

The Inglenook.

Only a Butterfly.

BY HANNAH B. MACKENZIE.

"Have you told Olive John?"

"Nay, why should I tell her, mother? Let the child keep her happiness as long as she may. She's a beautiful butterfly creature, dependent on the sun of happiness for her very life: let her live in the sunshine as long as possible. Time enough to tell her the worst when the blow falls."

"I think you are wrong, John," said the wise mother gently; "and, moreover, I think you misjudge Olive. She is gay and bright, a creature of the sunshine as you say; but do you think there's no strength and bravery, no power of meeting misfortune nobly and well, behind that joyousness of hers? John, be advised by me: tell her all; go to your wife for sympathy and help. To whom else should you go? I am proud that my son—my good, wise son—comes to me in his trouble; and you know—I do not need to tell you—that I would help you to the uttermost farthing, if I could. But God has put that out of my power. I can only thank Him that this which has befallen you is no degradation, because it has come through no fault of yours; it is the will of God."

John lifted up his head with a certain grave pride characteristic of the man.

"Yes; it is the will of God, mother. But what grieves me most is the selling of Carhilton. I think that hurts me more than anything in the world could—except the loss of yourself, mother."

"John, John, my son, you must not say that! I love you, and I thank God you love me; but surely your wife is more to you than your mother can be!"

"My wife!" Seaforth repeated slowly.

He rose, and stood by the fireplace, his tall figure and dark grave face thrown into strong relief by the sunlight which fell through the window. For a moment he was silent; then he said slowly:

"I made Olive Fenwick my wife when she was left alone and penniless, poor Justin's widow in heart, though she was never his wife. Mother it was a great mistake. I had no right to do it. Only one thing justifies marriage, and that is love."

"John!" came the gentle mother's reproachful accents.

But the unseen listener heard no more. She had been standing by the open French window, her presence concealed from the two in the drawing-room by a chestnut tree whose huge branches reached almost to the window. She was very fair and very sweet, and clad all in white, with a big, flapping white hat on her golden head. Her hands were full of white and crimson roses—she had been gathering them for the table. But as the first words were uttered by Mrs. Seaforth she stood as if turned into stone, unable to move a step until she heard all.

As she listened, drop by drop of blood forsook her face, leaving her at last pale and cold as the white roses she held in her hand. As Mrs. Seaforth uttered that reproachful "John!" the girl started and gave a convulsive shiver; then, turning away with a noiseless footstep, she sped round the house to the main door, and entering by it, went straight up to her own room.

Once within it, she closed the door, and, going forward to the dressing table, laid the roses on it; then, with her hand pressed heavily on the table, she stood as if staring into vacancy.

Suddenly a sharp sound, almost like a cry, escaped her. Her lips quivered; she covered her face with her hands.

"For pity—it was all for pity! And now I am only a butterfly thing to him—a butterfly!"

It was morning. Mrs. Seaforth had come over from Redthorpe, the nearest town, to "see John on business," she had said to Olive. Olive had concluded it was business of her mother-in-law's own, and no feeling of curiosity had stirred her. But now she knew the business to be John's own, and he had not even told it to her, his wife!

They had been married a year. Olive, left an orphan at fifteen, had been the ward of Mrs. Seaforth and her son, then a grave man of thirty. Then Justin Cavendish, John's cousin, had come on the scene; in a few months Olive and he were engaged. Justin had to go abroad to the front; he was captain in a regiment of yeomanry. He had taken enteric fever, and word was sent home of his death. Olive had felt it deeply; but she was only eighteen. When, a year and a half later, John had asked her to marry him, Olive had consented.

John Seaforth was a manufacturer in Cottingham, but he seldom went to business now, and spent most of his time on his small estate of Carhilton. Olive could only guess what had happened. John was ruined; even Carhilton, which he loved better than anything—except his mother!—he would have to give up.

Olive sank on her knees by the bedside. How long she knelt there she never knew—John, her husband, did not love her! O God! how cruel the words had been!—"Only one thing justifies marriage, and that is love."

Suddenly she rose to her feet—was it hours after? The morning sunshine still streamed into the room. Outside, the birds were twittering gaily; a branch of honeysuckle tapped at her window. What a fearful mockery it all seemed!

Something had come into Olive's mind. Her face was white and set; there was strange resolution in it. She went straight to an old-fashioned bureau in the corner of the room. It was locked. Olive opened it.

She opened it and pulled out an iron drawer. In it lay a small casket; within that, when it was opened, a crimson velvet case. Inside the case there lay a magnificent diamond star, composed of jewels whose beauty was almost dazzling.

It was Olive's only dowry; but it was one whose value she knew to be very great. It had been given her on her marriage day by her uncle George Gordon, her only living relative, who had lived all his life abroad in wild and adventurous ways, and had only come home for a few months at the time when Olive was married.

"This is my marriage present to you my girl," he said. "It is your dowry. It's of priceless value. A man whose life I once saved at Kimberley gave it to me. He said it was worth thirty thousand pounds. Anyhow, if fortune should ever run against you,

you will have that to stand between you and poverty."

Thirty thousand pounds! That might save Carhilton.

With trembling hands Olive put the diamonds back again in their case, and locked the bureau. There were three keys necessary to get at the diamonds. She wrapped them in paper, and, sitting down, wrote a few lines hastily, her cheeks burning, but her hands cold as death.

"DEAR JOHN,—I accidentally overheard your conversation with mother to-day. I am going away, and I hope you will forget all about me. I wish you to take the diamonds; they will help you to keep Carhilton, perhaps. If you have any thought of me at all, use them for that, for my sake.

OLIVE.

"Why did you marry me when you did not love me?"

Then she turned to her wardrobe, and mechanically took down a dark travelling jacket.

* * *

It was a year later.

John Seaforth, looking ten years older than he had done a year ago, sat one morning in his study at Carhilton. He was still there. A sudden, strange turn of the wheel of Fortune had warded off the catastrophe that was upon him, and John was established in Carhilton as surely as he had ever been.

But he was alone now. For a year he had searched for his wife, but without avail. Olive had disappeared as wholly as if the earth had opened her great mouth and swallowed her up.

Suddenly there came a tap at the door, and a maid entered.

"Some one to see you, sir."

John rose. As he did so, a man, tall, well-made, bronzed, with a scar across his cheek, entered, and John's eyes fixed themselves on his face. Then, with an exclamation that was almost a cry, he started forward.

"Justin! Are you Justin, risen from the dead?"

"I am Justin," said the other man. He did not extend his hand, but stood regarding the other with dark, drawn brows. "John, this is not the time or place to tell you how that mistake was made. It was a common enough one. I was taken by the Boers, and only released when peace was proclaimed. I came straight home. . . . Do you know who the first person I saw in London was? Your wife Olive—Olive, whom you married, and flung aside like a worn-out glove. Olive, whom I—"

He got no further, for John, with a face like death, stepped forward and seized his arm.

"You saw Olive? Where, Justin? Tell me at once. I have sought her without success for a year."

"Sought her, when it was you who drove her away!" cried Justin passionately. "Yes I saw her; we met by accident. It is strange how these accidents do happen sometimes. She is earning ten shillings a week as a typist, John Seaforth; and I hardly know her, she is so altered." He faced the other, with clenched hands and flushed face. "Why did you steal her from me? I loved her, as man never loved before; yet I would have willingly given her up if I had seen her happy. But you—it chokes me to utter the words—you flung back her priceless love in her face with your own callous coldness, and drove her from you. And she loves you still! It is her