

with her for a wife, one might not be happy without fortune? May Lucifer strangle me if I know what to do, or what resolution to take! My sensibility and my good sense are struggling in such a terrible fashion that my head is ringing with the uproar, and absolutely void of ideas! Yes, that is it! In the first place, I must see Raoul, and tell him all. I must then quit the Stag's Head, and lodge myself elsewhere. Let affairs arrange themselves as they may, I shall keep in the background."

(To be continued.)

ONCE A COWARD.

IN TWO CHAPTERS.

Concluded.

CHAPTER II.

I wish that I could tell you my feelings during the two minutes that followed. I do not believe any audience ever found themselves in so miserable a position. Even now, when I think of it, I feel the old, hot, sick sensation, and see the whole picture rising before me—the old-fashioned panelled room, with the wet wind rattling at the huge diamond-paned window, and a pale, watery moon glimmering between drifting masses of cloud over the ancient elm-trees in the park; the red, glowing fire in its carved oaken frame; the tall, graceful figure of the man standing before it in his dark velvet shooting-jacket, and muddy leathern gaiters, and with the pale shadow of irretrievable remorse on his handsome face; and the tall, beautiful girl sitting with bent golden head and clasped white hands before him, with the scarlet firelight kissing her fair, round arms, and lurking in the shimmering folds of her white dress.

Can any of you tell me the length of time comprised in one minute? Sixty seconds? No, rather six hundred. It seemed double that time to me that I stood longing for Helen to speak, longing to say something myself, and yet unable to find a single word between horror at the story and pity for the man who told it. It was Ducie himself who broke that terrible silence at last. His voice had been harsh and determined before; now it sounded sad, weary, almost appealing.

"That is all. I never told any one before. I don't think I could act in the same way again; but God knows; only you see I cannot hear other men condemned while I remember—" He broke off with a sort of gasp, and added hurriedly, "I wish to Heaven I had never needed to tell you; for of course I know what you think of me now."

He looked at Helen; but she never raised her eyes; and I answered quickly—
"I wish you had not, Ducie. There was no occasion; but I am very sorry for you—from my soul I am, old fellow."

I would have given him my hand; but though he said, "Thank you, Fred," as if he meant it, his eyes never left Helen's face. She had never moved or looked up once since he began. I feel sure now that she knew from the commencement that he was speaking of himself; but he was only when he said, "I was the man," that her face, which had been white to the lips, flushed scarlet as though the threatened blow had fallen; and such a look came over it—a look of pain unutterable, of bitter shame, of unconquerable disgust; a look which but to see once in the face of the woman we love might well make the voice break and the heart sink as Ducie's did then.

It was still there when he ceased to speak, and she rose up, calm and cold as if nothing had been said which could call for comment from her, and simply observing that it must be time to prepare for dinner, left the room without a glance towards either of us.

I strode after her, meaning to call her back and ask her to say a kind word to Ducie; but she put out her hands with an imploring gesture, and turning her face away, ran up-stairs.

When I returned slowly and awkwardly to the library, Ducie also had left it by the other door. I was not sorry.

We all met at dinner as if nothing was amiss. Mary Jackson and I were, I think, rather more lively than usual, and even Tom made himself pleasant to CIs Devereux, that my dear old father said it did him good to hear such a chatter of voices. Ducie was very silent, it is true, and Helen's face was colorless as a Guernsey daisy; but she spoke and even smiled whenever appealed to; and none but myself remarked, that when Ducie held the door open for the ladies, after dinner, she drew the silken folds of her dress together, and passed him without a glance, as something too foul for notice. His face was whiter than hers when he sat down again.

Next day we parted. I was busy all the morning over farming accounts, and did not know Ducie was going till the dogcart was at the door, and he came in to bid me good-bye. Then I saw he was much agitated, and I urged him to stay, using Helen's name. His lips quivered, but he only said—
"I have already seen your cousin. Good-bye, Fred, and thank you for all your kindness."

Five minutes later he was gone. I said nothing, but I went to look for Miss Helen, and found her moping in the library, with a face found host, and red rims to her eyes. She mumbled something about a headache. I remarked loftily, and taxed her with having

having refused my friend. She reddened like a rose, and said haughtily she had done no such thing. He had not had the presumption to ask her,

"Presumption!" quoth I, "and to ask a little vixen! Ah! well, you have sent him away; and what's more, you will never see him again."

