

(Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.)

MATER DOLOROSA.

My mates their garlands are bringing
To the shrine of virgin and saint;
The air is heavy with incense
And laden with odours faint.
But away from the brilliant lustre
That is shed by the great chandeliers,
I kneel alone in the shadow
At the shrine of our Lady of Tears.

We may come in the hour of our gladness
To kneel at the Virgin's shrine;
An hour hearts be light as around it
Our garlands we lovingly twine;
But oh, when the heart is o'erburdened
With heart crushing woes and fears,
With what depth of earnest devotion
We kneel to our Lady of Tears!

The dark eyes, heavy with weeping,
Look with pitying love on our woe;
For the heart has been pierced by a sorrow
Beyond all that we can know.
But 'twas grief that made it so tender,
Not anguish that crushes and sears,
For the sake of that sorrow we seek thee,
O sore-stricken Lady of Tears!

O Mother of mercy, behold us!
We sink 'neath our burden of grief.
See! low at thy shrine we are kneeling,
Almost in despair of relief.
Remember the measureless anguish
Thy heart knew in long-ago years,
And comfort our hearts that are stricken
So sorely, sweet Lady of Tears!

At thine altar we love to gather
To praise thee, O Mother most sweet!
Each name that thou bearest is precious,
Each one our hearts lovingly greet.
But that one is sweetest which links thee
With our human sorrows and fears,
And deep in the hearts of the grieving
Is the shrine of our Lady of Tears.

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THE NEW MAGDALEN.

BY WILKIE COLLINS.

SECOND SCENE—Mablethorpe House.

[CHAPTER XX.—(Continued.)

"Nobody's endurance will be tried much longer," said Lady Janet. She glanced at Julian, and, taking from her pocket the card which he had given her, opened the library door.

"Go to the police station," she said to the servant in an undertone, "and give that card to the inspector on duty. Tell him there is not a moment to lose."

"Stop!" said Julian, before his aunt could close the door again.

"Stop?" repeated Lady Janet, sharply. "I have given the man his orders. What do you mean?"

"Before you send the card I wish to say a word in private to this lady," replied Julian, indicating Grace. "When that is done," he continued, approaching Mercy, and pointedly addressing himself to her, "I shall have a request to make—I shall ask you to give me an opportunity of speaking to you without interruption."

His tone pointed the allusion. Mercy shrank from looking at him. The signs of painful agitation began to show themselves in her shifting colour and her uneasy silence. Roused by Julian's significantly distant reference to what had passed between them, her better impulses were struggling already to recover their influence over her. She might, at that critical moment, have yielded to the promptings of her own nobler nature—she might have risen superior to the galling remembrance of the insults that had been heaped upon her—if Grace's malice had not seen in her hesitation a means of referring offensively once again to her interview with Julian Gray.

"Pray don't think twice about trusting him alone with me," she said, with a sardonic affectation of politeness. "I am not interested in making a conquest of Mr. Julian Gray."

The jealous distrust in Horace (already awakened by Julian's request) now attempted to assert itself openly. Before he could speak, Mercy's indignation had dictated Mercy's answer.

"I am much obliged to you, Mr. Gray," she said, addressing Julian (but still not raising her eyes to his). "I have nothing more to say. There is no need for me to trouble you again."

In those rash words she recalled the confession to which she stood pledged. In those rash words she committed herself to keeping the position she had usurped, in the face of the woman whom she had deprived of it!

Horace was silenced but not satisfied. He saw Julian's eyes fixed in sad and searching attention on Mercy's face, while she was speaking. He heard Julian sigh to himself when she had done. He observed Julian—after a moment's serious consideration and a moment's glance backward at the stranger in the poor black clothes—lift his head with the air of a man who had taken a sudden resolution.

"Bring me that card directly," he said to

the servant. His tone announced that he was not to be trifled with. The man obeyed.

Without answering Lady Janet—who still peremptorily insisted on her right to act for herself—Julian took the pencil from his pocketbook, and added his signature to the writing already inscribed on the card. When he had handed it back to the servant he made his apologies to his aunt.

"Pardon me for venturing to interfere," he said. "There is a serious reason for what I have done, which I will explain to you at a fitter time. In the meanwhile, I offer no further obstruction to the course which you propose taking. On the contrary, I have just assisted you in gaining the end that you have in view."

As he said that, he held up the pencil with which he had signed his name.

Lady Janet, naturally perplexed, and (with some reason perhaps) offended as well, made no answer. She waved her hand to the servant, and sent him away with the card.

There was silence in the room. The eyes of all the persons present turned more or less anxiously on Julian. Mercy was vaguely surprised and alarmed. Horace, like Lady Janet, felt offended, without clearly knowing why. Even Grace Roseberry herself was subdued by her own presentiment of some coming interference for which she was completely unprepared. Julian's words and actions, from the moment when he had written on the card, were involved in a mystery to which not one of the persons round him held the clue.

The motive which had animated his conduct may, nevertheless, be described in two words: Julian still held to his faith in the inbred nobility of Mercy's nature.

