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## THE FAMILY HONOUR.

BY MRS. C. L. BALFOUR.

Continued from page 213.

Yes, Martin said the squire had expressly said, "I will see Miss Honor in the morning; I and Miss Gertrude. We will not trouble her before." What could it mean? Conscience was instantly alarmed. She rose up and paced the room, saying, "My brother here! Gertrude brought back!"

"Ah! I always thought as that Mr. Rupert was too fast," said Martin.

"Silence! Rupert Griesbach would not dare aspire to my brother's only daughter. Let me hear no more of such insolence."

There was a wild light in her flashing eye that terrified Martin. Of late, Miss Austwicke had been so silent and gloomy, that an outbreak like the present was startling from the contrast. Martin did not require further dismissal.

Left to herself, Miss Austwicke paced the room and wrung her hands; a wild alarm, as of a hunted creature at bay, dilating her eyes. "He's found out something: what can it be?" she kept repeating, over and over again, in a hissing whisper. She must have unconsciously walked miles to and fro—that terrified woman—before the house seemed stilled for the night.

There was a passage over the archway of which she kept the key, which communicated with the centre of the house. As she could not attempt to retire to rest, she wrought herself up to the determination to risk meeting her brother, and, at all hazards, to see Gertrude. This resolution was no sooner formed than it was carried into effect. Threading some unfrequented but to her familiar passages, she came, uninterruptedly, to the lobby on which her niece's chamber opened. She listened a moment, and heard no sound. It was evident Gertrude had been left for the night. Afraid to knock, she opened the door noiselessly and entered. A glance showed her that Gertrude was not in bed: indeed, she had flung herself on a sofa, dressed as she was from her journey. Her hat lay beside her on the floor. She was in a troubled sleep; the tears still wet on her flushed cheek, and her parted lips quivering. There was something so touching in her innocence and helplessness, as she had, like a child, wept herself to sleep, that the soul-worried woman who bent over her was awed, and shrunk back, feeling the difference there was between innocent and guilty grief. Suddenly her eyes fell upon a sheet of paper, with writing on it, on a table, beside the couch, on which the lamp was burning. Other sheets, as of a letter began and thrown down, were scattered on the floor.

## CHAPTER LX. RETRIBUTION.

"There's madness in the sudden shock!  
I hear the fiends' wild laugh;  
They come my shame to mock,  
They drive me on the fatal path.  
Through air, through fire, through flood  
Their yell is wildly tossed;  
It curdles all my blood:  
All's lost!—all's lost!"

THE tears yet wet on Gertrude's cheek, the meekly drooping head and unwonted pensiveness that made her a sweet picture of sleeping sorrow, did not affect Miss Austwicke, as she gazed at her niece with any other emotion than fear. She looked at the fragments of begun and torn-up attempts at letter-writing scattered around. What was the letter that Gertrude had tried, and failed to write? Miss Austwicke stooped and read one—

I may not call you mamma again. It was not wonderful you did not love me. But pity me, and forgive my innocent share in the deception. The woman Ruth told me that Aunt Honor knows all, and has the papers.

Transfixed by these words, Miss Austwicke reared her head in a sort of spasm; then her hand fell heavily on Gertrude's shoulder, and she shook her. "Wake," she gasped, "wake! What's this?—this about—deception, about—"

She kept one hand in a tight grip on Gertrude, and passed the other distractedly over her own brow.

The light slumber of the young girl was over. Broad awake, she sat up, shook back her rippling curls, and said simply—

"What's the matter?"

Then, in an instant recollecting all, she added, as the other again gasped out, "Deception—papers—what?"

"Yes, Aunt Honor, papa has come down about a marriage register which Ruth gave me a rough copy of when she was dying; and oh! aunt, she says I am not Gertrude. His—papa's child was—was killed."

"Marriage register!" cried Miss Austwicke, unmindful of all else. "Speak; whose?"

With a strange access of strength, the excited woman lifted Gertrude to her feet, and shook her to and fro as she spoke—

"Don't tell me about a child. Whose register?"

"Wilfred Austwicke and Isabel Grant's," said the young girl, almost involuntarily repeating the names aloud that she had conned to herself all the day.

"Lost—lost! The family honour lost for ever!" faltered out the wretched woman, between her shut teeth, relaxing her hold of Gertrude, who, awed by the dreadful pallor and gleaming eyes of the ghastly face before her, was about to cry aloud for help. But suddenly the expression changed—the features became less agitated.

"Hush!" she said, laying her finger on her lip—"hush! not now, Gertrude; not now."

"To-morrow, aunt," said the young girl, relieved from the mortal terror that it was a raving maniac who stood before her. "Let me go with you," she added, gently.

"No, no; no, little one," replied Miss Austwicke, softly; and, turning, went towards the door. She was just going out, when, yielding to some sudden impulse, she returned, lifted up the fair young face, balancing the chin on her marble hand, whose touch chilled Gertrude to the bone, while, with the other, she smoothed back the hair from her brow, and, stooping forward, kissed her. It was such a kiss as dying lips might give: it seemed to curdle Gertrude's blood.

"Aunt, aunt! what's the matter?" Gertrude said; but even as she spoke, with a fletter step than she had thought possible to her, Miss Austwicke was gone.

At that instant, a conviction that her aunt ought not to be left alone flashed on the young girl's mind; and, at the same time, a terror, in the present state of the family affairs, of doing anything precipitate, made Gertrude suddenly determine to follow Miss Austwicke, and see her safe to her own apartments. She lost no time in opening the door. It was a clear summer night. At the end of a long passage she saw Miss Austwicke, retreating towards the east wing. The little passage over the arch Gertrude was not acquainted with, and she feared that, if a pass-key was in her aunt's possession, it would prevent her flight being followed. However, Miss Austwicke paused for nothing: she was through the passage, and down the opposite stairs, before Gertrude's fleet footsteps even gained on her. Through a door at the bottom of the passage, the light was shining in Miss Austwicke's accustomed sitting-room; but, instead of entering it, she opened a door on to the lawn, and fled out into the night.

Gertrude, in these last few hours, had known something of the sorrow that longs to soothe itself by active effort or contact with the open air. The starlight on the grass, to the young girl, had something of a benign tenderness in its sweet calm: she ceased to wonder at her aunt's impulse to go out in it. "Some trouble has nearly turned her brain, poor thing. She'll walk, this clear night, and get calm."

Nearly! Ah, Gertrude, you little knew how nearly.

Impelled now more by affectionate solicitude than fear, Gertrude continued to follow her aunt, but, instead of gaining on her footsteps, was soon completely distanced. Seeing Miss Austwicke take the most secluded path through the shrubbery her niece accounted for it by supposing the fugitive had the natural wish not to be seen from the house; but when she continued on that path, and diverged into another which led by a