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HONOUR WITHOUT RENOWN

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CHAPTER VII—CONTINUED

"Sweet little visitor," said Sister Marguerite to herself as she moved to the window and looked fondly after it; "would that you had tarried with us longer." As she turned her gaze fell upon her patient; their eyes met, and in his she recognized at once the steadfast light of reason.

"You are better!" she exclaimed joyfully. "Oh, I am so glad!" Then taking his hand kindly, "Tell me how you feel."

"Tired—no tired and weak! and so perplexed," was the faint rejoinder; "and my foot hurts me so."

"Does it?" she asked somewhat anxiously. "Now that is too bad; but never mind, we will try to relieve the pain if you will endeavor to be patient, and not worry yourself."

"Tell me all about it. How long have I been here?" he asked faintly. "What time of the year is it? I can listen to you now; your voice soothes me, and I seem to know your touch."

"You ought to do so," she said smiling; "you have experienced enough of it lately to be weary of it. The fights you and I have had, to be sure! Sometimes I have almost given you up in despair, you were so obstinate."

He felt grateful, and endeavored to smile in return. Then, as he passed his hand feebly over his face, his eyes expressed some distress when his hand came in contact with a stubby beard.

"Do not allow trifles like that to disturb you," she said cheerily. "When you are a little stronger it can be easily removed."

"Come nearer to me and listen, for I can speak neither loud nor loudly."

She drew a chair closer to him, but facing him; and sitting herself listened carefully whilst he continued faintly: "What am I to call you?"

"At present 'Sister' only; when you are stronger you may call me 'Sister Marguerite' if you wish."

probability they would have left you to die; certainly, they would never have nursed or cared for you as we have done."

"I am well aware of that, doctor. But—and his lips expressed a faint shadow of scorn as he spoke—"upon one subject set your mind quite at ease you, and all who have aided me in my extremity, shall not go unrequited. I can afford to repay a generous deed. My name is Harold Manfred; my parents are dead. I have no wife, and need render to no man an account of my actions."

"The first part of the sentence he spoke haughtily enough, but the latter portion struck in his throat."

"Of course, of course," responded the medical man, moving uneasily in his chair, but immovably relieved; for to do him justice, the winter had been a weary one; he had worked hard day and night; his expenses were almost overwhelming, and taxes were likely to be a heavy burden for some time to come.

"You must pardon me," he continued, "but we feared lest an anxious wife or mother might be mourning your mysterious disappearance."

"Well, you understand me now," was the blunt rejoinder. "If you and Sister will continue your kind care of me, on my word of honor as a gentleman, I will amply requite your generosity."

"There, there! my dear comrade!" exclaimed the doctor, patting the thin white hand which lay nearest to him, "France is not mercenary. I hear, I assure you, been an honor as well as a pleasure to be anxious on account of your friends."

"Once for all, allow them to rest, then; accept my thanks for all your kindness and forgive me if I abstain from talking much; your language was always difficult to me, and it is doubly so just now. Will you, instead, tell me how things are progressing outside?"

"Thank God, the troops are advancing surely, if slowly. Yet we live in absolute dread of what may occur when those rebel armies driven from their bloody Revolutionary wars should set upon and murder poor little Sister Marguerite on her journeyings to and fro—her errands of mercy and charity to the sick."

"Dreadful, dreadful!" he groaned. "But I was sure of it. The loss has been terribly present to me all the time. What on earth shall I do?"

"Try to get well and live as you have never lived before," was the prompt reply, spoken kindly and distinctly. "I am certain God has some great design in restoring to you your life. Gather together, then, the remainder of your strength, and devote it to deeds of greatness and generosity; then, indeed, will England add one more name to the long list of her heroes, and" (taking his hand kindly) "even I, only a poor Sister of Charity, shall be proud of my countryman."

Manfred was surprised by the thrill of pleasure which ran through him when he anticipated coming to his senses. Surely he must be verifying the prediction he had uttered years ago, when first he encountered that indignant schoolgirl: "Some one will be proud to call her friend some day."

When next he awoke after a refreshing sleep though she forbade him to talk, she drew a chair nearer to him, and unfolded to him gently and with wonderful tact all that had occurred; something the hard facts down, smoothing the rough points where she felt his pride would most be wounded, lighting the future with the glowing colours of happiness reaped from duty accomplished, so that tears, arising from feelings that had long been unknown to him, filled his eyes, and he hung upon her words endeavoring to draw strength from the brave spirit which possessed her.

turned with a quick but amused glance of inquiry towards him.

"I mean," he went on to explain, "what shall I owe you for all your services?"

