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THE SNOW DRIFT; OR, HOW IT HAPPENED. PART II.

Comfort ye! comfort ye! It sounded like no mortal voice to me in my weariness; and I could almost imagine that 'some seraph strayed' to fill one earthly heart with heaven's own music.

Weeks passed before my grey-haired old doctor would allow me to go out of my bed-room. At last, one morning in February, I was permitted to go into a sort of cozy little snugger on the same floor, assisted by Justice Morgan on the one side, and the doctor himself on the other.

'Turk, do stand still!—it is only papa.' And before the owner of the voice had time to move, I saw the picture which long years have not effaced from the tablet of my memory.

Kneeling before a gigantic Newfoundland dog, on the hearthrug, was a young girl; her occupation consisted in wearing a collar of immortelles round the huge throat of her canine companion, who in return regarded her with eyes of the deepest affection.

'I am so glad you are better,' she said to me, while a faint blush tinged her cheeks.

'This is my child, Sir Archibald, my little Mayflower,' said the justice, as he lovingly stroked the beautiful head.

Golden-brown hair, soft grey eyes, low, square forehead, and perfect mouth and chin, May Morgan was beautiful indeed. There was a child-like vivacity about her, an inexpressible freshness and purity, that constantly made me turn to her as one would to some rare and lovely flower.

I have not said much about Justice Morgan, and I have not much to say. What he might have been in early years I know not, but he was all that a warm friend could be. I could fancy that he could be severe and harsh when crossed; but that May never did in any way.

'Now, Sir Archibald,' said May, one morning soon after our introduction, coming into the little sitting-room with a handful of hyacinths, 'while I arrange these I wish you to amuse me. But first, do you know that all the time you were ill in bed, you had inquiries made after your health every day?'

'I suppose it was Pat Doolan,' I said. 'Just so,' she replied; 'and do you know I knew all about your worship before I saw you? There is not much to know, Miss Morgan,' said I, smiling. 'Pat is Irish, you know.'

'And therefore warm-hearted,' she replied. 'You are a great favorite at the 'Blue boar,' and Pat quite made me like you long before I made your acquaintance. Did he tell you that he used to be servant of papa's?'

'Yes, and I think it was some feeling of curiosity which led to my accident, for I was inspecting Mainowen when the 'Marquis' went down.'

May came and stood by the side of my sofa while a sad expression shadowed her face.

'Then he told you of Lena?' she said. 'Yes,' was my reply.

'Will you help me, Sir Archibald?' she asked. 'I am going, for the first time in my life, to disobey papa; and instead of waiting for Harold to come back I will get you to help me.'

'Miss Morgan,' I said, 'you are going to be disobedient, and I am to help at it! I am shocked at such principles.'

'Now, do not laugh at me; listen instead,' she said; and her bright face was brought level with mine as the child—she was a child to me—knelt down to talk, clasping her arms round Turk's neck. 'I am going to disobey papa. Lena must come back. Look here,' she said, unfolding a newspaper and pointing to a passage.

'On board H. M. transport, Aradée, homeward bound from India, Major Laurence, of H. M. 10th Hussars.' I have written to Lena, and asked her to come—my dear, dear sister. Her home must be here now. Only what will papa say?'

May Morgan hid the newspaper, and the justice never saw it. A few days after she came to me, her face flushed and excited.

'Sir Archibald,' she said, 'I have seen Lena. She is at the 'Blue Boar,' and she has a little girl, the only one that lived, three years old.—Pat says it's Lena herself again. Poor Lena, she is quite broken-hearted! Now, Sir Archibald, you must help me in my scheme. I want you to do what my courage even fails to think of. Papa has never been angry with me, and I could not bear to see him angry now. What I want you to do is to allow Lena's child to be with you to-night, here, when papa comes to sit with you.'

'I will do anything I can for you,' I said, pressing one of the small hands which were busy clasping and unclasping themselves in extreme nervousness. 'Let the little one come here—I am not afraid of the justice. I do not think he will be very angry.'