At this she paled and panted a little; then flushed up again and answered:

"Oh! yes, we shall, and quite as soon as we want him, I dare say. Oh! how can you care for him?—the cruel, dastardly—Oh!"

This made me angry, for I don't like hitting a man when he's down; and the vision of poor Ducie's handsome face, with the haggard, beaten look on it, as he shook his head to all my hospitable hopes of soon seeing him again, rather haunted me. So I set myself to bully Helen by way of retaliation, told her she was a proud, self-righteous girl, who didn't deserve to be loved at all; that she had likely sent a fine young man to the bad; that she had no right to judge anybody; that Ducie had acted a coward's part two years ago; he had taken a hero's last night; that I doubted very much whether she would have had the courage to stand up and blacken herself forever in the eyes of any one she loved; that I couldn't, and that it was a braver and a nobler deed than saving ten men's lives.

Would you believe it? In the middle of my abuse she suddenly bursts into tears, and instead of quarrelling with me, throws herself into my arms and sobs out—

"Oh, Fred! so it was. Oh! I never thought of that; and I told him—I told him—Oh, dear! oh, dear!"

"What did you tell him?"

"I told him I never wished to see him again, because he could never do anything brave enough to blot out the memory of that dreadful, dreadful day."

"And what did he say?"

"He said, 'You never shall.' Oh, Fred, Fred! what shall I do?"

"Do? Write and tell him you are very sorry, and ask him to come back again"—a piece of sensible advice at which Miss Helen springs up, dashes away her tears, says indignantly, "Thank you, Fred, I have not quite lost my self-respect yet, even if your friend has lost his," and marches off to her own room.

I went back to my accounts, and finished them.

Days and weeks slipped by. Our house was hardly empty before I was off myself on a visit to my beloved. Then the hunting season began; the Hall was again filled with guests, and in the constant round of sport, merriment and excitement, I must confess that the little incident concerning Ducie's departure escaped my mind. Neither did I notice the change in Helen's looks, and how rapidly she was losing color, flesh and spirit, till she looked like the shadow of her former self. You see she never lost her prettiness; and then a certain little maid was spending her Christmas with us, and that in itself was reason for not being particularly observant of other women's appearance.

Was it the day before Christmas Eve that the governor told me Lord de Laine had proposed to Helen and been refused? I think so—I'm not sure. Anyway it was that day that I first noticed the girl's white face, and spoke to her of Ducie. Her sweet eyes flashed up instantly, and she answered—

"Would you like to have him here this Christmas?"

"My dear you told him never to come again."

"Then I was wrong, for it is not my house" (hypocritically).

"You are mistress in it, and I'll have no friends here whom the mistress cannot welcome."

She blushed up high, put her hand on my arm, and said enthusiastically—

"All your friends are welcome to me, Fred. Please and ask him at once."

I did so. Shall I ever forget her face when the answer came? Mr. Ducie had sailed for the Cape three days before, in the royal mail-steamship *Tamar*.

We all know the end of that good vessel; how she encountered hard weather off the Azores; how she sprang a leak which no pumping day and night could bring under; how the boats were hoisted out with just enough seamen to work the oars, the passengers lowered into them one by one, women and children first, afterwards, in perfect discipline and order; and how, when all were full, the captain standing on the poop deck, gave the last command to pull away out of vortex of the sinking ship; and the men in the boats, obeying, saw the gallant vessel, with captain, crew and officers standing hand in hand, brave and resolute to the last, settle heavily down into a deep trough of the waves, and disappear forever from mortal ken.

Ah, me! all English hearts were thrilling with the story in those days. It makes mine ache now to recall it.

The boats reached the Azores in safety two days later without having lost a soul; but it was not for months, not till every inquiry had been made, not till I had gone down to Southampton myself, and interrogated the rescued passengers one by one, that we heard how, when the boats were all but full, and there was only one passenger to descend, one of the crew cried out in despair, "Oh, my little wife and child!" and the passenger, a tall, dark-eyed young man, turned to him and said, "Take my place. There is no one belonging to me at home," and had stood by the captain's side at the last moment,

and waved his hat to his friends in the boats in a cheery good-bye.