He had inferred, with little difficulty, from the language which Grace had used towards Mercy in his presence, that the injured woman must have taken pitiless advantage of her position at the interview which he had interrupted. Instead of appealing to Mercy's sympathies and Mercy's sense of right—instead of accepting the expression of her sincere contrition, and encouraging her to make the completest and the speediest atonement—Grace had evidently outraged and insulted her. As a necessary result, her endurance had given way—under her own sense of intolerable severity and intolerable wrong.

The remedy for the mischief thus done was (as Julian had first seen it) to speak privately with Grace—to soothe her by owning that his opinion of the justice of her claims had undergone a change in her favour—and then to persuade her, in her own interests, to let him carry to Mercy such expressions of apology and regret as might lead to a friendly understanding between them.

With those motives, he had made his request to be permitted to speak separately to the one and the other. The scene that had followed, the new insult offered by Grace, and the answer which it had wrung from Mercy, had convinced him that no such interference as he had contemplated would have the slightest prospect of success.

The one remedy now left to try was the desperate remedy of letting things take their course, and trusting implicitly to Mercy's better nature for the result.

Let her see the police officer in plain clothes enter the room. Let her understand clearly what the result of his interference would be. Let her confront the alternative of consigning Grace Roseberry to a madhouse, or of confessing the truth—and what would happen? If Julian's confidence in her was a confidence soundly placed, she would nobly pardon the outrages that had been heaped upon her, and she would do justice to the woman whom she had wronged.

If, on the other hand, his belief in her was nothing better than the blind belief of an infatuated man—if she faced the alternative, and persisted in asserting her assumed identity, what then?

Julian's faith in Mercy refused to let that darker side of the question find a place in his thoughts. It rested entirely with him to bring the officer into the house. He had prevented Lady Janet from making any mischievous use of his card, by sending to the police-station, and warning them to attend to no message which they might receive unless the card produced bore his signature. Knowing the responsibility that he was taking on himself—knowing that Mercy had made no confession to him to which it was possible to appeal—he had signed his name without an instant's hesitation: and there he stood now, looking at the woman whose better nature he was determined to vindicate, the only calm person in the room.

Horace's jealousy saw something suspiciously suggestive of a private understanding in Julian's earnest attention and in Mercy's downcast face. Having no excuse for open interference, he made an effort to part them.

"You spoke just now," he said to Julian, "of wishing to say a word in private to that person." (He pointed to Grace). "Shall we retire, or will you take her into the library?"

"I refuse to have anything to say to him," Grace burst out, before Julian could answer. "I happen to know that he is the last person to do me justice. He has been effectually hoodwinked. If I speak to anybody privately,

it ought to be to you. You have the greatest interest of any of them in finding out the truth."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you want to marry an outcast from the streets?"

Horace took one step forward towards her. There was a look in his face which plainly betrayed that he was capable of turning her out of the house with his own hands. Lady Janet stopped him.

"You are right in suggesting just now that Grace had better leave the room," she said. "Let us all three go. Julian will remain here, and give the man his directions when he arrives. Come."

No. By a strange contradiction, it was Horace himself who now interfered to prevent Mercy from leaving the room. In the heat of his indignation, he lost all sense of his own dignity; he descended to the level of a woman whose intellect he believed to be deranged. To the surprise of every one present, he stepped back, and took from the table a jewel-case which he had placed there when he came into the room. It was the wedding present from his mother which he had brought to his betrothed wife. His outraged self-esteem seized the opportunity of vindicating Mercy by a public bestowal of the gift.

"Wait!" he called out sternly. "That wretch shall have her answer. She has sense enough to see, and sense enough to hear. Let her see and hear!"

He opened the jewel-case, and took from it a magnificent pearl necklace in an antique setting.

"Grace," he said, with his highest distinction of manner, "my mother sends you her love, and her congratulations on our approaching marriage. She begs you to accept, as part of your bridal dress, these pearls. She was married in them herself. They have been in our family for centuries. As one of the family, honoured and beloved, my mother offers them to my wife."

He lifted the necklace to clasp it round Mercy's neck.

Julian watched her in breathless suspense. Would she sustain the ordeal through which Horace had innocently condemned her to pass?

Yes! In the insolent presence of Grace Roseberry, what was there now that she could not sustain? Her pride was in arms. Her lovely eyes lighted up as only a woman's eyes can light up when they see jewelry. Her grand head bent gracefully to receive the necklace. Her face warmed into colour; her beauty rallied its charms. Her triumph over Grace Roseberry was complete! Julian's head sank. For one sad moment he secretly asked himself the question: "Have I been mistaken in her?"

Horace arrayed her in the pearls.

"Your husband puts these pearls on your neck, love," he said proudly, and paused to look at her. "Now," he added, with a contemptuous backward glance at Grace, "we may go into the library. She has seen, and she has heard."

He believed that he had silenced her. He had simply furnished her sharp tongue with a new sting.

"You will hear, and you will see, when my proofs come from Canada," she retorted. "You will hear that your wife has stolen my name and my character! You will see your wife dismissed from this house!"

Mercy turned on her with an uncontrollable outburst of passion.

"You are mad!" she cried.

Lady Janet caught the electric infection of anger in the air of the room. She too turned on Grace. She too said it:

"You are mad!"

