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## HILDA;

OR,

### THE MERCHANT'S SECRET.

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#### CHAPTER III.

##### THE TREMAYNES.

We must now go back a few months and beg our readers to accompany a young girl as she passes through Prescott Gate, and wends her way wearily down the steep descent of Mountain Street in the City of Quebec. They will hardly recognize in that shabbily dressed girl the fashionable-looking young lady just introduced to their acquaintance, and yet Hilda Tremayne and that daily governess returning from her wearisome duties to her humble home were the same person.

The evening shades were deepening into night and a heavy rain was falling, accompanied by a bitter wind. The light shawl which wrapped Hilda's slight figure was but poor protection from that inclement weather, and shivering she hurried on her homeward way. The last streak of light faded from the gloomy horizon as she reached Champlain Street. Entering a large, old-fashioned house—an humble Maison de Pension—she ascended a partly dilapidated staircase to the third story. Two small apartments in that half-ruinous French mansion were at that period the home of Hilda Tremayne.

In one of these rooms a fire was now burning brightly in a small Franklin stove, the ruddy light displaying the scant plain furniture, the patched faded carpet, while it also revealed the pale, worn face of an invalid, seated in a low rocking chair near the fire. This was Hilda's mother, and though her dress and her surroundings bore evidence of great poverty, yet she had that refined appearance, that lady-like air which can neither be mistaken nor assumed.

Hilda's father, the brother of Lewis Tremayne, had been an actor of some reputation in Great Britain and the sister island. It was during his appearance at a provincial theatre in the south of Ireland that he attracted the admiration and won the affections of a young lady of good family in the neighbourhood. Of handsome exterior—proudly walking the stage in the borrowed dignity of Shakespeare's finest characters, the fascinating actor appeared the personification of manly beauty to the inexperienced girl, and deaf to the voice of prudence, listening only to the pleadings of her lover and the promptings of her own heart, she eloped with the gay Lothario. Consequently, she was cast off by her incensed family, disinherited—and forgotten. The anger and disappointment of Tremayne were extreme when he found that no entreaties could prevail on his wife's father to pardon her elopement or give her that fortune the actor had hoped to possess by marrying her. His love was not strong enough to survive the wreck of this hope. He felt that instead of a fortune he had gained only an incumbrance—that the maintenance of his wife would increase his expenditure and necessarily diminish his own selfish gratifications. Very bitterly then did he regret his marriage—sacrificing his liberty and gaining nothing in return but the love of an infatuated girl, which in the eyes of the unprincipled man was of little worth. Too soon did the sad realities of Mrs. Tremayne's wedded life make her also mourn over her imprudent marriage and regret the madness of the step she had taken in exchanging the luxuries of her home for the privations and discomforts of her present itinerant life. The dissipated habits of her husband too filled her with gloomy apprehensions for the future. With mingled entreaties and reproaches she tried to win him from the debasing vice of intemperance, but in vain. The evil habit was too deeply rooted to be overcome by the slight influence she—a portionless wife—possessed over him. Her reproaches, often ill-timed, only roused the demon of ill-temper and called forth bitter recrimination which resulted, as it always does, in making matters worse. The love of the young wife was gradually weaned from the worthless husband, his harshness and neglect contributing chiefly to this effect, for woman's love may survive the unworthiness of its object, but it is blighted by the chilling atmosphere of unkindness—annihilated by bickering and contempt. One tie alone bound this ill-matched pair together—the silken bond of parental love. The separation so much wished for by both and often threatened in the bitterness of altercation, never took place, because neither could part with their only child, Hilda. Beloved by both parents, but the chief solace of the unhappy mother in the frequent hours of loneliness and dejection,

she grew up unlike most children, thoughtful and sad, her countenance wearing that care-worn expression so touching in the face of the young—so painful when stamped on the lineaments of a child.

The habits of dissipation in which Tremayne indulged gained greater power over him every year, often unfitting him for the duties of his vocation, and this produced the usual results. He lost the confidence of his employers and was often dismissed by exasperated managers when unable to act his part on the stage. At last, unable to procure employment, he was compelled to relinquish his histrionic career. It was at this period he immigrated to Canada and settled with his family in Quebec. There he earned a scanty subsistence by filling an humble situation in a government office, sinking low indeed in the social scale.