"He was beginning to regain strength, and the softer part of his nature was departing. There was a ring of condescension in his voice which chased the bright smile from her face. She raised her head after the manner of the dear, wistful school-girl, Beatrice de Woodville, but continued her work in silence. Receiving no reply, he addressed her again.

"Don't be ashamed," he said, "to name a sum; you have saved my life, and, what is more, you have actually taught me to respect a nun."

"I did not, unless for you," she answered as calmly as she could; and there was tuborn dignity in her bearing as she turned and faced him. "But if it be true that I have taught you to respect a nun, then why seek to humiliate me?"

He rose upon his elbows, staring at her in astonishment. How like she was now to that beautiful girl. What a revealing resemblance! How could she humiliate you, Sister?" he exclaimed, feeling strangely moved as he gazed upon her. "I meant what I said in good past."

"I suppose you did," she answered, lowering her eyes and struggling with herself. "I must excuse your ignorance."

"On my honor as a gentleman, I will pay you in current gold for your services!"

She faced him fully now, and the old flash of scorn lit up the eyes as she spoke; for in her secret heart she despised the man before her and longed to bring him to reason.

"Are you then really so ignorant as to suppose that a Sister of Charity devotes her life to works of mercy in the hope of earning gold as her reward—or that she lives only for good opinion of those for whom she labors? No, you cannot think it! You know it is not true. Keep your gold; or rather bestow it, if you will, upon the poor, the sick, and the orphan, that the Father may bless the God of His mercy in your behalf; perhaps you need it!"

She paused abruptly, as though the subject was distasteful to her, and it was some seconds ere he dared to speak again. Without taking his eyes from her face, he ventured to ask in a low tone:

"Then if not to earn a livelihood, why do you do it?"

"Why?"—and the words issued with living fervor from her mobile lips, whilst her eyes, gazing through the open window, were fixed upon the blue sky—"Why? I will tell you. For the sole love of Him to whose service we consecrate our lives. It is His will alone we seek, His love and approval alone we need, and to Him, alone do we look for recompense. Do you think," she continued—and a flash of pride mingled with the almost sublime look on her face—"that money could ever repay or satisfy the heart that has learned to love and live for the God alone, that neither wealth could suffice to stimulate our weak nature, or to give us courage? Ah, you do not understand the meaning of words like these—you, who have lived for yourself alone. But rather would I belong to God and be the poorest beggar upon earth, than be the wealthiest of earth's monarchs without Him."

He held his breath as he listened to her, but could not still the beating of his heart. What did she know of him? What would she say next? Who was she? Strange, too, how her voice and face haunted him! But she, seeming almost unconscious of his presence, walked slowly towards the easement, and leaning her arms upon the sill passed the crucifix which usually hung at her side to her lips, apparently buried in prayer or reverie. Was she seeking for strength and courage for herself, or for grace and mercy for her patient? Perhaps for both.

wind was blowing fresh and keen, the crested waves were rolling massed, and the steamer rose and fell as she cut her way defiantly through the bright waters. There were many passengers abroad, and most of them were thoroughly enjoying the invigorating breeze, whilst a friend and I were amusing ourselves at the cost of two French nuns—poor sickly-looking creatures they were; one of them could barely stand—when bang down in our midst bore this English beauty. She was walking with indignation, and constituted herself their champion and protector."

"I hope you felt thoroughly ashamed of your conduct," said Sister Marguerite with spirit.

"I did; but I felt also a strange presentiment that I should meet her again some day, and that she would play an active part in my destiny."

Sister Marguerite made no reply, but her head was lowered a little; she seemed to be examining the nun more closely. Manfred continued:

"You should have seen how she treated those nuns. Why, if they had been her superiors her behaviour could not have been more deplorable."

"Pray how do you know that they were not her superiors in birth as well as in sanctity?"

"Have I not already told you that she was of noble birth, that she was young, wealthy, and beautiful, and that she had been brought up to her lot to become—?" he hesitated.

"One of us? Why not say it out?"

"Well, Sister, it does not seem to me probable that such a thing could occur."

"I believe you! How should you understand the motives of self-sacrifices?"

"You are severe, and for all you know unjust, in your judgments, Sister."

"I hope I am neither the one nor the other; but you are both, or why should you deem it impossible that some save the lowly, the ignorant, and the destitute should be the chosen of God?"

"I have always read and been told on the very best authority, that nuns save the miserable and disappointed seek refuge in a convent."

"And I am supposed to be a specimen of the poor disconsolate ones," she said, springing lightly to her feet. "Well, well, at least have the kindness to reserve your pity and sympathy until I crave them. But what became of the wonderful girl of whom you spoke? Surely you followed her destiny?"

