

have grown into a man, wiser, sadder than I had ever thought to be. One thing above all others puzzles me—how could I have been so blind or so foolish as to misjudge her?"

"Misjudge whom?" asked Sir Raoul.

"Hildred. Oh, I forgot I did not tell you that! You believed of course that she had been sent for?"

"Certainly I did," replied Sir Raoul in amazement. "Was it not so?"

"No—that is the worst part of my trouble. There is no truth in it. I sent her away myself."

"You sent Hildred away?" echoed Sir Raoul slowly. "What do you mean, Ulric?"

"I told her that she must never enter my doors again. Now I find that it is all a mistake."

Sir Raoul tried to be patient, but it was very difficult.

"I do not in the least understand what you mean, Ulric. Why did you send Hildred away, and what was a mistake?"

"I shrink from telling you. Upon my honor I am ashamed of myself. Do you know, Raoul, I positively believed Hildred had done this deed—I believed she had shot Lady Hamilton."

An expression of deepest contempt came over Sir Raoul's face.

"I should never have imagined such a thought would enter your breast," he said indignantly. "I speak plainly to you, Ulric, as I have never done before—your wife is wasted on you—she is a thousand times too good for you. She is one of the noblest, truest, purest women under the sun. You—if you could so misjudge her—are to be pitied. Hildred capable of murder? Heaven give me patience! I could not have believed you would entertain such an idea. I could not have imagined that you were so utterly devoid of reason."

"Listen, Raoul—do not judge me quite so harshly. You do not know all. Let me tell you my story," and without further discussion the earl related the whole history.

Sir Raoul listened in silence.

"Great Heaven," he cried at last, "to think what a heart you have thrown away!"

"But Raoul," he rejoined, when I found her hiding behind the tree, and she owned that she was guilty, what was I to think?"

"Careless as you have been of her," said Sir Raoul, "you might have known her better. If I heard her say such a thing, I should, even in spite of her own words, believe in her innocence. Shame on you, Caraven, that I, a stranger to her, should have to take up her defence! Shame on you that you did not understand her better! She had learned to love you, poor child! I thought she would. You drove her mad with her slighted, wounded love and her jealousy, and she followed you; that was what she meant when she owned that she was guilty. She meant guilty of loving you when you have studiously neglected her—guilty of jealousy when there was love. I understand her words, even if you do not."

"I am very sorry," said the earl humbly—"doubly sorry, because, do you know, Raoul, I was really beginning to love and care for her."

"Beginning!" cried Sir Raoul. "I hope that I shall keep my patience. Beginning to love her! You will have to answer hereafter for all these long months of neglect and unkindness. To me your sin appears a terrible one. You had one of the noblest women in the world for your wife, and to gratify your foolish whims you have neglected her. Shame on you, Caraven—you are no man to treat such a wife in such a fashion!"

"What can I do?" asked the earl humbly.

"Whither have you sent her?" was the stern inquiry.

"To her father's house," replied the earl.

"Then I will tell you what to do. Go as fast as steam can take you, and ask her pardon. She is a noble woman, she may forgive, but," added the soldier frankly, with a flush on his honest face, "I declare that if I were in her place I never would."

The earl took the advice offered him, and went straight off to town.

CHAPTER XLIII.

Lady Caraven had refused to see any one; she had refused to quit her apartment. The horror of the charge made against her overpowered her. Her husband believed her guilty of intent to murder. At first that was the only idea her mind could grasp—a horrible, distorted idea. She could not think clearly. Her husband, whom she had saved from ruin, whom she had roused from indolence and self-indulgence, whose better nature she had called into life, whom she loved with a passionate love, had judged her guilty of murder. She could not realize it, she could not put her thoughts into words; they assumed no tangible form. Then slowly enough she returned to a clear memory of what had happened.

Some one had shot Lady Hamilton, who it was, or how it happened, she could not tell.

Then she remembered having heard the shot fired of which at the time she thought so little. She remembered how something had whizzed through the trees. By degrees all the events of that dreadful night returned to her clearly and forcibly—the startled cry, the sound that came from the borders of the lake, the tramp of many feet—and she wondered that all these things had had no significance for her when her husband had cried—"You guilty, cruel woman!" and she had owned herself guilty. Then she saw how the mistake had arisen. They had been playing at cross-purposes. He meant that she was guilty of murder; she had meant that she was guilty of jealousy and of following him.

She was in despair. Of what avail would it be now to defend herself, to tell him that she was not guilty, to try to clear herself? Her husband would never believe her, he would always suspect her because of her own words.

(To be continued.)

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