The unavailing sorrow which Mrs. Tremayne experienced and the many privations of her sad lot had the usual effect of undermining her health, and while yet young she was gradually sinking into the grave. Fortunately, she was herself able to educate her daughter, qualifying her to become a teacher and contribute her aid to the support of the family. Hilda was very young when she undertook the duties of daily governess, but she did so gladly, as the money she earned enabled her to supply her invalid mother with the necessaries of life. This happiness was now to be taken from her. On this particular evening the lady who had hitherto employed Miss Tremayne to educate her children, had coldly informed her she would not require her services any longer. She really must procure a governess who could make a respectable appearance. How this information crushed the heart of the poor girl. It seemed as if every hope was destroyed by this unexpected trial. Where now could she procure pupils? would not the same objection be urged by other ladies to whom she might apply? and how could this objection be removed? She had no money to purchase the dress suitable for one in her position. Dark indeed seemed the future to Hilda Tremayne, and bitter were the repinings that filled her heart as she returned to her miserable home and ascended the stairs to her mother's apartment.

The gloom on her daughter's face soon attracted the attention of Mrs. Tremayne.

"What is the matter, dear? has any new trouble befallen us?" she asked, anxiously.

"Yes, another trial; as if our cup of suffering was not full enough," replied Hilda, bitterly.

"Surely some have more than their share of sorrow in this world! How can the Almighty expect either faith or patience from the creatures he so sorely tries!"

There was bitterness in the broken heart and a striking want of Christian submission in the wailing tones of Mrs. Tremayne; but affliction unsanctified has no softening influence, and it is the natural impulse of the human heart to murmur and rebel.

"If things could only remain as they were," observed Hilda, moodily, "we might live, but now the prospect is dark indeed."

"But you have not yet told me what the trouble is!" exclaimed Mrs. Tremayne, with angry impatience very unusual to her, but which was now the result of this new sorrow.

How often may irritability of temper be attributed to a similar cause. The sudden angry bursts which excite our resentment are merely the outpourings of some latent grief. Might not this thought help us to pardon such ebullitions and check on our lips the angry retorts which irritating words so naturally call forth.

"Well, the trouble is," replied Hilda, provoked at her mother's angry words, "that my engagement with Mrs. Dormer ended to-day. She is going to engage another governess, one, she said, whose style of dress would be different from mine."

"And she told you this—dismissed you on such a plea! And Mrs. Tremayne's pale face flushed with indignation.

"Yes, and I do not wonder at it, mamma, for her servants look more respectable than I do! Any one of them would scorn to wear the clothes I wear," and giving way to her feelings of mortification, Hilda burst into a wild paroxysm of weeping.

Fondly the grieved mother drew her child within her arms and rested her head upon her bosom, mingling her tears with hers.

"Oh, mamma! this poverty is bitter!" wailed forth Hilda, when the violence of her emotion had partly subsided. "If you knew the humiliation I felt to-day! how my feelings were wounded when dismissed for such a cause. But the bitterest thought of all was that you would suffer, that I could no longer help to provide for your wants."

"But it rests with yourself, darling, to put your foot on this poverty which you feel so galling. Competency has been offered you, Hilda," and Mrs. Tremayne's small thin hand passed caressingly through the soft raven curls of the young head nestling so lovingly on her bosom.

"But at what a price must that competency be obtained! Oh, mamma, how can you urge my acceptance of such an offer?"

"I have not urged it hitherto, darling," and the mother turned away her face from the sad, reproachful eyes of her daughter, "but now Hilda! now, when destitution stares us in the

face, when I see no other door open to escape want, I cannot help wishing you would marry Captain Dudley. He is not certainly the husband I would have chosen for my daughter, but necessity must silence all objections. A handsome person and polished manners do not insure happiness in the married life," and Mrs. Tremayne sighed deeply as she thought of her own fatal error in the choice of a husband.

