

A BEAUTIFUL GIRL.

CHAPTER III.—Continued.

Sorrow and illness had so completely changed Lady Hutton that her foster-sister hardly knew her again.

When Magdalen replied that it was, Lady Hutton led her to her own room, where hung a portrait of a lovely little girl, not unlike the one who gazed upon it.

"See," said she, "your child is like mine, Magdalen, you must give her to me; look at the violet eyes and the golden hair."

"There was indeed some faint resemblance between the two fair little faces," said Lady Hutton—"money to take you to your husband—you shall have it—as much as you like to ask me for—

"I was a hard struggle; how hard none new but herself."

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"Lady Hutton was liberal in her own way. She did not spare gold, and Magdalen Hurst left England amply provided for, and never saw the face of her foster-sister again."

Ten years passed away, and brought with them great changes to Brynmor. Sir Ralph and Lady Erskine slept with their ancestors in the family vault; Lady Hutton was sole mistress of the Hall, and of the large fortune left by her father.

"In accordance with her promise never to tell him to whom she had confided her child, Hilda had been adopted, she said, by a lady who did not wish her name to be known; she seemed quite indifferent about it, and asked no questions."

"Lady Hutton read correctly enough that a broken heart was revealed in every sad word of that letter. Magdalen Hurst set no address; she asked no questions, and Lady Hutton never heard from her again."

"Day by day Lady Hutton grew fonder of her adopted daughter. Hilda was taught to call her mamma, and in every way she was treated as her own child. No expense or trouble was spared in her education; the most accomplished governess was provided for her. The child spoke French and German fluently; she was a good musician and a skillful artist, but she excelled most in singing. Nature gifted her with a magnificent contralto voice, rich, passionate and full of melody; cultivation and science did their utmost for it."

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she would do with her life. It came, simple pleasures sufficed; she never looked beyond them; but Lady Hutton was ambitious for her. Day by day she watched the growth of that wondrous loveliness, and built her hopes upon it. The world she had given up and ceased to care for should smile upon her ward. She spared no pains over her education, and rarely allowed her to be long out of her presence.

"There were times when Lady Hutton asked herself if she had done quite right. She had taken this young girl from her own natural sphere of life; she had taken her from her parents and brought her up in the midst of luxury and wealth as her own child. Had she done well in trying to alter and shape a human destiny to suit her own purposes? Should she not have been contented and resigned when her great bereavement came? These questions haunted her at intervals; but even had she been wrong it was too late now to undo what was done."

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One bright morning in May Hilda rose earlier than usual. Eldie had told her the previous evening that any lady who for fine mornings together bathed her face in May dew would be beautiful forever. Hilda resolved to try it, and on this particular day rose almost with the sun while the dew still lay upon the flowers, little dreaming that on that day the tragical story of her life would begin.

"A golden glow seemed to have fallen over the earth when Hilda stood on the hill near Brynmor woods; the air was full of an indescribable melody and fragrance; the birds sang, the flowers bloomed, the hawthorn shone white upon the hedges; all was fair, fair and beautiful. Heaven seemed smiling upon the bright face of the earth."

"There was plenty of dew upon the heather; it glistened on the long blades of grass and shone upon the green leaves, and before long the fair young face was bathed in it."

"The one to the right," replied Hilda, raising her eyes to the handmaidens and mistresses who had gathered round her.

"These are bonny woods," he said; "I have not seen fairer in all Scotland. They belong to the Brynmor estate, I suppose."

"Will you give me one of those flowers?" he said, touching the blue-bells; "just as a little memento of the most pleasant morning I ever spent and the most beautiful picture I ever saw."

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