings of evil came over the mind of Clare—a father's interference and opposition; but these were faint and soon banished; he would not believe that Everard could destroy the happiness of his only child; and he turned from these thoughts to other and brighter ones.

“Leora! what a night is this—so calm, and still, and beautiful. Does it not almost tempt you to wish our abiding place were here for ever?”

“No!” said the maiden, and she smiled, “not all the splendour of Italia's sky can bring forgetfulness of England—my English home! Oh! do you not remember it? The stately trees, older by years and years than I am—the park stretching away in the far distance, and the little stream, that like a thread of silver, wound its way among the tiny flowers, and graceful shrubbery—these things are all before me now, and if the golden sunsets of this bright land, linger not upon them, they are encircled by old familiar memories, and they will tinge around my heart for ever.”

“Right! my own Leora!” was the answer, “love of country and of home is a bright image in the hearts of women, and should ever guard and cherish it. But they say, Leora, in story and in song, that love is stronger, and more passionate, beneath the blue sky of Italy, than in our cold northern isle; shall we not linger here, that ours may continue unto the end, the same that it is now?” Then there was a pause for a moment, and by the pale moonlight, Clare saw the colour deepen upon Leora's face, as she answered:

“Do you fear change for yourself or me?”

“For neither—I have doubted thy sex, Leora, but never thee, thou art noble in character, pure and upright, yet full of all gentle and womanly feelings; and thou art like unto one that I honour and love next to thee—my mother! Bless thee, my own Leora, that you have consented to become her child; many sorrows she has had through a long life, and affection such as you could feel towards her, would compensate for much trial.”

Tears gathered in the eyes of the warm-hearted girl, as she exclaimed in a low, yet earnest tone—“Your mother! Oh! Frederic, shall I ever be so blessed as to win her love? what would I not do to deserve it?”

And words he answered such as lovers are wont to say, when the heart is full to overflowing of gentle and kindly feelings. But the night waned, and they parted, with no shadows upon their happiness—no presentiment of coming evil—but with trust in each other, and confidence and hope for the time to come. Blessed be Heaven that it is so! that the dim uncertain future is shaded by the curtain of everlasting silence; when it is withdrawn, and slowly as we can bear, come sorrow and sore anguish, the spirit is enabled to bear, for it knoweth not the worst.

The morrow came, and Louis Everard returned, the gloom that hung over his spirit vanished in the presence of his darling child.

“My daughter,” he said, in fondness and pride, as he drew her towards him, and kissed her soft cheek, “the same Leora that I parted from; the world hath not changed thee, that happy face is beaming as of old, with innocence and truth,” and once again Everard clasped her to his bosom; his haughty spirit was moved with a warm and yearning tenderness, which had almost shown in tears, but that his strong self-control rarely permitted emotion of any kind to manifest itself.

The evening of that day came soon, Everard and his child were alone together; many questions of home and England had been asked and answered; then Everard bade her sit down beside him, and give some account of their manner of passing the time, and of events as they occurred during his absence. With a light and