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BLACK, MIXED OR GREEN

A TURN OF THE ROAD.

(Continued from page 300.)

"Come Rajah," she said, with a dutiful attempt to "make it up," for she and Gilbert seldom invited a third person to join in their expeditions.

David glanced at his mother and refused. Marjory was visibly relieved, but Mrs. Lane was sorry he had not accepted this olive branch. She dreaded above all things any "little rift within the lute." The master hand which had always been able to draw harmony out of discord was stilled for ever: must the music of their happy family life be mute without his skillful touch? The very closeness of the bond between Gilbert and Marjory might easily constitute a difficulty, since it inevitably left David out in the cold—a position which he was quick to perceive and resent. And now that he was placed of necessity almost *in loco parentis* to the other two, would he have tact enough to escape antagonizing Gilbert who, at sixteen, was ready to resent any exhibition of authority from his elder brother? Troubled by forebodings for the future, and storm-tossed by her overwhelming longing for her husband's love and counsel, Mrs. Lane rose and put her arm through David's as he stood looking out of the window.

"My good unselfish boy," she whispered, "I know what it has cost you to give up Oxford and India and all you have longed for. David, my son, I know and I appreciate it. But don't be vexed with the others if they accept it all as a matter of course. They don't know what this change means to you, but they will realize some day, and bless you for your unselfishness. But remember, my boy, it is in the little things of life that it is hardest to be great. It is easier to make sacrifices for those we love than to live patiently with them. Though I give my body to be burned

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and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing."

David put his arm round his mother and kissed her silently.

"I had a letter from the house agents this morning, David," she continued, after a short pause. "They think they have found an excellent tenant for this house. A retired Indian officer and his wife and two daughters want to live near Oxford, but on high ground. They would probably take some of our furniture, and the rent is about right, too. It sounds exactly what we want, only—"

"Only what?" asked David as she hesitated.

"They want the house immediately—at midsummer—only ten days from now. One of the girls is ill, and Colonel Smith wants to get settled in as soon as possible. He can come to see the house to-morrow if I telegraph to his London address. David, could we go so soon?"

"Mother dear, are you quite determined to accept this Canadian proposal? Do you think you can face the hardships and isolation of a settler's life? I can't bear to think of you doing housework instead of painting or doing lovely needlework. Mother, wouldn't you like to try to do something else?"

"What other way is there, David, if I can't earn enough to live on by painting or teaching? At least this Canadian plan gives us a chance of living together: we shall still have a home—Colonel James writes like an upright and refined English gentleman, and Sir Gerald thinks the offer a good one. I have great faith in his powers of discriminating character—he would not let his brother's children be defrauded."

"I shall never forgive him for calmly consigning you to poverty or exile," said David fiercely. "It made me sick to see the luxury and waste at Dinton, and then to hear him say he could not afford to continue father's income from the estate to you."

"If you knew the past, you would understand and make allowances, David," said his mother, a soft flush overspreading her face. "You must at least always remember that Sir Gerald is in almost constant pain except when he is relieved by strong drugs, and then I believe that he is hardly responsible for his words and actions. Anyhow, I think that this Canadian plan is a real effort to do something for us, and we must accept it in the spirit in which it is proposed. I shall write to Sir Gerald to-morrow, thanking him for his offer, and shall tell him we shall almost certainly accept it."

Mrs. Lane spoke with a quiet dignity and decision which repressed further discussion of Sir Gerald's part in the project, and Martha's entrance with the tea-tray made private conversation impossible.

Martha bounced about in the manner which indicated to the family that her temper was ruffled. She was an

adept in the art of making a maximum of noise with a minimum—or indeed an entire absence—of damage to the china and silver. Having been Mrs. Lane's maid before her marriage, she considered herself a member of the family, and as the teaspoons clattered in the saucers which in their turn rattled against the silver tray, even David had an impression that something was amiss. When everything was in place, and every chair had been marshalled into position and the door finally banged, Mrs. Lane turned to David with a smile:

"Martha thinks she has been neglected: I suppose she guesses we are planning for the future," she said.

"Well, mother, if we go to Canada, what's to become of Martha?" asked David. "How will she get on with Colonel James' Chinaman?"

Mrs. Lane laughed. Martha's hatred and contempt of "foreigners" would not even permit her to buy an onion from a Spaniard or give a penny to an Italian organ-grinder. That Martha should consort with a Chinaman was outside the realms of possibility; and yet would she consent to stay behind?

Martha had entered Canon Courtenay's service as a mere child of fifteen, saved from the workhouse to which the death of her father would otherwise have consigned her, for her mother had died at her birth. She had known no home except the rectory at Compton until she accompanied her mistress to the pleasant house at Oxford. She was a tall, angular person, with a long hatchet-shaped head, and thin dark hair brushed tightly to it until it seemed to stick on. She rarely smiled or suffered her severe expression to undergo any modification, and generally spoke sharply, yet the children had long ago found that her bark was worse than her bite; and Margaret Lane knew that behind an unprepossessing exterior lay a wealth of industry, honesty and devotion.

In every emergency, Martha was ready—always grumbling furiously as she rendered her efficient help, yet always helpful. She had at one time or another filled every position in the household, and usually went by the name of "The general"—a delicate compliment to her powers of command as well as her adaptability.

In Martha's affection, Mrs. Lane and her family had only one rival.

A great yellow cat, left in a neighbouring house when the other occupants went off for a summer holiday, had touched Martha's heart by his forlorn appearance, and had repaid her kindness by becoming a permanent inmate of the Red House.

Martha loved him with an intensity of which a superficial observer might have thought her incapable, judging her by her hard features and sharp words.

But Ginger, with the mysterious insight into character which is common to children and domestic animals, seemed to penetrate through the armour of harshness in which she incased herself, and found in the warm heart which beat beneath both protection and affection.

One other joint there was in this rigid armour of Martha's.

She had a weakness for conspicuous and gorgeous millinery. After the Boer war, "a gentleman friend" had bought her a huge and untamed ostrich feather, which for years, summer and winter, had dominated Martha's hats. Her chief joy in life was to attend the services and classes at the chapel of which she was a pillar, in her staid dark clothes, surmounted by a head-dress in which waved a plume, suitable only to the helmet of Henry of Navarre. A halo of sanctity, an atmosphere of mystery enveloped both the plume and the "gentleman friend"; even Gilbert, the irrepressible, dared not chaff Martha on the subject. What would Martha and her hat do in the wilds of Canada, sundered from the mild

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diversions of her chapel and forced to hobnob with a "heathen Chinese?" No wonder Mrs. Lane laughed as she thought of it.

"We certainly can't take Martha with us, we can't pay her fare or her wages. Perhaps we could 'let' her with the house to Colonel Smith. Poor old Martha," sighed her mistress. What a comfort she would be in the new, hard-working life; but it was not to be thought of.

A WARNING.

"Nothing, not even sea-power, will have been held cheaply by the end of this conflict, nor must we be deluded by idle rumours of peace into imagining that after Verdun the end is in sight."—Observer.



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