MRS. MONTAGUE'S NEIGHBORS

It was little, sly Mrs. Field who broke the news and quite unintentionally started the fuse that exploded the bomb of postily, elegant Mrs. Montague's wrath.

"Well, how will you like your new neighbors?" she artlessly asked her hostess.

"My new neighbors?" Mrs. Montague repeated. "Has some one taken the Shriver place? Why, the old gentleman was but buried yesterday."

"Oh, then you haven't heard the news?" Mrs. Field gurgled her delight at thus being the center of interest. "Mr. Shriver's will was read this morning and he left the place—his beautiful home and the surrounding acres to—well just guess to whom?"

"To whom?" demanded Mrs. Montague, making little effort to hide her great interest.

"To an orphan asylum!" At which her hostess gasped in dismay. Then she added: "To a Catholic orphan asylum!"

After the departure of her guest, Mrs. Montague tried to consider the matter calmly but her anger and nervousness forbade it. She could not think of it without indulging in indignation and violent protests.

"She hated asylums," she told herself, "and she particularly hated Catholic asylums." Suddenly, she remembered that Lillian, one of the maids, was a Catholic, and decided to question her, hoping that Mrs. Field had been misinformed.

"Lillian," she demanded when the girl answered her ring, "is it true that the Shriver place is to be converted into an orphan asylum?"

"Yes, madam."

"You are positive of it?"

"Oh, yes, indeed. It is very fine, is it not, Mrs. Montague?"

"It is outrageous. It is impossible. I will not permit it," she stormed. "How is it you know of it when Mr. Shriver's will was only read this morning?"

"Ah!" was the mother's only comment.

Yes. Her only son, to whom she was devoted, married a Catholic girl and for this she disinherited him, refusing to see either her son or his wife. Several years later, the wife wrote to her telling of her husband's severe illness and their dire poverty. Mrs. Montague answered with a cruel note, saying that her home was open to her boy, but in it there was no room for the wife he had taken against her wishes. The boy died and somewhere his wife is working, trying to eke out a living for herself and two babies, while Mrs. Montague enjoys every luxury money can buy!

"Poor, hard-hearted mother! We will pray for her," answered the nun. But if Mr. Wallace believed that Mrs. Montague was giving no thought to her son's family, he was mistaken. Although too proud to admit it, and never letting her best friends suspect it, her heart was broken. Her son's death was a blow from which she would never recover. Bitterly she regretted the stand she had taken and when she learned that he had died amid the poorest surroundings, without necessities that might have prolonged his life, her grief and remorse were intense and sincere, but they were never indulged outside the security of her bedroom.

She even sought to make some amends for her misdeeds by sending for her son's wife and children and offering them a home with her. A little note was all she received from that "Catholic girl" her boy had married.

"Dear Madam: (she wrote) "You let my dear husband—be whom you called 'son'—die. Now, do you think I could trust you with my darling children? Gladly would I have taken your money while he lived and with it purchased the things he needed—nourishment and comfort. With them, his life would have been prolonged. He might have been cured entirely! I would not touch it now. I am going to work as a maid! My babies—the children of your son—the grandchild of the wealthy, exclusive Mrs. Montague—must go to an orphan asylum until their mother can earn enough to again establish a little home for them."

That, then, was the cause of Mrs. Montague's antipathy to orphan asylums and particularly to Catholic ones, for, of course, she knew that her daughter-in-law would place her children with the nuns. In spite of the fact that she employed a detective and spared no expense in searching for her son's family, she had never been able to locate them and thus four years, years of despair though hidden sorrow had passed.

Now, she was getting old and she longed for the company and love of some one of her own; she wanted to be sure that when she had passed away, her estate would not go to strangers, but to the children of her son. A nervousness and unrest this was worse than physical illness possessed her and she was in this troubled mental condition when Mr. Shriver died and his big mansion, the nearest house to her own, passed into the hands of the Catholic Orphanage.

For awhile she pretended to ignore their nearness, but it was a poor pretense, for she could not help seeing the children as she passed in her coupe, neither could she prevent the sound of their joyous laughter that rang in her ears for hours after she heard it.

One day she called Lillian, the maid.

"Lillian, you told me that it was through the prayers of the children that Mr. Shriver obtained the grant favor he sought?"

"Would the children pray for me for my intention—something that I want so much?"

"The maid's eyes widened. 'I will ask the Sisters to have the children pray for madam's intention.'"

"Yes, Lillian, and—oh, girl, can't you see that my heart is breaking! Beg of them to pray, pray, pray that I may find my dear son's children before I die!"

The girl came to the woman's side and looked down upon her, then she murmured: "Why do you want them? Would you love them for their father's sake?"

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