

you do not know me. You never met me before, but I have every reason to believe you have heard a great deal of me. I think your elderly housekeeper knows who I am; she looks as if she did yesterday afternoon.

Madam Valentine takes a step back, a sudden change passes over her face—a sudden wild fear comes into her eyes. And it has chanced to few people ever to see Madam Valentine look afraid.

‘My God!’ she says, under her breath, ‘is it—is it—’

‘George’s wife. Yes, my dear mother-in-law. You behold your daughter! I am Mary Valentine—known to the circus-going world as Mimi Trillon. For professional reasons a French name has hitherto suited me best, but my reputation is made now as a dashing trapezist, and tight-rope dancer, and I am tired of sailing under false colours. I propose from this day forth assuming my own name. “Mrs. George Valentine” will look well on the bills, I think, and sounds solid and respectable. Unless—unless,—she pauses, and the blue eyes flash out upon the black ones with a look of spite and hatred not good to see. ‘I owe you something these last eight years, Madam Valentine, and I have vowed a vow to pay my debt. But I am willing, after all, to forget and forgive—on one condition. Do you know I have a child?’

There is no reply. Abhorrence, hatred, disgust, look at her out of Madame Valentine’s dark, glowing eyes.

‘A little girl of three years and three months—George’s daughter—your only grandchild, madam; the heiress, if right is done, of every farthing you possess. I love my child, provide for her, provide for me; you count your wealth by millions; I drudge like a galley slave. Buy me off; I don’t use fine phrases, you see, and I have my price. Buy me off from the circus. It is not half a bad life for me, but for my little girl’s sake, and for the honour of the highly respectable family I have married into, I will quit it. But at a fair price—a carriage, servants, diamonds, a fixed and sufficient annuity—all that. And you may take your granddaughter and place her at school; I shall not object, mothers must sacrifice their own feelings for the good of their children. Do all this, and I promise to forget the past, and trouble you no more.’

She pauses. Madam Valentine still stands, but more erect, if possible, her hands resting one over the other on the top of her cane, her face as set as steel.

‘If you have finished,’ is her icy answer ‘go!’

A flush of rage crimsons Mimi’s face. She

plants her little feet, and comes a step closer to her foe.

‘I have not finished!’ she cries, fiercely; ‘this is one side of the medal—let me show you the reverse. Refuse—treat me with scorn and insult, as you have hitherto done, and by this light I swear I’ll make you repent it! I’ll placard your name—the name you are all so proud of—on every dead wall, on every fence, in every newspaper, the length and breadth of the land! I’ll proclaim from the house-tops whose daughter-in-law I have the honour to be, whose wife I have been, whose widow I am! For you know, I suppose, that your son is dead?’

The haughty, inflexible old face changes for a moment, there is a brief quiver of the thin, set lips—then perfect repose again.

‘Yes, he is dead,’ goes on Mimi, ‘killed by your hardness and cruelty. He was your only son, but you killed him with your pride. It must be a consoling thought that, in your childless old age! But you have your nephew—I forgot—he is to have poor George’s birthright. He perished in misery and want, Madam Valentine, and his last thought was for you. It will comfort you on your death-bed, one of these days, to remember it. Now choose—will you provide for my future and for my child’s, or shall I proclaim to the world who I am, and what manner of woman are you?’

‘Will you go?’ repeats Madam Valentine, in the same voice of icy contempt, ‘or must I set my dogs on you to drive you out?’

‘If you dare!’ cries Mimi, her face ablaze. ‘I defy you and your dogs? I shall remain in Clangville until Saturday—this is Thursday—I give you until Saturday to decide. If I do not hear from you before I leave this place, look to the consequences! The whole country shall know my story; the world shall judge between us. My story shall go to be told in every way in which it is possible to tell it, the story of the wronged wife, and the mother who murdered her only son! You are warned! I wish you good-day, and a very good appetite for your dinner, Madam Valentine!’

She takes her skirts after the stately old fashion, and sweeps a profound and mocking courtesy. Then singing, as she goes a snatch of a drinking song, and walking with an exaggerated swagger, she marches back to rejoin her friends, by this time waiting at the gate.

Madam Valentine stands and looks after her, a lofty, lonely, dark, draped figure, in the yellow waning light. So still she stands, her hands folded on the top of her gold and

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