That I said, more to reassure her than because I thought so, for my real opinion was that Justice Morgan would never forgive me. But what could I do, with those sad grey eyes fixed upon my mine? I knew then that I loved May Morgan with the whole passion of my life; and had she asked it, I would have braved the displeasure of thousands.

Day after day I had listened more and more intently for the sound of a fairy footstep or the echo of a silver laugh. When I was a boy, I had loved Maud Muriel, but it was with the strength of a boy's heart; now, at six and thirty, or very nearly that age, I loved with all the depth of a passionate nature a child of seventeen—for she was but as a child to me. I knew all the folly, all the madness of it; but I was powerless as a reed swayed by a mighty tempest. I knew all its hopelessness also, for I saw that May had no feeling or thought for me deeper than what she might feel for a brother. Oh, May, but once to see your eyes droop beneath mine—once, did I say—Bah! She must love me not at all, or all in all.'

There is only one thing for me to do, get well as fast as I can and start for Castle Roydon. It was the only advice I could give myself.

The evening was closing when the door of my sitting-room opened, and the justice came in; he was earlier than usual, and the child had not come. I was wondering how the meeting would be managed, and thought it best to leave it all to chance, when Turk bounded in, throwing the door wide open, followed by a wee toddling thing shouting with childish glee. 'Turk, wait for baby!—wait for baby, Turk?'

When the justice saw the child he turned ashy white, and covered his face with his hands; and she, after standing irresolute for a second, went and laid her little cheek upon his knee, saying, 'Don't ki! Turk won't eat you. Kiss baby!' and the little rosy mouth was held up very persuasively. The old man caught the child up in his arms, whispering in a broken voice, 'My Lena! my Lena!' and carried her out of the room.

We saw him no more that evening. Towards night we heard the child's chatter on her way to bed. 'Put her into the little room next to mine,' was the order, when the old man rang for her to be taken to bed.

So it was: the gulf which had existed for years was bridged by a little child.

'Sir Archibald, I am so thankful papa has gone to Pat Doolan's to fetch Lena.'

It was getting late when May came to me, and she sat down on a stool by the sofa as she spoke.

'When are you going to say "Archie"?' I asked. 'You do not know how much prettier it is than "Sir Archibald."'

'Oh, I could not,' she laughed. 'It does not seem right for me to call you that! You are so much older than I am, I feel quite a respect for

you. Now, I have some more news for you.—Harold is coming in a few days, and you will be well enough then to go out a little; if you cannot walk far, I will drive you myself.'

'Who is Harold?' I asked.

'My companion,' she replied; 'the only companion I have ever had—Marold Maurice—I suppose he will be Sir Harold some day. You see we were children together—the Maurice estate joins Mainowen—and as Harold had no playmates, nor had I, we were very much together. He has been abroad with a tutor for a long while, and is now coming home. I am so glad!' she added, looking so bright and radiant through the clear gray eyes I so loved into my face, as she spoke.

Then that was to be the end of it all; she would probably marry this young Maurice; and I—ah, well, I must make haste and turn my face homeward. My visit to Ireland was sadly fated.

That night Justice Morgan brought back his daughter; and when I saw him again ten years seemed to have been lifted off his shoulders.

'Archie,' he said, for he was fond of me, and always called me 'Archie' now, 'I have been very foolish, very wicked; I cannot change the past, but I will guard the future for them.'

And so he did. It was as though Justice Morgan fancied that he could never be sufficiently loving to his daughter—as if there were long years of absence and sorrow to be atoned for—and as if he felt that the uncertain future was all too short to redeem the sad and dismal past.

A few bright days fell to my lot, and then an interruption. It seems to me that throughout life, sunshine and shade are so closely allied, that the presence of the one is but as the dawning of the other. The days that followed were so full of happiness that I might have guessed they could not last. They were passed by Mrs. Laurence, May, little Kathleen, and myself, the best part of the time out of doors; for I had been so long an unwilling prisoner in the house that I seemed not to be able to breathe enough of the fresh, pure air. I had quite recovered my accident, but a feeling of weakness frequently made me feel weary. The long rides or drives we took soon made me my 'could sell entirely,' as Pat used to tell me. Perhaps that was true in a physical sense; morally, I knew that I could never feel the same again.