I found out that sailor, and he gave me a scrap of paper, which he said, the gentleman had torn from his pocket-book and gave him as he went over the side. It was to Helen, and contain these words—

"God bless you. I have earned my right to meet you again—in heaven at last.

H. P. DUCIE."

Two years later Helen left us to keep that meeting; and when she was dead I saw the first smile on her pale lips which had ever shone there since she sent her lover away, to prove that a man may die a hero's death though in life he has been once a coward.—*Cassell's*.

NICELY CAUGHT.

BY MRS. C. CHANDLER,
OF MONTREAL.

"What note is that you have received by the post this morning? you seem very much interested in it," asked Mrs. Manifold of her husband.

"Ah! my love, nothing that you will care about; only an invitation to a 'fancy ball' next Tuesday week," replied Mr. Manifold.

"Am I not invited also?" his wife inquired.

"Of course, of course, my dear, that must be in etiquette; but every one is well aware that you have for some time given up such entertainments, and devote yourself to your little tribe; in fact, that you are a model wife," said Mr. Manifold, with a slight laugh.

"I only wish, Alfred," replied Mrs. Manifold, that you were a little more home-loving than you are; it is really too bad your going about so much. I heard Mrs. Marsh say a few days ago, when she called here with another lady, that you were the gayest man about her set, that the girls seemed to forget that you were a married man, that your flirtations were carried to a great extent, and advised me to go about with you."

"Don't believe her, Bella; she is a spiteful old woman, and only said what she did because I never take any notice of her; I will not, for I do not like her. I hope you are not going to be absurd enough to be jealous; I did not think that was in your nature. I like occasionally to go to a little amusement, and when I do I certainly prefer to make myself agreeable to the younger portion of the assembly than to join the old gentlemen and dowagers at cards."

Mrs. Manifold smiled, shrugged her shoulders, but said nothing for a few moments; then she asked:

"Is this affair to be a masked fancy ball?"

"Yes, my dear, that will be the greatest fun in it. Why do you ask so much about it? Do you think of going?" asked Mr. Manifold.

"Oh, no; but I merely inquired through curiosity; besides, you are going, and I may be pardoned if I show some interest in your proceedings."

At that moment Mrs. Manifold was summoned to some household duties; then papa went up to the nursery and kissed his little girls, sweet sprites from five years to infancy; bid adieu tenderly also to his wife, for he always was very attentive in these matters, then, drawing on his gloves, he departed for the city.

Mrs. Manifold hovered about very busily that day, and many succeeding ones, but it could well be seen that some matter was weighing heavily on her mind, for her usually sweet face looked grave and her white forehead was contracted as if in painful thought.

It was about three days before the expected ball. Mrs. Manifold was sitting in the nursery finishing a bit of needlework, when, after a few moments thought, she started up, clapping her hands together, much to the astonishment of little Elfy, who was playing with her doll by her mother's side, and who opened her blue eyes very wide at the unusual excitement of her mother.

"I'll do it, I'll do it!" she murmured; "the motive justifies the means. I will find out whether my husband really does anything to merit censure, and if he does he must change his course; at least, I will do my duty. Nothing but a masked ball could effect my purpose. I cannot leave that flighty girl at night to take charge of my children, but I will go and see Margaret Fullum and tell her my plan, and asked her to take charge here for me that evening."

Thus, half thinking, half speaking, Mrs. Manifold hastily threw on her walking dress; then, summoning the girl to the nursery, she went out, and bent her steps to an old maiden friend who lived a few streets from her.

"Take care, my dear," said the cautious old lady, "that you are not playing with edged tools. You had better not do this."

"Now, Margy, what is the use of talking like that. I have weighed the thing well, and I am sure you are too kind to refuse me."

"Well, well, I'll come. A wilful woman must have her way."

Mrs. Manifold then proceeded to the place where she had heard her husband say the fancy dresses were being made. She was undecided as to what dress she should wear, but intended to select some costume there.

"Here is one, ma'am, very pretty; it is representing 'Ophelia.' I made it for Miss Egerton, but she came here this morning and told me that she had been summoned away into the country to her grandmother, who was dying, and that she should not require the dress; that if I could dispose of it to do so, if not she would pay for it when she returned. Now I think, madame, that it will be exactly your fit, for the young lady I made it for is very much your height and size."

