

JUDGE NOT.

(Concluded.)

"It shall be repaid to you," said Beryl. "He has told me who his friends are. They will remit to you what is owing. I have not the means. I have but just enough for my passage-money. I shall be ready to start in ten minutes. There is a steamer sailing to-day. Let me have your account before I go."

She put the money in the woman's hand.

"You ken trust me," said Mrs. Manning. "I'll take care that Tom Groves hev a proper funeral."

"I know I can trust you," said Beryl, and she went away.

She had not enough money left to wire her husband. She had sufficient to purchase her berth, and no more, and she was lucky in being able to secure one, for the steamer was crowded.

It was a stormy passage, and this caused delay, so that some of the passengers feared that they would have to spend Christmas Day on board, but on Christmas Eve the boat was alongside the quay at Liverpool, and a hearty cheer went up from passengers and crew.

As she set foot once more on English ground; as she realized in its fullness the thought of her nearness to "the haven where she would be," Beryl felt faint and dizzy. She managed to make her way through the crowds on the quay, and reached the station. She felt neither hunger or thirst, save the heart hunger that grew the more poignant as it approached the time of relief, even as does physical hunger; save the thirst of all her being for the clasp of loving arms, the touch of loving lips, the words of forgiveness for almost intolerable wrong. For Beryl did not spare herself; she lacerated herself with the thongs of self-reproach.

"How could I doubt him?" she said in her heart; "how could I believe such infamy of him? Why did I condemn him unheard? Can he ever really trust my love again? Oh, I have been mad, mad, all these terrible weeks. Would he have so dealt by me, as I have dealt by him?"

The train was crowded with happy men and women going up to London to spend Christmas at home or with friends; but there was one woman who sat apart with closely veiled face, and spoke to no one, and that woman counted off every mile, as a miser counts his gold; and at length the "long, long line of lights" loomed through the December fog, and Beryl Deverell was in London; but a few minutes, and she would be at her husband's feet.

CHAPTER XIV.

HE AGAIN.

Christmas Eve! The fire glowed in the grate, and made the shadows dance morrice-dances on walls and ceilings; the bells were ringing for evensong; through the fog and drizzle came the sounds of cheerful voices and hurrying footsteps. Fog and drizzle cannot chill and damp the merriment of holiday-folks, or stop the clatter of business in London streets. But it was all a mockery to the white, baggared man who stood by the mantelpiece in that luxurious library and stared blankly into the rippling flames. Christmas had never been a happy time for him; even as a child he had felt the more keenly at that time of,

Happy, loving faces,
Of old friends meeting at old trysting places.

that he was shut out from the best of all—love! and even as he grew older, he grew to almost hate the season that came freighted with so many bitter memories.

For years he had not known a home Christmas; he had spent the time abroad, and he was content to do so.

Abroad, Christmas is more of the church; less of the home. And better so, perhaps; for to most of us, after childhood, Christmas only marks the dial of added sorrows; points out more clearly the vacant chair; brings back distinctly the accents of the voices we shall never hear again this side of the grave; recalls half forgotten memories of pain and disappointment.

No; Max Deverell had never loved Christmas, save the beautiful service in the old church at Deverell, and the beautiful old Christmas hymn, "Hark! the herald angels," sung by the choir in procession, with cross and banners and incense; but he had looked forward to this year with that strange longing that shows how deep rooted in our hearts is the connection between Christmas and home; for this year he had a home; this year Beryl brought with her the ideal Christmas; the church and the home would blend together; they would kneel side by side in the old church; and there should be merry faces and happy laughter in the great hall.

And this was the fulfilment of all those dreams!

Why did he ever hope or dream? Why did he ever dare to imagine that for him there could be love and happiness. Whatever his hand touched must turn into a sword to stab his own heart.

If there are men and women doomed to unhappiness, was not he, Max Deverell, one of them?"

The sound of a cab stopping did not arouse his attention. Why should it! Next door there was a Christmas Eve party, and cabs and carriages had been setting down ever since eight o'clock.

But then there was a ring at his own door, and that made him start and flush up with a sudden wild hope that took his breath.

He made an involuntary step forward, and then paused with the instinct of pride.

How foolish he would look opening the door to some stranger! And if it was Beryl, he could not meet her in the hall before the servants.

But he stood listening, with every pulse throbbing, and every nerve strained.

He heard the hall door close, then there was a minute's silence, and then the library door opened abruptly.

A dark-robed figure was in the room. Without word or cry Beryl was at her husband's feet, crouching down like a guilty thing as Guinevere crouched at the feet of Arthur.

