

1999

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"Mrs. Bray was allowed to slip back into her old place in Effie's heart, and my Harry was Mrs. Bray's object."

"Effie had been sharper than I, but Harry was too strong in love for me to yield. I felt sure."

"It was about the time that Harry's business compelled him to choose a boarding-place further down town. He left Mrs. Horton's and only called to see me in the evenings, and we began to write to each other. I have the little notes he wrote me carefully taken away even now."

"They are very precious to me. As I read them over they bring those hours back again, and I am a young and loving girl once more."

"I never loved Harry more tenderly than when I sat down to my desk one morning to tell him of a little festivity which I had been invited to attend, and to ask his escort. I never shall forget that day."

"After I had posted the letter I sat in my own room and sewed upon the pretty dress I intended to wear, thinking all the while that it was Harry's favorite color, and that he would be sure to like it."

"So, as soon as he recovered leave I went with me and read aloud from a little book of verses that Charlie had given her. They were not fine verses, but was he an elegant reader, but there was love in them and in her heart, and that sufficed."

"I had finished the dress, and sat looking down into the street, when I saw a boy hurrying along. It was the errand boy at Harry's place, and Effie, who had seen him also, ran down stairs to bring my note to me, for we both knew that it was my answer that shimmered in the little white envelope in his hand. She ran down gaily, humming a tune. She returned with a very serious face. A note was in her hand, with my name upon it in Harry's writing, but her expression frightened me so that I caught my breath."

"What is it, Effie?"

"Frank," she said, very sadly, "I must tell you, though you'll hate me. The boy who brought that note brought one for Mrs. Bray."

"I was relieved that I burst into a fit of laughter. 'Why should that trouble me?' I inquired."

"Don't you see your Harry must have written both?" she asked.

"No," said I. "I do not. I am not jealous of Harry."

"Then I broke the seal, and these were the words I read:

"MADAM,—I have another engagement, and am obliged to decline yours. H. HEATHCOTE."

"I put the billet down with a strange chill at my heart. What had I done to deserve this? What should I do? A note like this from a betrothed lover whom I had parted from with the tenderest of farewells! Effie saw that I was in trouble, and forebore to question me, but she glided out of the room and did not return for an hour. When she came back her face was wet with tears."

"You cannot tell me what it is?" she asked.

"I answered:

"I must have offended him unconsciously. I can't say anything more."

"When the dinner bell rang I went down stairs as usual. Passing the parlor door I saw Mrs. Bray. She was reading a note aloud."

"I declare I was never so surprised," she said. "I thought he was in love with that little girl. Ah! here she comes."

"She hurried away as she spoke, in assumed terror. The next moment I saw Effie speak to her, and a white paper pass into her hands. Whatever it was she knew and would tell me. She did. That evening she brought a letter into my room—a letter that Mrs. Bray had exhibited to all the house—a love letter from Harry Heathcote, tender and more passionate than any he had ever written to me, and with his undoubted signature at its foot. It was no forgery. I even knew the paper, a rare and costly kind, with his own monogram upon it. It began 'Darling,' and ended with 'Your own Harry.'"

"I did not scream, I did not swoon: I faced the terrible truth as best I might. She had won him from me; but I was in no wise to blame. I was not to be blamed, I sinned against, not sinning, and the world should not crush me."

"I did not even allow myself to play the mourner. Contempt of my lover had taken the place of love. We would know that I did not grieve for him; and asked good old Mr. Halloran to be my escort to the party next evening with a smile on my face, though my heart ached sorely, and life seemed a cold and cruel thing to me."

"They told me I was gay that night. I chatted, I ate and drank, I danced whenever I was asked to do so. All the while the words of that letter Harry had written to me were in my heart."

"When Mr. Halloran took me home he told me I had wearied myself out and was beginning to feel it." But I was strong yet.

"As I went up stairs old Mrs. Horton looked out of her room.

"Your beau was here to-night," she said. "I expect he was cut up to find you out, but Mrs. Bray took care of him."

"I tried to laugh. All my life I felt I must now laugh when I had rather cry. I must hide my heart. No one should speak of me as one who had been sinned against."

"I wrapped myself in my dressing-gown and sat before the fire. I could not sleep. I could not even doze. The clock struck twelve, one, two, and still I watched the dying embers. Ten minutes more had gone by, when suddenly a frightful shriek rang through the house—another and another."