The sunshine consisted in being constantly with May, following her about, listening to her merry laugh, which had more music in it to me than any sound in life. When the twilight deepened we would go to the organ-room, and Mary's voice would awake thoughts and feelings of a better world and a truer life. Perhaps it was the influence of the better nature which gave me courage to— But we must not anticipate.

The shade came soon. A few days afterwards I was smoking on the terrace, and playing a game of romps with little Kathleen and Turk, when a tall, handsome, young fellow of three and twenty rode up. In an instant May came flying through the low French window of the drawing-room, her face sparkling with pleasurable emotion, and both her small hands outstretched.

'Hallo, May,' exclaimed the stranger, springing to the ground and fastening his horse, and then running lightly up the steps. 'Well, now say you are glad to see me,' he continued, clasping her little hands in both of his. 'Wily, May, May, how pretty you have grown!'

'And, Harold, you have grown foolish. Of course I am glad to see you. Let me introduce you to Sir Archibald.'

The conversation was general, Harold and I talked about foreign countries, and May joined now and then; but I could not help noticing that though his words were addressed to me, Harold's eyes were frequently fixed upon May's face with an expression of admiration, for which I could have knocked him down.

The justice welcomed the young man warmly, the horse was sent round to the stables, and my sunshine at Mainowen was clouded over.

From that day, upon some pretext or other,

Harold Maurice was always coming. Sometimes it was some new music, a rare flower, or a book of poems, which brought him over, until at last his coming was looked for as certain and daily event.

One day the justice came and laid his hand upon my shoulder, as I was standing at the window watching Harold and May amongst the crocus-beds.

'Archie,' he said, 'those two are going to make a match. Maurice came to me this morning and asked me for my child, and I told him that if he won her consent he might make sure of mine. I think she is fond of him.'

'I think she is,' I answered, in a dreamy sort of way, looking over the two young heads in the garden below into the cold gray sky; 'and now, justice, I want to speak to you as I could wish for all your kindness to me.'

'Nonsense, boy! do not speak of it.'

'But I must speak of it, for I must leave Mainowen, and I do not want to do so without telling you how grateful I—'

'Boy, boy, hush! what a deal of nonsense you can talk. And why do you speak of leaving us? I think as we had all the trouble of nursing you, you might honor us with your company now you are well.'

'But Castle Roydon wants me, sir. Indeed, I expect I shall have plenty to occupy my time now to prepare my house for your summer visit. Kathleen has given me many orders,' I said, as I lifted up the sunbeam which had just pushed open the door, 'she wants to know if she may bring the ponies and Turk, and Pat, and the kitten—'

'No, all the tittens,' interrupted the little one. 'But, pet, who would take care of them?' asked the justice, laughing.

'Archie,' she replied, throwing her little arms round my neck and hiding her laughing face upon my shoulder. The justice laughed.

'Lena,' said he, as Mrs. Laurence entered the room, 'you will have to watch the wee one, she is already trying her infantine powers upon Archie. What will she be when she grows up?'

'An old woman,' replied the Sunbeam, peeping at her grandpapa.

I had given her the pet name of Sunbeam at the first, and the rest of the household had taken it up until it had become pretty general.

My last evening at Mainowen had arrived, and I was not sorry for it. May had seemed to avoid me lately. She refused to take some of our old quiet walks unless Mrs. Laurence or the justice would join us, and in every other possible way I had seen she wished to avoid being alone with me. I was thinking that in twenty-four hours I should be far away, when the justice came in.

'It is the strangest thing!' he said. 'I always thought that May loved young Maurice.'

'And does she not?' I asked, with a strange feeling of expectation beating at my heart.

'No; at least, she has rejected him, and that looks like it. But I cannot help thinking that she must like him; perhaps, after all, it is her caprice, though May has never shown it before. Archie, I wish you would speak to her.'

