

"She is indeed; but then her coquetry is so delightful that a man does not mind being made the victim just for once."

"Tastes differ," said Sir Raoul calmly. "A coquette would never please me."

Then the carriage stopped at the great entrance, and they were at home. Remembering that after all he owed this house to the wife he did not love, Lord Caraven dignified to say a few kind words to her; he said that he had never seen so many roses at Ravensmere, and never such beautiful blooms. She did not even turn to look at the flowers he indicated, but passed on, the words he had spoken about Lady Belle ranking in her heart.

What mattered the bloom of the roses to her? He did not love her; she did not even like him; but she could not forget that he was her husband, and it was intolerable that any other woman should have all his admiration. With a gesture of haughty pride she swept into the house. Sir Raoul understood the action well.

It was not a very bright home-coming. Lady Caraven went to her room, and sent an excuse for not appearing at the dinner table—she was tired from the journey; but Sir Raoul, who had grown to understand every thought, every look of hers, knew quite well that she had found the earl's ardent praise of Lady Belle unendurable.

It was true. Hildred was asking herself how she could bear it. She did not love her husband, yet in some vague way she was jealous of him. She did not like him offering even the light flattery of the hour to another woman.

Sir Raoul was more troubled that night than he had ever been before. He sat down to review the situation. If he was to do anything for this unhappy husband and wife, it must be done at once. It was a strange position, and to him there came no gleam of light—no inkling as to how he should avoid his difficulties—no knowledge of what would be best to be done.

He saw one thing very plainly. The present state of things could not last long. It was impossible to think calmly of such a life as Hildred's—always unhappy, always lonely. He remembered how with the saddest voice he had ever heard she had said to him one day—

"I never feel so entirely alone as when I am in a crowded Mayfair ball-room."

He understood why—this brave, noble soldier, to whom had been given the delicate instinct that reads a woman's heart. She missed the love that should have been hers. As time went on she would miss it still more—and then? What then?

Her noble, womanly nature revolted against her fate. She disliked the husband who had lost no opportunity of showing how little he loved her. This dislike, with one of her earnest nature, must deepen into hatred. What then? Sir Raoul saw that things must grow worse.

"If this coquette, this lovely Lady Belle, comes to Ravensmere and the earl flirts with her, evil will ensue," he thought. What could he do?

If one had loved the other, matters would have been easier. But it was not so; there was nothing to which he could appeal—no love, no tenderness, on which he could build even the slightest foundation. It was the husband's fault that this beautiful young wife disliked him; he had been unkind, neglectful—he had hardened her heart against himself. The earl visited on his girl-wife the wrong that he considered Arley Ransome had done him. The dislike and contempt he had for the father were vented on the daughter; although she was quite innocent, they fell on her. To him she was never his wife, Countess of Caraven, a lovely dark-haired girl. She was simply the money-lender's daughter.

Pride, coolness, indifference, neglect, dislike, contempt, all lay between them. How were these to be bridged over or vanquished? Added to all the rest was the dissipation, the want of purpose, the indolence, the self-indulgence that characterized Lord Caraven.

"I would rather be at the head of my regiment, facing some wild savage horde, than here with this struggle before me," thought Sir Raoul, almost despairingly.

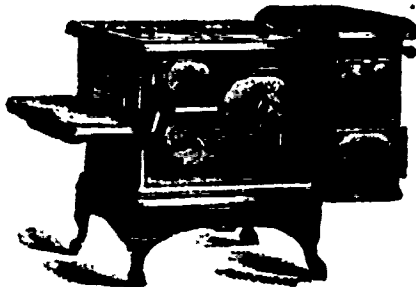
For her sake he must do it. He loved her very dearly—not with a love in which was one iota of wrong; if she had been a fair young sister of his own, he could not have loved her better. He rendered her true and knightly service—he admired her beauty, her grace. He saw what her husband could not see—that a whole world of passion and tenderness lay hidden beneath the cold, calm pride. He cared more for her than any one else living, but it was with a true and knightly love—a love that would fain have placed her where she ought to have been—in her husband's heart.

## CHAPTER XXV.

Perhaps the distress that Sir Raoul Laureston could not help feeling for the sorrows of his fair young kinswoman was too much for the weak shattered frame, or it may have been that the air of Ravensmere did not suit him. He was not well for many weeks after his arrival. He did not actually keep his room; the earl, who was tender enough and anxious enough where his cousin was concerned, had ordered two of the largest, lightest, and most cheerful apartments in the castle to be prepared for him, and Lady Caraven was only too anxious to arrange everything most luxuriously for him. No sitting-room in the house was so comfortable as his; the fairest and most fragrant of flowers were there, the richest and ripest of fruits. Thither all the magazines and periodicals of the day were taken, and there the beautiful young mistress of the castle spent many hours that would otherwise have been most wearisome. She would take her drawing materials thither; and many charming pictures were sketched and painted in the Red Room, as Sir Raoul's sitting room was called.

(To be continued.)

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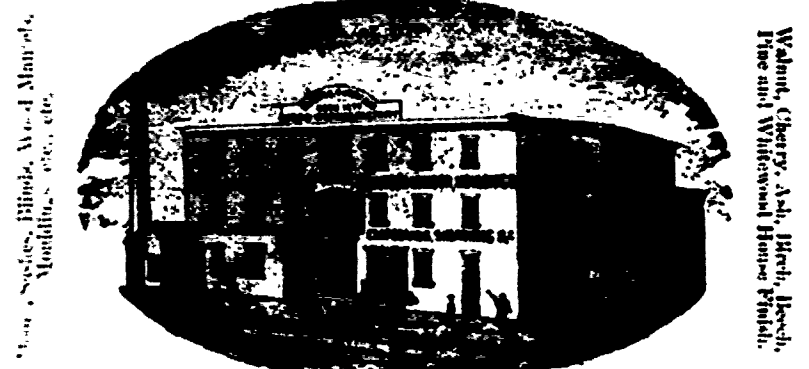
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LEAVE DIGBY, daily at 2.20 p.m., Arrive at Yarmouth, 7.00 p.m.

Trains are run on Eastern Standard Time.  
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J. BRIGNELL,  
General Superintendent.

Yarmouth, N. S.



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The Department does not bind itself to accept the highest or any tender.

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A. GOMEIL,  
Secretary.

Department of Public Works,  
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