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Edith's Lover.

Coming out upon the terrace where they stood alone together in the June twilight, I remember thinking what a handsome, noble-looking couple they made, and how well it was that my mistress had chosen Mr. Hollis for her future husband when so many attractive young gentlemen aspired to the honor of her hand.

As I approached, Mr. Hollis was saying,

"To-morrow is our wedding day, dear Edith! To-morrow! I can scarcely realize it. Ah, how proud and glad I am!"

My lady looked up at this moment, her cheeks all aglow, her eyes shining with happiness. Hearing my voice she said with a gentle way,

"What is it, John?"

A strange woman has presented herself at the kitchen door, indeed. She asked me for you, and will not be denied. She does not live in these parts, I think, her accent and dress are both peculiar. Good gracious, th're she comes now, and I left her on the kitchen step!"

"My mistress looked in the direction indicated, and behold a drowsy figure slowly advancing from the rear of the house.

She changed color and drew back with a start.

"Mrs. Hawkin!"

The woman came near and paused on the upper step, looking curiously about her.

"Forgive me for coming," she said, "a raw, blustery, cold night, and right by the fire! I'm to trouble you, I suppose, but—But what can I do? I'll wash my hands and scrub 'em, and then go back to bed again."

"Hush! My Mistress drew her strange visitor hurriedly down the steps.

She was very pale and trembled with excitement.

"No more now—I cannot listen," said she huskily. "If you have any mind with me come again by night when I am alone."

The woman stammered heavily.

"Let me give you this note, madam—it's from him, and I'll trouble you no more. You'll rest if I do all its work, as 'm she added, quite plaintively, as she thrust a bit of crumpled paper in his hand."

"Yes, yes. Now go at once!"

"I will. But don't disappoint him, madam, don't do it!"

There was a depression in her voice and looks—perhaps even anger—as she turned and made her way with difficulty down the path.

Mr. Hollis naturally made some inquiry as to this strange visitor; but Miss Edith dropped the subject, and soon afterward went away.

About ten o'clock that night my lady's bell summoned me to her chamber.

I found her sitting with her wraps on and a bit of paper—the note the woman had given her—clutched in her hand.

Her face wore a sadder expression than I had ever seen upon it before.

"Jenny," she said, turning in her chair as I entered, "do you know a place to the village east of Holmes' Cottage?"

"Yes, madam."

"Good! Get your basket; I wish you to go there. I wish to speak to you."

It is a long distance, madam, if you must go, should not take the carriage?"

"I do not wish this visit known to any one else in the house, Jenny. The servants would think strange of it. You, I am sure are discreet and faithful."

We left the house by a side door, looking it not taking the key with us.

Promiscuously we reached Holmes' Cottage. It was a long, low building in the outskirts of the village, at some distance from any other dwelling. Since my knowledge of the house began, it was occupied by the poorer class of tenants.

"Someone I wish to see is here, Jenny. I shan't be long away."

She entered without knocking and closed the door. The next instant I heard a glad cry within, then a burst of sobs.

Suddenly Mr. Hollis confronted me, his face white and convulsed in the moonlight.

"Tell me," he said in a husky whisper, "was it Edith, my promised wife, that went at yonder door?"

"I could not speak, but my looks answered him."

He grasped his hand and was turning away when a few agonized words came through the open window:

"Edith, I know you would come; my precious darling, my wife! You are not so cruel as to forsake me entirely."

It was a man's voice, but Mr. Hollis seemed to hear a simple word only of those it uttered.

"Wife!" he echoed, in a hollow tone. "Wife! Good God! And to-morrow was to be our wedding day!"

In spite of my terror and bewilderment, I had the presence of mind to grasp his arm and drag him further away from that house.

"What brings you here? I sternly demanded. "Why have you followed me?"

"I did not follow you; I am no spy; it was chance that brought me in this direction to-night. Nay, and chance," he added with sudden vehemence, "but the providence of God."

Then, before I could say a word in reply he had freed himself from my

grasp and was striding down the shadowed street.

Ten minutes later my mistress came out. She drew a deep breath, as she clasped my arm, and I felt her tremble.

"Come, Jenny, let us get away quickly. I shall be glad to reach home again so glad."

She looked so miserable and distressed that I led the carriage to tell her what had occurred outside the cottage while she lingered within.

The next morning, while she was at breakfast, and the mystic air of the bridal preparations was going on in the house, one of the servants brought in a package. She cut the cords and our full heap of letters—the pure, daily letters she had written to time to time to her lover—saw the few books and keepsakes she had given him.

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