"But, mamma, this marriage might be avoided," urged Hilda, "if you would again write to grandpapa and represent our great poverty. It is some years now since you last wrote."

"Yes, and you remember I received no answer to my letter," said Mrs. Tremayne sadly. "That does not promise much for the success of another application. But," she resumed, after a gloomy silence, broken only by the hysterical sobs of her daughter, "I will write to Colonel Godfrey—father I cannot call him—if you will promise to marry Dudley should he still continue inexorable."

"I will promise," was Hilda's reply, after some minutes' hesitation.

On her way home that evening the idea that this hated marriage was inevitable had forced itself upon her mind, and now, as she sat silently looking into the fire, she tried to familiarize her thoughts with an event that was but too probable. One hope alone remained, the application to her grandfather, Colonel Godfrey. If that failed—and fail she feared it would—then the sacrifice of self must be made for the sake of her beloved mother, she would not shrink from immolating herself on the altar of filial duty.

Mournfully and in silence the mother watched the expressive face of her child as these thoughts passed through her mind, and she knew by the stern determination which settled about Hilda's chiselled mouth that her promise to marry Captain Dudley would be fulfilled if necessity continued to thrust such a husband upon her.

#### CHAPTER IV.

##### HILDA'S LOVER.

CAPTAIN DUDLEY WAS a sailor, but not in command of one of Her Majesty's ships of war. His sphere of action on the high seas was an humble one. He was merely the skipper of a trading vessel sailing between England and Quebec, and chiefly engaged in the lumber trade. His acquaintance with Mr. Tremayne commenced at a tavern, where he rendered the *ex-décent* actor some service in a drunken brawl, subsequently conducting him home. There he saw Hilda, and was captivated by her beauty. To gain her father's favour was now Dudley's object, and he soon succeeded, for the man who could supply the degraded Tremayne with brandy and oyster suppers was the best fellow in the world, and a very suitable husband for his young daughter.

Emboldened by the encouragement he received, Dudley made Miss Tremayne an offer of his hand, offering to settle on her the sum of four thousand pounds—a legacy lately left him by a distant relative. The offer was very tempting to the poor parents of Hilda Tremayne, but to the young girl herself the marriage was most distasteful. Won by her tears and entreaties, Mrs. Tremayne declined giving an answer until her daughter was older, hoping that time might remove her repugnance to the match, and so the matter had rested during the last year. The greatest part of that time had been spent by Dudley at sea. He had lately returned to Quebec, and had renewed his visits to the Tremaynes, protesting that his passion for Hilda had increased during their separation, and urging her immediate acceptance of his hand. But still Hilda preferred the privations of her present life to the comforts which a marriage with Captain Dudley would bestow; for, notwithstanding the poverty of her surroundings, she was very fastidious in the choice of a husband. Possessing natural refinement she shrank from intercourse with the vulgar Dudley, whose education had been common-place, and whose manners were unpolished.

Neither was his appearance calculated to win the admiration of a young girl deeply read in the light literature of the day, whose ideas of a lover were drawn from the heroes of a fashionable novel. His stalwart figure lacked the grace of an Apollo, and his sunburnt face was very common-looking, its features irregular, the expression of the large blue eye alone redeeming it from being pronounced downright ugly—that was full of the softness of a woman and the frankness of the British tar.

It was near eleven o'clock. Mrs. Tremayne having written her letter to Colonel Godfrey—a last appeal to his parental feelings—had retired to bed, her delicate health requiring unbroken rest, and still Hilda sat alone by the dying fire, waiting, as was frequently her wont, the return of her dissipated father, who was spending the evening at a tavern in the neighbourhood. Very bitter were the memories that crowded on the mind of Hilda Tremayne as she listened nervously for his stumbling step upon the stairs. Her childish reminiscences helped to swell the wave of sorrow that swept in upon her. Her earliest recollections were full of sadness. Her father's wayward moods, his violent bursts of temper

made her even in childhood shun his presence and dread his returning step, which brought neither joy nor comfort across the threshold of their miserable home. Then in later years this childish dislike almost amounted to aversion when she witnessed his dissipated habits and felt the poverty and humiliation they brought upon his family. Poor Hilda! fate had dealt very bitterly with her in giving her the portion of the drunkard's child, checking the gleesome bursts of childhood with a father's muttered curse and a weeping mother's tears, and veiling the sunshine of youth with the dark shadows of poverty and sin!

