

money is stolen you change one of the notes, yet you refuse to say how it came into your possession. Ask yourself what verdict a jury would pronounce."

"That, Mr. Marner," smiled Lady Hannah, coldly, "is looking into the future, is it not?" "Mamma," exclaimed Gertrude, throwing herself on her knees by Lady Hannah's chair, "you cannot believe Mr. Vane guilty!"

"And why not?" retorted her ladyship, harshly. "He who could stoop to steal an heiress may surely be capable, to satisfy the same greed, of stooping yet lower!"

"No," put in Mr. Marner, firmly: "I will have no courts of law—no publicity! We owe you, Mr. Vane, our daughter's life. It is your own fault that we cannot make a more fitting return. If you have not taken this money you know who has."

"That, sir, I cannot admit," began Vane.

"At any rate, you have one of the notes in your possession, and refuse to give any account of it. You are in that case an accessory or accomplice, consequently—"

"Can no longer be received under this roof? Farewell, Mr. Marner! This unhappy matter shall be made clear, and earlier than you think!"

"I hope you are correct; until when, sir, for the sake of an unfortunate friendship, I advise the affair to be kept a secret by the four now here."

"Also," exclaimed her ladyship, haughtily, "if you still possess the least spark of honour, you will release this unhappy girl from the vows into which you have drawn her. You surely would not disgrace her by holding her bound to one suspected of a crime?"

"Certainly not, Lady Hannah. I promise you I will never seek Miss Belliston's hand while this shadow is upon me," he rejoined. "I release Miss Belliston from this moment."

"Halbert!" exclaimed Gertrude, "you must not! Would you break my heart?"

"Break your heart!" said Vane, his eyes sparkling. "Oh, Gertrude! is it possible that you hold me innocent to—that you trust me?"

"As firmly, as confidently, Halbert," she answered, taking his hand, "as I did when we stood side by side on the rock awaiting death! I felt that you would triumph then, and so will you do now; I am sure of it!" she exclaimed.

"You are an angel!" clasping her to his heart.

"Gertrude," ejaculated Lady Hannah, "are you lost to all shame? Would you unite yourself to one who, at least, must live under suspicion?"

"No, mamma," she answered, quietly, her hand on her lover's arm. "When I told you Halbert and I were betrothed, I said we would wait until I was of age. That is two years yet. Before then these cruel suspicions will be removed."

"They shall be, my brave darling; sooner, far sooner, than that, if there be honour in man. Farewell!"

He pressed her hand fervently to his lips; inclined his head to Mr. and Lady Marner. The latter turned her back on him, and retired, writhing with rage.

"Poor Stanley! Mad, foolish boy!" he reflected, as he hastened to his room. "I could not denounce him. No; let them believe me guilty, if they will. They must do so until Lord Belliston's own lips confess my innocence and his folly!"

VI.

THE SUN THROUGH THE CLOUDS.

Though Halbert Vane would not state to Lady Hannah his suspicions as to who had taken the notes, he had no intention to remain under the base stigma cast upon him. His purpose was to get Lord Belliston to make the confession himself; consequently, on reaching London he he proceeded at once to the young nobleman's rooms; but to his mortification, learned that Lord Belliston had gone on a yachting cruise, and at present it was not known where to address his letters. Vane, however, left one to be forwarded. He merely said:

"My dear Lord Belliston,—"

"Pray inform me at once where I may see or write to you. I desire to acquaint you with that which is, to me, a very serious matter."

"Yours sincerely,

"HALBERT VANE."

Days passed, yet no reply came. The artist, at the end of the week, called at his lordship's rooms. The letter had with others been forwarded to the Cantire Post-office.

"Then," thought Vane, "he may not yet have got it."

At the end of three weeks an answer came; short, cold, formal:—

"Lord Belliston had received Mr. Vane's letter, the contents of which had caused him some surprise. He believed he knew the matter to which Mr. Vane referred, and could not but be astonished that Mr. Vane should write or desire to see him, Lord Belliston, on such an affair. Lord Belliston had only one reply to make—that he considered it best to hold no further communication with Mr. Vane."

