

He sung one of the prettiest of English songs,—“Good-by, sweetheart, good-by”—sung it with such sweetness, such pathos, that his listeners were almost moved to tears.

“I could not leave thee though I said,
“Good-by, sweetheart, good-by.”

As the last words passed his lips he caught a glimpse of his wife's face. What did it express? He stopped suddenly. Sir Raoul rallied him, begging him to finish.

“Let us have the last verse,” said he; but the earl turned quickly to him.

“Not another word, Raoul,” he answered; “I can sing no more. I have seen a ghost.”

“A ghost!” cried Sir Raoul. “The ghost of what?”

“I am not quite sure,” replied the earl; “but I think it was the ghost of what might have been.” And Sir Raoul said no more.

Guests and friends began to ask themselves could they be mistaken—could they have misunderstood? The cold, sullen gloom was leaving the young wife's face; the husband ceased his covert sneers and hard words; they too exchanged laughing jests and smiles. Yet Hildred saw, and saw plainly, that it was all her own doing. If ever by chance she for one moment forgot her rôle, he forgot his; if by any chance she relapsed into her cold frozen manner, he changed as though by magic. She saw plainly enough now that all depended on herself.

She studied how to please him. For instance, there was nothing that pleased Lord Caraven more than finding his newspaper cut and aired to read in the morning; he disliked having to cut it himself or to air it. She had always been loftily indifferent, thinking to herself that his insolence must not even be encouraged. Now she thought differently; the newspaper was cut and aired and laid ready for him.

Happening to come downstairs rather earlier than usual one morning, he found her engaged upon her self-imposed task. He looked at her with a bright, pleased smile.

“Hildred,” he said, “is it to you that I am indebted every morning for my cut newspaper?”

“It is a great pleasure to get it ready for you,” she replied, with a charming smile.

He was deeply touched by this simple act of attention. After all, there was something very amiable about the money-lender's daughter.

From that day Lord Caraven never opened his newspaper without a kindly thought of his wife.

It was perhaps but a small beginning, this changing of sneers into smiles, but it was something gained. Both husband and wife were alike in one respect, they had a keen sense of humor. The earl had more of this sense than his young wife, and it was a wonderful bond of union between them. There were times when there was no need for words, when a glance was quite sufficient; and Lord Caraven began to look into the beautiful dark eyes for the secret sympathy that no one else gave him. He began to do what he had never even thought of before—converse with her. If time hung heavily upon his hands, if he tired of billiards, or there was no one at hand to play with him, it came to him with a sense of relief that he could go and chat with Hildred.

She grew accustomed to see him looking at her from the door of her room, with an air of apology on his handsome face. “May I come in for half an hour, Hildred?” he would ask; and then she would put away her books, or her easel, or whatever she was engaged upon, and devote herself to him. If he were told some merry story, her quick, laughing sympathy was the first thing he sought. If he heard any clever repartee or play upon words, the first thing he thought of was to repeat it to Hildred.

All this was so much gained—yet it seemed to her very little. Sir Raoul asked her one morning how she was progressing. She turned her beautiful face to him, and it seemed to him there was a tired look upon it.

“I can hardly tell you, Raoul,” she replied. “I have done my best. I have thought on him and studied him, and the utmost that I can say is that he has learned to associate me with all his amusements. This is not a very high or elevated state of things, is it?”

“I term it beginning at the very foun—ton, Hildred,” he answered, looking at the wistful face. “If he commences associating with his amusements, he will end by making you share in all that interests him.”

The dark eyes brightened.

“Do you think so? Then all my trouble has not been in vain.”

“I think,” said Sir Raoul, “that you have made wonderful progress. All the coldness and restraint, the terrible distance between you that made every one uncomfortable, have disappeared. Your husband's face brightens now when you enter a room; when you leave it he watches you regretfully. You have gained much, Hildred. It is a long struggle, this battle for a man's heart, but you will win in the end.”

“Still,” she remarked, half wearily, “I am a long way from the grand purpose I had in view. There is nothing heroic in being able to make your husband laugh, in sympathizing with a comical story, in helping to amuse him so that the time may pass more quickly.”

“Yes,” opposed Sir Raoul, “there is something heroic in it. It is the first step. When you have thoroughly identified yourself with his amusements, you can begin to influence Ulric for better things. Try to rouse him from his indolence, try to make him care less for amusement and take greater interest in his duties. Rouse his soul from its long sleep, and the awakening will soon follow. I am quite certain that his faults are rather those of training and education than of nature.

(To be continued.)



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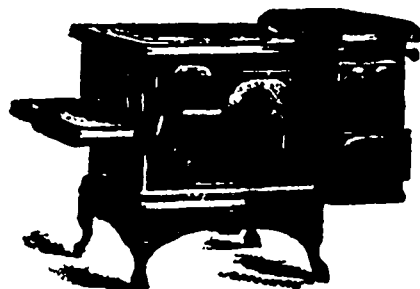
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