As the clock of a neighbouring church struck the hour of eleven, a heavy step was heard ascending the stairs, startling the weary Hilda from the deep sad reverie into which she had fallen. The tread, though heavy, was measured, not stumbling like the step of a drunken man. Hilda listened, wondering whether it was her father or some of the other lodgers in the house. On gaining the landing at the head of the stairs the step paused for a moment, then approached the room where Miss Tremayne was, and a gentle knock was heard demanding admittance. Hastily and in surprise she opened the door, and by the dim light in the passage saw a tall figure outside enveloped in a cloak, from which the rain was dripping in little streams, for the night was inclement. Removing his hat as he bowed awkwardly, the stranger revealed the plain and blushing face of Captain Dudley.

"I beg you to excuse my coming so late," he stammered forth, dropping his eyes hurriedly as he encountered the inquiring gaze of Hilda—dazzled, perhaps, by their brightness.

"Where is papa? Have you seen him? Is he not coming home to-night?" Hilda asked as the skipper paused, overcome with embarrassment in the presence of his idol.

"No—yes—that is, he is—I mean he had better remain at the tavern all night, because—"

"Yes, I understand," interrupted Hilda sadly. "I thank you for coming to let me know. You are very kind."

There was an unusual kindness in the girl's manner, but the thought that this man such as he stood there before her, awkward-looking, unrefined, might be her husband before many suns had risen and set, would force itself upon her mind, and the idea, painful as it was, had a softening influence, subduing the usual hauteur of her manner towards her humble admirer.

"I have done all I could to make Mr. Tremayne comfortable; told them at the tavern to take good care of him," resumed Dudley, more calmly encouraged by the change in Hilda's manner.

"Thank you! I regret you should have so much trouble."

"Oh, it is no trouble, but all the pleasure in life to be able to do any thing for you or yours!"

There was a huskiness in the young man's voice, and a tremulousness in its tones which spoke of deep emotion. All the passionate love of his strong nature was stirred within him by the sight of Hilda, as she stood there so sad and yet so beautiful. Hope, too, was awakened in his heart, opening a way for the pent-up torrent of his affection to gush forth and frame itself in words.

"Forgive me," he proceeded, "if I seem too bold; but I must speak to you now; I cannot live on in this way, racked with doubts and fears that are enough to drive a man crazy. To say that I love you would be saying little of what I feel. It is a mad passion that has seized upon me, more like bewitchment than anything else. I know I am not worthy of you; but if you will deign to be my wife you will never have cause to repent it, and all I possess in the world shall be yours!"

Deep feeling made Dudley eloquent, and gave force and pathos to every word he said. He had never before presumed to address Hilda on the subject of his passion. All his love-making had been through her parents, but now the unlocked-for change in her manner inspired him with courage to plead his own cause, and take advantage of the opportunity of speaking to her alone.

"We will talk again upon this subject," said Hilda, with haughty coldness, "the time is unsuitable, excuse my putting an end to our interview at this late hour."

The sudden iciness of Miss Tremayne's manner chilled the hopes of the enamoured Dudley. He had presumed too much on her gratitude for his kindness to her father—he had been too hasty. To be sure she was right, the hour was late, and the place—the threshold of the door—was unsuited for such a declaration. How humbled and unhappy he looked as with an awkward, but lowly reverence, he turned to go away without saying another word.

A feeling something akin to pity was felt by Hilda as she saw the brightness of hope in his homely features give place to the deepest dejection. She had never before realized the depth of his devotion to her. The freezing hauteur of her manner at previous interviews had checked the words of love as they trembled on his lips. But this feeling of compassion was not allowed to remain long in the heart of Hilda, pride soon drove it hence, and in its stead came anger at his presuming to love her and hope she would ever be his wife. How