"The rascal!" cried the artist, angrily throwing down the letter. "Would he shift his crime on to my shoulders?"

It was nearly the end of June, when Vane, crossing the Park, saw Lord Belliston. He was on horseback, and perceiving the artist, averted his face, which had flushed somewhat, and increased his pace.

That same evening he sent up his card and a note to Lord Belliston. The note contained merely these words:—

"I demand, and must, and will see you."

He was ushered into the presence of Lord Belliston, who had risen. With a cold, haughty expression on his fair face, he made no response to the artist's slight inclination.

"Since, Mr. Vane," he began, "you have forced yourself into my presence—"

"For an explanation, my lord," interrupted the artist, sternly, "which I must have, and which you ought to be anxious to render."

"I am quite unable to understand what explanation you have a right to expect at my hands."

"On the night you left Cumberland you enclosed me a bank-note."

The other bowed.

"That note, Lord Belliston, Lady Hannah declared to be stolen, and as I refused to give the name of him from whom I received it, her ladyship was so good as to believe that I had robbed her."

Great was the change that came over the young nobleman's countenance. He stepped back, and after an exclamation of surprise, stared at the artist as though stunned.

"Mr. Vane, are you mad?" he ejaculated.

"All this is pure absurdity. If it were a jest—"

"Jest, Lord Belliston! It has been none to me," said the artist, bitterly; "to be sent from beneath your roof, to be considered a thief, to have to bear the stigma of another's crime!"

The young lord, greatly agitated, paced the room, then stopped, and said, "Mr. Vane, I owe you a deep reparation. On my word, I never imagined such a result possible; but, mark me, it was a folly, not a crime."

"You took the notes, Lord Belliston?"

"Yes; and her ladyship knew that I took them."

"Lady Hannah knew?" exclaimed the artist.

Lord Belliston nodded.

"Sit down, Mr. Vane," he said. "There has been a great misunderstanding. As I apparently was the first cause, it is my duty to clear it up. You recollect the last time I saw you, I left to write a letter in the library. Perceiving Lady Hannah's desk with note-paper on it, I wrote it there. In searching for an envelope I found the roll of notes. You know the desperate state I was in. If I had not the money I needed I might be dishonoured. I hesitated—the temptation was too great. I took the notes—that is, I borrowed them, leaving in their place a letter to Lady Hannah explaining everything."

"That letter, Lord Belliston, her ladyship never found."

The other looked curiously at the artist, then, rising again, took one or two turns in the room. After resuming his seat, he said, "My dear Vane, I am sorry to confess it, but I owe you too much to refrain. Her ladyship did find the note; she couldn't help doing so; but she suppressed it because she wished to—"

"Ruin me?" suggested the artist.

"No; disgrace you in my sister Gertrude's eyes."

"And, my lord, does this account also for the coldness of the letter I received from you from Cantire?"

"Yes, I have, I believe, Vane, been made a dupe. I will not enter into the matter—I cannot; but her ladyship led me to believe that—that your sudden banishment from Cumberland arose from conduct not befitting a gentleman; also, owing to your having sought most dishonourably to force my sister's affections under the plea of the gratitude she owed you for her life being preserved."

"Surely Miss Belliston could have given a different account, my lord?" remarked the artist.

"Had I asked her, no doubt; but Lady Hannah requested me not to mention it to Gertrude. It is all clear now, and"—extending his hand—"I apologize. You shall be righted."

"But, my lord, are you aware that I do love your sister—that she has honoured me by returning my affection?"

"I guessed something of it; but you may never hope for success. Her ladyship looks higher for Gertrude, and, I tell you, I do not blame her. A wealthy suitor will alone find favour in her eyes. Could you only, by some lucky chance, lay claim to the Fordyce property, which I believe to this day she regrets having allowed to escape, you would be received very differently."

"The Fordyce property?" said Mr. Vane.

"What's that?"