Horace followed Lady Janet. He was beside himself. He fixed his pitiless eyes on Grace, and echoed the contagious words:

"You are mad!"

She was silenced; she was daunted at last. The treble accusation revealed to her, for the first time, the frightful suspicion to which she had exposed herself. She shrank back, with a low cry of horror, and struck against a chair. She would have fallen if Julian had not sprung forward and caught her.

Lady Janet led the way into the library. She opened the door—started—and suddenly stepped aside, so as to leave the entrance free.

A man appeared in the open doorway.

He was not a gentleman; he was not a workman; he was not a servant. He was vilely dressed, in glossy black broadcloth. His frock coat hung on him instead of fitting him. His waistcoat was too short and too tight over the chest. His trousers were a pair of shapeless black bags. His gloves were too large for him. His highly-polished boots creaked detestably whenever he moved. He had odiously watchful eyes—eyes that looked skilled in peeping through keyholes. His large ears, set forward like the ears of a monkey, pleaded guilty to meanly listening behind other people's doors. His manner was quietly confidential, when he spoke; impetuously self-possessed, when he was silent. A lurking air of secret service enveloped the fellow, like an atmosphere of his own, from head to foot. He looked all round the magnificent room, without betraying either surprise or admiration. He closely investigated

every person in it with one glance of his cunningly-watchful eyes. Making his bow to Lady Janet, he silently showed her, as his introduction, the card that had summoned him. And then he stood at ease, self-revealed in his own sinister identity—a police officer in plain clothes.

Nobody spoke to him. Everybody shrank inwardly, as if a reptile had crawled into the room.

He looked backwards and forwards, perfectly unembarrassed, between Julian and Horace.

"Is Mr. Julian Gray here?" he asked.

Julian led Grace to a seat. Her eyes were fixed on the man. She trembled—she whispered, "Who is he?" Julian spoke to the police officer without answering her.

"Wait there," he said, pointing to a chair in the most distant corner of the room. "I will speak to you directly."

The man advanced to the chair, marching to the discord of his creaking boots. He privately valued the carpet, at so much a yard, as he walked over it. He privately valued the chair, at so much the dozen, as he sat down on it. He was quite at his ease: it was no matter to him, whether he waited and did nothing, or whether he pried into the private character of every one in the room, as long as he was paid for it.

Even Lady Janet's resolution to act for herself was not proof against the appearance of the policeman in plain clothes. She left it to her nephew to take the lead.

Julian glanced at Mercy before he stirred further in the matter. He alone knew that the end rested now, not with him, but with her.

She felt his eye on her, while her own eyes were looking at the man. She turned her head—hesitated—and suddenly approached Julian. Like Grace Roseberry, she was trembling. Like Grace Roseberry, she whispered, "Who is he?"

Julian told her plainly who he was.

"Why is he here?"

"Can't you guess?"

"No!"

Horace left Lady Janet, and joined Mercy and Julian—impatient of the private colloquy between them.

"Am I in the way?" he inquired.

Julian drew back a little, understanding Horace perfectly. He looked round at Grace. Nearly the whole length of the spacious room divided them from the place in which she was sitting. She had never moved since he had placed her in a chair. The direst of all terrors was in possession of her—terror of the unknown. There was no fear of her interfering; and no fear of her hearing what they said, so long as they were careful to speak in guarded tones. Julian set the example by lowering his voice.

"Ask Horace why the police officer is here," he said to Mercy.

She put the question directly. "Why is he here?"

Horace looked across the room at Grace, and answered, "He is here to relieve us of that woman."

"Do you mean that he will take her away?"

"Yes."

"Where will he take her to?"

"To the police station."

Mercy started, and looked at Julian. He was still watching the slightest changes in her face. She looked back again and at Horace.

"To the police station!" she repeated.

"What for?"

"How can you ask the question?" said Horace irritably. "To be placed under restraint, of course."

"Do you mean prison?"

"I mean an asylum."

Again Mercy turned to Julian. There was horror now, as well as surprise, in her face. "Oh!" she said to him, "Horace is surely wrong? It can't be?"

Julian left it to Horace to answer. Every faculty in him seemed to be still absorbed in watching Mercy's face. She was compelled to address herself to Horace once more.

"What sort of asylum?" she asked. "You don't surely mean a madhouse?"

"I do," he rejoined. "The workhouse first, perhaps, and then the madhouse. What is there to surprise you in that? You yourself told her to her face she was mad. Good heavens! how pale you are! What is the matter?"

She turned to Julian for the third time. The terrible alternative that was offered to her had showed itself at last, without reserve or disguise. Restore the identity you have stolen, or shut her up in a madhouse—it rests with you to choose! In that form the situation shaped itself in her mind. She chose on the instant. Before she opened her lips, the higher nature in her spoke to Julian, in her eyes. The steady inner light that he had seen in them once already shone in them again, brighter and purer than before. The conscience that he had fortified, the soul that he had saved, looked at him, and said, Doubt us no more!

"Send that man out of the house."

Those were her first words. She spoke (pointing to the police officer) in clear, ringing, resolute tones, audible in the remotest corner of the room.

(To be continued.)