

now? Why, now, 'tis one partic'lar coat he won't never have brushed! He's safe enough to be minded in that, for none of us don't want to brush his old coat now that we've turned the pockets inside out, and found that there aint no bank notes inside. But I hope you can come up, Mrs. East."

"I'll be up by nine o'clock at latest," she replied, with a husky voice; and the foot-man, with a hasty "Good evening," went off.

Somerset was far from pleased to see his mother thus called away. He had hoped to have a long talk with her about her girlhood to hear many things she had hitherto been silent about, and could not understand her strange eagerness to go and nurse the eccentric old nobleman at The Priory.

"You will not earn so much by it, mother," said he. "Why should you go every time they send for you?"

"Don't talk just now, my dear boy; but bring me my carpet-bag, and I'll pack the few things I want."

With a face clouded with disappointment Somerset obeyed his mother, and scarcely was her son's back turned when she sank on a chair, and, covering her face, uttered a sort of groan.

"Oh!" she murmured; "what agonies to endure! But if even at the last, after so many years, I may be avenged, I will not complain. Oh, Somerset, it is for you, for you, that I do this—for you, who know nothing!"

"I shall see you to-morrow," said she, calmly, on Somerset's re-entrance. "You will be working in the gardens, and at least I can get a word with you at the dinner-hour."

"It will not be much comfort to me to see you in that manner, mother," said he, gloomily. "But let me help you now, and don't disquiet yourself about me, mother. I can do all that I want myself."

Half-an-hour after, Mrs. East walked up to The Priory, her son carrying her bag. She was ushered by Mrs. Jones into Viscount Cleveland's handsome bed-chamber. Mrs. East curtsied quietly as she entered, and glanced towards the bed on which the old nobleman lay. A moment or two later she found herself alone with her charge, having received all her instructions from Mrs. Jones before entering the apartment.

CHAPTER II.

THE VISCOUNT'S OLD COAT.

It was midnight. Great stillness reigned over the large and sleeping household at The Priory, but Mrs. East kept her watch most conscientiously in the invalid's room.

"Is he awake?" that is the question she asks herself as her restless eyes wander scrutinizingly around. "No!" she answers to herself, as the old lord's deep and regular breathing tell of his slumber. Her eyes glitter with excitement as she notes a dark coat hanging over a chair on the other side of the apartment. Mrs. East had said a word to the housekeeper about his lordship's increasing eccentricities as she came upstairs, and the coat had been mentioned.

"He keeps it near him, an old thing like that, and won't once have it brushed. That's

his last fancy," Mrs. Jones had said.

It was on this old garment that Somerset's mother fixed her eyes with absorbing interest.

"Is it there? Can it be there, after so many years of search—of agonizing search?" she thought.

Cold tremours thrilled this poor woman, whose life had been one long torture.

She rose without a sound, and very silently crossed the room. The old man's regular breathing was undisturbed, but his face was turned towards her, and she feared to draw the curtain lest any noise might startle the sleeper.

With deft fingers she felt all over the unused coat, which she heard was so treasured by Lord Cleveland. Suddenly, she caught her breath, her face flushed under the white linen cap she always wore; for, sewn into the coat, fastened between the seams, was something hard and small. Mrs. East was not long in cutting the threads which held it, and a tiny key fell into her lap.

Mastering her strong emotion she clutched it between her fingers.

"Oh it is worth more to me than silver or gold!" she cried to herself. "But the casket—where is the casket? Has Heaven sent me deliverance at last?"

A hoarse, gruff voice from the bed interrupted her meditations.

"Give me some tisane," said the old Viscount, crossly.

He had adopted French remedies as much as possible.

The nurse hastened to bring the drink.

"Oh, you're the woman from the cottage below the park gates? Well, you've some sense, that's one comfort! Keep up the fire and hold your tongue, and I shall go to sleep again."

A very slight noise at the door caused Mrs. East to look in that direction.

It opened noiselessly, and disclosed a lovely picture—the slight form and enchanting face of a young girl in the first bloom of youthful beauty.

She wore a pale blue dressing-gown, over which her abundant hair, waving in luxuriance, fell in most attractive fashion. These shining tresses were of a rich gold-brown, and would curl in spite of the vigorous brushing lately applied to them. The young girl's eyes were of the darkest shade of violet, full of questioning tenderness.

Without venturing to advance, she made a sign to Mrs. East, and the latter went on tiptoe to meet the young lady.

"Is my uncle more seriously ill than usual?" asked she, in lowest tones, outside the bedroom door.

"No, Miss Nadelka; on the contrary, his lordship is not so feeble as before, only he is fanciful."

"Ah, then I will not sit up to-night. I came to offer to stay with you."

"There is no need of it, thank you, miss," returned Mrs. East.

The young girl said a whispered "Good night!" and retired as gently as she had appeared, while the nurse went back to her exciting vigil.

She waited till all was profoundly still; then, by the light of the night-lamp, drew from her pocket a needle-case, and with

nervous fingers stitched into the coat a small piece of wood about the size of the key she had just possessed herself of—for there was both wood and coal to replenish the fire.

"He will never discover the change by mere feeling!" thought she, with throbbing pulses. "Now for the casket! Oh, where can he have secreted it? Too well I know the lock, could I but find it!"

Her first search was round the spacious sleeping apartment. Like a ghost she glided slowly from couch to cushioned chair, searched two book-shelves, and in every corner, but her anxious quest was not rewarded.

"I cannot do more to-night. It may be hidden about his bed—for if he will not let the key be absent from him, be sure the casket is very near!"

She fell exhausted into a chair as the gloomy, misty dawn came slowly up the sky.

But more dark than any outside gloom were the unhappy woman's reflections as she reclined in the chair into which she had sunk.

"Oh, my poor boy—my own dear, noble Somerset!—it is not enough to know that you are cruelly wronged, but now I can discern a new trouble! That lovely Nadelka, whose pets you fed for her whilst a mere boy, is dear to you now she is grown up and ready to enter that world which would scorn you—a labourer! How is it that you dare to love so high-born a maiden?—for you do worship her, I feel sure, my poor boy!"

Her reflections were sharply interrupted. "Here, East, I want you. Are you awake?"

"Yes, my lord," she answered, springing up.

"Give me my coat—the old one lying out there; and go and look out of the window, and tell me what sort of morning it is."

As she obeyed his directions, the old man eagerly felt in the accustomed place for the secreted key, and Mrs. East well understood that it was in order that she might not see him fumble at his queer hiding-place that she was told to look out and report on the weather.

"Yes, it's all safe! They'll never think of looking here! Trust me for sharpness!" chuckled the old man to himself. "Here!" he called aloud; "can't you see what sort of morning it is without so much looking? Come here! I've something to say to you!"

"Yes, my lord," said the nurse, submissively, approaching the bedside.

"You can sleep by daylight, can't you, as well as by night? Well, then, get some sleep here, for I shall want you to sit up with me perhaps for a week to come. You can do what most of the women here cannot do—keep quiet, and not bother me with medicine or cough mixtures every half-hour. So be here to-night in good time.

"I will not fail, my lord."

"Fail?" said she to herself, as she passed down-stairs. "No fear of that! For the opportunity of search I came here—for that I have lived my life near him all these weary years! I have the key—but where is the casket?"—*To be Continued.*