"Beryl!"

That one word under breath, and then he bent down, and by gentle force lifted her up, though she strove against him, and wrapped her to his breast, pressing his lips on hers in such rapture as even love in its first knowledge of love returned cannot know.

She could not cry to him to put her from him—she was not worthy who could doubt him—so close he held her to his heart, so close his lips clung to hers, till, in the sheer exhaustion of such strong emotion, he loosed his clasp a little, and then he saw the deadly pallor sweep over Beryl's cheek, and he bore her to the sofa and laid her gently down, and brought some wine to her, making her drink a little; then, as he knelt down and folded her in his arms again, she clung about his neck, and hid her face against him, sobbing in a convulsive way that frightened him—but not violently; she was too much spent for frantic weeping.

"Beryl," he said with infinite tenderness, "my precious wife, there must be no bitterness in your heart; no thought that I have anything to forgive. No wonder you believed me perjured—"

"No, no! How could I believe it—how could I? Oh, Max, I was mad—mad! I know the truth now. I know how horribly I wronged you, but I must have come back to you, Max, or killed myself!"

"Beryl, you shall not reproach yourself. I wronged you in keeping silence. I had no right to withhold from you a secret that might by some mischance seem to involve my honor. You shall know the whole truth now, and the world shall know it—at least, so much as touches the story of that poor girl, my wretched brother's wife!"

"Max, stay." She looked up with wild eyes of horror. "Do they say that I—that I have dishonored you?"

"God be thanked, no! They say that you left me because of this woman. Darling," laying his trembling lips to hers again, "I can only know that I have you back again. There is no shadow between us, Beryl—there must not be; it would break my heart."

She did not answer for many minutes; all her being was stilled with the intensity of feeling.

When she spoke it was in a whisper, faint and faltering:

"Max, let me first say this to you. If I had loved you less, I could have charged you face to face with that sin; but I dared not see you again; I might have been tempted to forgive."

"Shall I," he said quiveringly, "condemn you for too much love? Dearest, I can only remember how you have suffered."

"And I," she said, with a deep, passionate sob, "can only think of your suffering and the wrong I did you."

"Hush, Beryl! not those words, they wound me."

Beryl kissed his hand in deep reverence.

"Max," she said after a pause, "let me tell you how it all was, and how I came to know the truth."

"When you have rested a little, sweetheart, and had something to eat and drink. You must be weary and faint. Now that I hold you in my arms again, I can have patience."

But Beryl was too excited to feel hungry yet. She would only take a little biscuit dipped in wine to please her husband; and then, kneeling at his feet, folded in his arms, she told her story from the time when she heard about the mystery of the little cottage at Rickmansworth.

"If I had known," Max said—"if I had only known you were so near to me! Poor Lilian! Often she fancies that I am her husband, and so I humor her. It was Mrs. Foster, the woman who has charge of her, who wrote the letter you saw. Lilian had one of her bad fits approaching; at such times she is amenable only to me. I hoped when I left you, to have been only a short time away; but it was impossible to leave Lilian; she would only be calm at all when I was with her. Ah, Beryl, it stabbed me so that I tacitly deceived you. I did not tell you I was going to Deverell Court; but when you assumed it, I did not contradict you. I swore to my mother on her death bed that never to living being would I betray the secret of Clinton's shame. I kept that vow at a bitter cost indeed."

"And you have not broken it now, Max; I know the truth from Clinton's own lips—the man whose burden of guilt you have borne all your life."

"From Clinton's own lips, Beryl!"

She told him then that sorrowful story—how she had been sent for to the dying man, and how, as she heard his story, it broke upon her that he spoke of Max and Clinton Deverell, and Max listened with bated breath, hardly asking her a question.

For his brother there could be no regret; but it was a consolation to know that Clinton Deverell did not sleep in a pauper's grave.

They were a long, long time silent when Beryl's story was finished, and clearly through the stillness came the joyous clang of bells.

Beryl spoke first very low and softly:

"Max, have you seen Lilian since I left you?"

"No, dearest; but I have heard from Mrs. Foster. There is a change come over Lilian. I don't think the poor girl has many months of life before her. Better so; her life is all darkness."

"Max, will you take me to see her? No, don't shrink from that idea. Would it not, after all, be the best way to disarm scandal?"

"You are right, Beryl; you shall come with me."

It was a happy Christmas after all for these two, happier than any festivities could have made it; they were with each other, and just now they wanted nothing else under heaven but each other.

Two days later appeared in the papers the announcement of Clinton's

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