"That will be just the very thing, and I like the dress, so please finish it up and send it at once."

Mrs. Manifold then paid the charges and departed.

"This is a coincidence," she thought; "the game is played completely into my hands, for I know Miss Egerton is one of my husband's prime favorites—that is, if he does not hear of her departure into the country."

The eventful night came.

Mr. Manifold came home earlier than usual, and in high spirits. At an early hour he began to array himself in his dress, which was that of a courtier of Charles the Second's time. He certainly looked well, for it set off to advantage his really fine figure.

"Are there any others to be dressed like you, Alfred?" anxiously inquired Mrs. Manifold.

"I cannot tell, my dear," he replied, "but there is one thing certain, that any one I wish to know me will by the clue I have given them, which is a small bouquet of buds and leaves stuck in the left breast of my coat, and to make sure they won't drop off, I took natural flowers and matched them with artificial; here they are," and Mr. Manifold brought them out of his pocket, and fastened them on his coat. "Well, my wife, what do you think of me?"

"The dress is very becoming to you, Alfred. I'll say no more; you are quite vain enough without its being increased by flattery," said Mrs. Manifold laughing; but she, in her heart, truly admired her remarkably handsome partner.

A short time after Mr. Manifold's departure Miss Margaret Fullum arrived, for she had been requested not to come before. And in an hour's time Mrs. Manifold was equipped in her fairy costume, much to the amusement of her old friend, who knew very little of the gay world, not even in her youth having mingled in it.

A carriage was sent for, and in a short time Mrs. Manifold found herself, trembling and with a bounding heart, seated in the gorgeously decorated and illuminated ball-room.

The circumstances under which she had come, joined to the length of time since she had mingled in a scene of this kind, combined to overpower her usually calm nature.

Her eyes roamed around the room as much as she could through the crowd, which was assembling, in search of her husband; but it was more than an hour before her anxiety was appeased, then she espied his tall, graceful figure walking towards her with a lady on his arm dressed as "Lady Macbeth." She knew his walk in a moment, independent of the flowers in his coat. There were several others in the room dressed similarly to Mr. Manifold, but they did not look to advantage as he did.

He walked leisurely down the room, looking eagerly from side to side, but he did not perceive the "Ophelia" he was in search of for some time, for Mrs. Manifold was in rather an obscure seat; but when at last, in passing, he caught sight of her, not many minutes elapsed before he had seated the lady with whom he had been walking and came with avidity to Miss Egerton (as he supposed).

Mrs. Manifold's heart thumped almost audibly, and she felt a faintness sweep over her; but, gathering courage, she replied in soft, disguised accents to her husband's salutations.

"Where have you been the whole evening, Miss Egerton? I have sought you everywhere."

"I came late, and have been here since I entered."

"Indeed; I wish I had known it. Will you dance? A waltz is just forming."

Mrs. Manifold rose, not having any excuse to make, as she had always heard of Miss Egerton being a great dancer; but she could scarcely stand, her knees were trembling so much. It was a trying ordeal she was going through.

"Why are you trembling so much, Mary? Is there anything disturbing you?" Mr. Manifold asked, with a tender pressure of the fingers at the same time.

"No, nothing at all, but I do not feel very well."

"I am very sorry for that; let me bring you a glass of wine."

"No, I thank you; but I will take a little water instead," for Mrs. Manifold felt that she must take some refresher, and wine she never drank.

Speedily was the water brought, and soon after the couple were flying in the waltz.

Mr. Manifold thought several times that his partner danced different to usual, but he ascribed it to her not being well. Thus things coned it to her not being well. Thus things coned it for more than two hours, Mrs. Manifold poured into (the supposed) Miss Egerton's ears, all of the flattering words and "soft nothings," all of which were gently responded to by his now almost exasperated wife. Had she not been a woman of calm temperament, she must have burst forth, but she bore it quietly, determining to carry through the plan she had formed, and eventually to "gain the day."

Feeling, however, unable to endure it any longer, Mrs. Manifold pleaded indisposition, and requested a carriage to be called to take her home.

"Papa is away somewhere, don't call him; let me go away quietly."