"What! haven't you heard of the great Fordyce property, that for nearly ten years has been lying by, accumulating for want of an heir to John Fordyce?" laughed the other.

"Not a word," answered the artist, a little tremulously. "Most of my time, since I was a boy, has been passed abroad. You know all about it?"

"I should think I did, remarked Lord Belliston. "John Fordyce, the rich merchant, fell down the stairs of his club, and was killed, a few days before he was to have married my mother."

"What?" ejaculated Vane, leaning forward eagerly; "Lady Hannah wed John Fordyce—my uncle?"

"Your uncle!" cried Lord Belliston. "Good gracious, Vane! you are dreaming!"

"No; not if you mean John Fordyce, of Gresham street."

"The same."

"Then," said the artist, drawing a deep breath, "his only brother was my father."

Lord Belliston stared in silence at his companion.

"And you never heard of this property?" he said.

"Never."

"You will have clearly to prove your identity, you know."

"I can easily do that. My old friend and master, Maurice Wain, can aid me. But, my lord, my statement seems to have overcome you."

His voice was shaken by agitation.

Could wealth be his? Might he indeed wed Gertrude as her equal?

"Let me tell you my story."

He had to pause a space to conquer the emotion Lord Belliston's announcement had occasioned.

His brain, indeed, felt dazed. Then he commenced.

"From my earliest recollection I can remember a life of poverty. I knew nothing of my father's antecedents; but in heart, in appearance, he was a gentleman, and of an upright, generous nature. Poverty might wear him to the grave, as it did, but it could never debase him."

"My mother died before I knew her; and I never heard my father mention relations until the night of his death. We were lodging in Newman street. My father had been suffering from a chest affection, and we were very, very poor."

"I was not quite fourteen, and shall never forget the pale, handsome, aristocratic face of my father one dull December day, as he sat silent over the fire."

"Suddenly he rose, saying, I believe, unconsciously aloud, 'I'll make one more effort; he can't refuse—he can't!'"

"Despite my entreaties, he went out. It was late before he returned; then a policeman brought him. He had been knocked down by a cab in Oxford street. His limbs were uninjured. He had hardly a bruise; but the injury was internal, and also, in his state of health, it was fatal. My father knew that as well as the doctor summoned. He passed an hour in writing, and enclosed that which he had written in an envelope; then called me."

"Halbert, my boy, if I die, open this, and read the contents. It will inform you that you have a relation who may assist you. It is all I can do for you."

"Emotion checked him. He averted his face, saying he would tell me more in a few minutes. He never did, for in less than an hour he ceased to breathe."

"It was the evening of the next day that I remembered the letter. I opened it. It informed me that Vane was not my true name; that it was Fordyce; that my father had a brother, John Fordyce, a wealthy man, who in his prosperity had felt ashamed of that brother whom misfortune had pursued."

"I need not enter fully into that letter. Enough that it said that on that dull December day my father had made a last but ineffectual appeal to his rich brother, not for money, but employment."

"He refused, Halbert. He held me as a disgrace to him. Yet," continued the letter, "his heart may be touched when he hears I am no more—that you are left an orphan. Go to him."

"Never!" I exclaimed, fiercely; "I will never go to him! I hate him—hate his very name! I will never be beholden to the man who allowed my father to starve!"

"In my indignation I was about to fling the letter in the fire, when I remembered that it contained the last communication, the last wishes of my father on earth, and I preserved it."

"Lucky that you did," commented Lord Belliston.

"Then I threw myself on my knees by my dead father, and wept as youth only can. My grief attracted a fellow-lodger, an artist, who had been kind to us, and who had discovered that I possessed talent with the pencil. He came in, and tried to comfort me."

"Have you no relations, my boy?" he asked.

"Not one," I answered, "and not a friend."

"There you are wrong, Hal. You have me, and, better, you have art," he said. "She will prove true to you. One day you shall make a name for yourself. In a few days I am off to Rome, and you shall go with me."

"Maurice Wain became my friend and master from that moment to this."

"And never knew that you were—"

"The heir, according to you," laughed Halbert Fordyce, nervously, "to half a million. Belliston, can it really be true? Is it not all a dream?"