"I rushed to the door. Other people were in the entry. The shrieks came from Mrs. Bray's room, and ere we could think the door was flung open and

I don't know what I thought; I don't know what I did. I cannot remember anything more until I had her down upon the floor with a blanket that I had snatched from a pile that lay on the table in the entry wrapped about her. I heard myself crying, "Lie still, and you will save your face." And I saw the flames choke out, and the light, black thick, floating over me, and I knew that I had at least saved her from being quite burned to death. Soon I knew that I had saved her life.

It was night again when some one came to my door and told me that Mrs. Bray wished to see me. Of course, I went to her. She was lying in her bed, wrapped in bandages, and she could not stir, but she looked at me earnestly.

"Send them out of the room," she said, "I want to speak to you alone."

And when the nurse had closed the door between her and me, I sat down, she looked at me again in the same strange way.

"You have saved my life," she said. "Yes, and I remember what you said: 'Lie still, and you'll save your face.' Most women would have liked me to have spoiled my face had I used them so. And you don't know the world, either. Go to that desk. There's a letter there. It's yours. I wanted to make you jealous, and I wrote to your beau to ask his escort somewhere."

Two notes came at the same time to the house. I knew very well that there was a mistake made—that mine had been put into your envelope, and yours into mine. I scratched your name out of that one you have there, and showed it about to make you jealous. He's as true as steel to you. I love you for saving my face, and tell you that. Now, try to forgive me."

I was too happy to do anything else. I knew that what she said was true. And when she asked me I stooped down and gave her a kiss.

That was you, I remember now. When Mrs. Bray discovered she left Mrs. Horton, and Hans, the Heathcotes never knew anything about those two miserable until I had been his wife too long to have any secrets from him.

(Continued.)

Osbert turns to Sir Walter and begins on some other subject; and Robin's uncle, man like, is only too glad to embrace an opportunity of escaping a painful and embarrassing situation. Robin's lips tremble; she turns and goes away hurriedly.

Beyond, in the hall, rings out the laughter and voices, excitement and pleasure pervade every corner; but the exhilaration is gone for Robin; her place is here no longer; she is not wanted; she is sent out from the warmth and the gladness to the cold and discomfort of a strange home and strange people. All her life and spirits are gone; she climbs the stairs almost with an effort, and feels that the last straw is put to her burden, when she reaches her cosy room and finds that Parsons, Lady Lowrick's maid, has already packed and strapped her one-box.

It is pale, sorrowful Robin who buttons on her winter coat and pins a veil over her pretty face.

"They might come and wish me good-bye," she thinks, a little brokenly, and then suddenly she feels glad that none of the young ones have come. "It might make me cry, and I won't cry—I won't. He shan't have the pleasure of seeing me make a baby of myself—nasty, horrid, ugly thing!"

All the same, her strength is very nearly broken when her aunt comes in and folds her in a tender embrace, calling her by every loving word.

"I would not let you go my darling," she says, over and over again. "You, the only child of my dear dead Alice; but you see, I cannot help myself, Robin. Mr. Everest is your legal guardian, and is only acting within his rights. I don't want to vex him, because if we do he may not let you come to us again, and that would be terrible; and now, darling, shall we go down to say good-bye?"

But Robin draws back.

"No, no, I would rather not, auntie, dear. I—I would rather go away quietly. Give them all my love, and say how sorry I am to leave them, and ask them not to forget me. I shall come back soon perhaps."

If her face is white and her eyes red as she kisses Sir Walter at the big oaken door, Osbert Everest pretends not to see. He is taking a courteous farewell of Lady Lowrick.

Just for one moment the girl hesitates. Somebody in the distance is playing a dreamy waltz; the rest will be dancing, wondering why she does not come. Within all is light, warmth, and gaiety—without, a keen east wind is blowing, and a carriage is waiting to carry her from all she loves to desolation and despair. The contrast is horrible.

She gives one sob, runs down the steps, jumps into the carriage, and, as Osbert Everest takes his place beside her, she feels her last atom of pride pass away, and burying her face in her hands, she bursts into a flood of passionate tears.

CHAPTER II.

Newtownlock, the property of which Robin is the owner, is situated about twenty miles away from Lowrick Hall. It is a difficult and tedious journey of all kinds, and very onerous and wearisome, and bearing this in mind, Osbert has determined to relinquish the railroad and go by road.

The weather is bitterly cold; but Robin can find no reasonable cause for complaint inside the rooey landau. For the first half hour of their journey not a word is spoken. Osbert produced a carriage-