

"You prefer some one else?"
 "No," with a frown, "there is nothing of that in it. But the mistake is there all the same."

"I wish you would place it."
 She hesitates for a moment, and then, as though compelling herself, goes on:

"I think you wish to marry me, only because you cannot get this money unless you do."

There is a long silence—then:

"Except that I am sure you could not mean deliberately to hurt any one," says he coldly, "I would take that as a direct insult. I may say, however, that you are making a great mistake. I would not marry you unless I liked you, if you had the mines of Golconda."

"You are not, however, prepared to say you love me?" says Hilary, whose face is now quite colorless.

"I hardly know how I feel toward you," says Ker, which at this moment is perhaps as honest a thing as ever he said in his life. His anger leaves his judgment blind.

"Don't you?" Hilary smiles a rather fugitive smile. "Then I'll tell you. You hate me!"

At this astonishing declaration, Ker, after a moment's angry pause, bursts out laughing. It is a very ironical laugh, and drives Hilary to the very limits of her temper.

"Any one can laugh," says she. "But for all that I tell you the truth. I will ask you one question. Would you choose me as your wife, if you suddenly found that I had not a penny in the world?"

"Certainly," says Ker. But he is so angry now that his voice denies his assertion.

Hilary shrugs her shoulders.

The shrug maddens him.

"Well, is that what you *didn't* want me to say?"

"I don't know that I wanted you to say anything."

"Look here," says Ker slowly, calmly, and full of the grand knowledge that he is now proving himself a thoroughly equitable creature, who has the power at any moment to put his temper beneath his feet, even when most incensed. "Let us talk this over calmly."

Hilary turns upon him.

"One would think," says she, her lovely face lighted up by the fire of a most just indignation, "it was *I* that was not calm."

"Of course, what I desire is that we should both be calm."

"It is plain to earth and sky now that he at all events, is anything but calm!"

"What I want," says Miss Burroughs with dignity, "is that you should keep your temper!"

"I? Keep my temper? I assure you it was never better under my control than at this present moment."

"Then all I can say is, I'm sorry for the other moments!"

This, of course, makes an end of all things.

Slowly, in dogged silence, they walk back to the house. Just before they

reached it, Ker addresses her once more—"for the last time" is writ large on every word he utters.

"That is settled then?"

"I suppose so."

"I shall go back to India next week."

"No great hardship, is it? Most men like India."

"No wonder; it's about the best place going. Lots of fun and shooting. I have only one thing to regret, and that is that I ever left it." This is distinctly rude, but he sticks to it.

"It does seem a pity!" says Miss Burroughs calmly. If he had hoped to take a rise out of her he has failed signally.

She turns to him presently.

"I should like you to take back this," says she, holding out her hand with the florin in it. "It was such a stupid affair all through, was it not?"

"More than that?" coldly.

"Criminal!" with a rather mocking smile. "Well, I don't wish to be reminded of it then."

"Neither do I."

Taking the coin he flings it into a bush on his right hand. All seems at an end, indeed.

They are within two yards of the hall-door now, and as Hilary turns to bid him an overlasting adieu Bridget rushes down the steps and up to Hilary.

CHAPTER XVI.

"I will not let thee go.
 I hold thee by too many bands;
 Thou sayest farewell, and lo!
 I have thee by the hands,
 And will not let thee go."

"Oh, Miss Hilary, I thought ye'd niver come! The masher is in sich a state! What wid sendin' to the door for ye ivery minit and the ould man in the study!"

"The ould man in the study?"

"Yes, miss. Raal ould! The mistress tould me to stand on the hall-door-step, an' bring ye in, when ye came, an' Misher Ker if he was wid ye. An' sure," with a merry glance between her roguish Irish lids, "where would he be but there?"

"But"—Ker is standing a good way behind, "why, Bridget?"

"Faix, I don't know, miss. Barrin' it is the ould gentleman that's the cause of it. He's from London Town, I'm thinkin'; a sort of a grand sort of law man, an' its something about a will, I think."

It is plain that Bridget has been applying her best ear to the keyhole of the study with great effect.

Hilary's face grows disturbed. She turns round and beckons somewhat haughtily to Ker. Her face is very white.

"It appears that there is a man here, a lawyer, acquainted with my—our" reluctantly—"aunt's will, and he wishes to see you as well as me."

"But how—?" begins Ker.

She disdains reply, however, and leads him to Jim's study.

The interview is at an end. "The ould man" has gone back to London. He has brought strange news, however—

strange enough to induce him, the second partner in the great firm, to come all the way to Ireland to explain it. A second will has been discovered, written by the old aunt, that entirely upsets the first terrible one, that would have destroyed or made the lives of two young people. This latter will is quite clear. Of the £18,000 a year, left by the old aunt, one-half is to go to Hilary, the other half to Frederic Ker. There are no restrictions whatsoever.

(To be concluded.)

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