"No dream, old fellow, if you are the nephew of John Fordyce. You may assure yourself of that if you apply to Messrs. Tolkein & Tolkein, Lincoln's Inn Fields. Now I'm off."

"Where?" inquired the artist.

"To Cumber. I told you I'd put all right; and I shall have no difficulty, I expect, now."

Halbert Fordyce walked back to his apartments feeling as if treading on air.

"Gertrude, my darling Gertrude, I may claim you now before all the world! But never will I forget that my cloud has had more than a silver—it has had a golden lining, for

you loved me in poverty and apparent disgrace!"

"Why, lad, asked Wain, looking up from his pipe as the young artist rather impetuously entered, "what's the matter? Has the British public become aware of the genius they have amongst them?"

"Better, Wain—better, dear old man, and dear old master! Have you ever heard of the Fordyce property?"

"Yes; I think I have. Only not being the next of kin—"

"But I am, Wain! It's true—yes; it's all true!" cried the artist, with a great laugh, as he flung his hat in his rapture to the ceiling.

A fortnight later, Halbert Fordyce received a letter from Lord Belliston, enclosing one of apology from Lady Hannah.

"My mother," wrote the young man, "declares that she never saw my note—has never found it. You will, I am sure, old fellow, believe me and—forgive."

"Forgive!" laughed the artist. "Is she not my darling's mother?"

It is July, and Halbert Fordyce hastens with a light step and joyous heart through the Cumber woods to the Priory, at Lady Hannah's invitation.

Suddenly there flits out from the trees a pretty, laughing girl, at sight of whom the artist springs forward with a cry, imprisoning the graceful figure in his arms.

"Gertrude, my own dear Gertrude!"

"Pray, sir, do not be so impetuous!" she laughs, blushing. "I ought not to be here. I know I ought to have waited with proper young lady-like self-possession, and patience in the drawing-room; but—well, I couldn't help it. I am so happy, Halbert!"

"Then how must I feel, dearest?" he responds, gaily. "All the clouds that obscured our happiness have passed away."

"Or, rather," she says, "have shown their silver linings, you millionaire!"

"Nay, Gertrude; my cloud is brighter even than that," he rejoined, looking into her sparkling eyes—"for it has the golden lining of a dear, brave woman's love!"

THE END.

ANECDOTES, ETC.

In the court, or in the camp—at the bar, or on the rostrum—it made no odds to O'Connell: he was at home anywhere where wit and intelligence were required; and if keen repartee could come into play, he was never found wanting. Never was there a more dangerous man to attack. The following shows the man's ready wit, and is certainly worth telling:—

It was when O'Connell was contesting the city of Dublin with Mr. West for a seat in parliament, and the two candidates were before their constituents in the great hall, or rotunda, of the Court House. As might be supposed, the announcement of two such speakers on such an occasion filled the house well-nigh to suffocation. Both were in the best of humour, suffering nothing to drag.

In the course of his remarks, O'Connell, in a humorous manner, alluded to his opponent's personal appearance, declaring that the girl's line of beauty didn't touch his face anywhere, if it touched his head at all. It was not so much what he said as the manner in which he said it that convulsed the people.

When Mr. West's turn came he attempted to pay his friend off for this; and, after a funny prelude, he exclaimed, "It is all very well for Mr. O'Connell to attack me upon my personal appearance; but let me tell you if you could see Daniel O'Connell without his wig on, he wouldn't show a face nor a head much to boast of."

Before the people could find time to laugh, and to the utter surprise of everybody, Mr. O'Connell stepped quickly upon the rostrum, close by Mr. West's side, and, with a flourish, pulled off his wig, at the same time exclaiming, "There! Now my wig is off, which of us two is the better looking?"

The effect was electric. The giant form, with the grandest head in Ireland, by the side of the diminutive person of the other, showed to wonderful advantage; and who shall say how much the quaint passage, coming so unexpectedly, may have had to do with returning the Great Agitator to Parliament?

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