'I, sir! What could I say or do? Surely, it is yourself or Mrs. Laurence whom she would attend to most—not me.'

'I shall never influence her one way or another,' said the justice. 'She must trust to her own judgment. But I should like you to lay before her all the advantages she is throwing away. She is so much a child, she can hardly know her own feelings yet. Will you do it, Archie? I know she will care for what you say.'

'If you wish me, I will,' I replied, in a weary voice; and I turned away to find her.

I had been reading Tennyson's 'Idylls,' and the book was in my hand when I joined May Morgan in the conservatory. There she stood amongst the flowers, like Ruth amongst the golden sheaves. The dying light lingered over her shapely head as she stood looking out of the glass door down the garden. I went and stood by her side, and for a short time neither of us spoke.

'Sir Archibald, you are very quiet,' she said, at last. 'What makes you so?'

'The weight of a commission, and the recollection that it is perhaps the last time I shall stand here for years.'

'I hope not,' she said, speaking quickly and earnestly. 'And the commission?'

'It is to make an appeal to you on behalf of a certain young gentleman. Will you consider your answer to him again, May?'

'No—Sir Archibald, I knew what I was doing.'

'You liked, but did not love him, May?'

'Yes.'

'Do you know that the justice would like you to marry him?'

'Yes.'

'Do you know that you are throwing away a very good chance of happiness, May?'

'Yes.'

'And you think that you will never be sorry for it?'

'No, never.'

I stood all the while watching the light playing amongst the waves of rich brown hair; her eyes never once looked up, while her small white hands were nervously employed in picking a rose to pieces.

Something in that picture struck me, while the beating of my heart was so loud, I thought she must hear it.

'May,' I said, clasping her hands in mine in a grasp so tight that the flower was crushed, 'May, my darling, if I ask you to be my wife, will you give me the same answer?'

A long pause—her head, with its crowning mass of golden brown, was bent lower and lower; the answer came very softly—so softly, that I think no ear save my own could have caught it.

'No, Archie!'

I clasped her graceful form to me in a wild, mad embrace. In that one minute of speechless delight it seemed as though all the darkness in my life had faded into the brightest, purest happiness given to humanity. Such happiness comes but once (sometimes never) in a lifetime. It was flooding mine now with more than earthly sunshine.

'May,' I said, presently, as we sat down to talk calmly over events, 'do you think with me? Are you sure about your love for me, darling?'

I looked down into her clear gray eyes, and saw my answer there; but a verbal one came.

'Archie, I think I must have loved you before I saw you, for I seemed to know so much about you from Pat and Mary Doolan. Oh, how could you imagine I loved Harold when I could love you?' she said; and I was satisfied.

The daylight faded, and the moon rose, and looked down through the glass upon us as we sat in our unspeakable happiness.

'I suppose you two are discussing all the affairs of the nation as well as your own,' the justice asked, as he opened the door, and came in.

'No, sir, we have not got beyond our own,' I replied. 'Justice Morgan, we think that May will require an older husband than Harold Maurice; will you give her to me instead? I will take all care of her.'

'Will I give her to you, Archie? Ay, that I will. I have not felt so pleased and happy since my birth.'

The kind old man took May's hand and clasped it in mine, and I accepted it as the gift of God.

Did the justice think, as his eyes filled with tears, as he turned away from us, of that other life which he might have blessed as he did mine? Perhaps so. Who could know all his regret and sorrow for a long past?

The delight of Pat Doolan was beyond all bounds when he heard that I was to be married to his favorite Miss May.

'Bada! then, your worship,' said he, 'it's just the best wife in the world you're getting, barring my own. And it's yourself that I would rather see her married to than anybody, for it's yourself that's the real gentleman.'

Pat was further convinced of my being 'a real gentleman' some time afterwards, when I offered to employ him on my estate giving him and his wife Mary one of the pretty lodges at Castle Roydon to live in.

'It was just about this time that an unusual