

with his loving voice and compassionate eyes. She knew that if he could only see her now he would go on his knees and entreat her forgiveness again and again, and be thoroughly miserable all his life, and love her. She felt that no one in all the world could love so well, though his love could never be given to her, and she must deliberately chase him out of her thoughts.

CHAPTER XI.

Five weeks later Frank Merreday, too, was once more in London. He had been desperately ill since Helen left him, and there had been a terrible conflict in his heart. 'Who would have thought,' he said to himself, 'that a slip of a girl of twenty with dark eyes and a walk like an empress should have been able to give me five weeks' torture not unworthy of an ancient Christian gridiron when a usurious Jew was handy, and that on top of a raging fever! Some things are ingeniously done in this world.' He also arrived at Charing Cross Station, and stood blankly wondering what to do.

'I know,' he said. 'Go to the club and see if there are any letters; then to Hans Place, I shall hear where Nell is, the latest news about everybody is always there.' But at the club he heard for the first time of Halstead's departure and Lambert's death, and an ungovernable desire took hold of him to see Helen again. He looked hurriedly through his letters without reading them. He took up a paper, and the first line that met his eye was: 'We understand that Mrs. Laurence Halstead is studying for the stage.' His face turned white with rage.

'It shan't be done. I must find out where she is, and put a stop to it at once. Why doesn't that belated idiot Lal wake up and behave like a man? I wrote him every conceivable thing that it was possible to say.' Suddenly a thought struck him, it was true, like Volney might know where and with whom she was studying. In another moment he was driving to Chelsea Gardens.

Yes, Miss Volney was still in town, but going away to-morrow, and too busy to see anybody.

'She'll see me,' he said, and walked in. Miss Volney was drinking tea and eating tinned lobster and lettuce. Her sitting-room was disarrayed, but the mantelpiece was still covered with portraits of actors and actresses. Merreday longed to sweep them on to the floor and stamp on them.

'I didn't expect to see you,' she said, without any further greeting. 'Why didn't you tell me of Ted's death?'

'Why should I?' he asked. 'You forced him to keep his life a secret from you, the least you could do was to let him keep his death one. Who told you of it?'

'Ben Galton.'

'Seen him again, have you?' he said angrily.

'You needn't be so disagreeable about it. He's been in trouble and came a bit. He talks of going abroad.' Merreday looked at her with a long vacant expression, then he remembered that among his letters he had noticed one addressed in Jean's hand. There would be time enough to find out about Ben presently. 'You might have told me about Ted's death,' she went on again sullenly. 'I don't pretend that I cared so much, but it isn't nice to remember that one went laughing round while one's husband was lying in his open coffin.' He looked at her again for a moment in silence.

'You're right there,' he said. 'I only kept it from you for fear you should play the devil with a man's life again. I came to see you last time because he asked me. Keep straight, if you can, for his sake. Look here,' he said, with a sudden change of voice, 'you heard about Mrs. Halstead, I suppose?'

'Everyone heard about her,' said the woman scornfully. 'She could not have cared much for her husband, or she wouldn't have gone off.'

'Now, understand this once and for all. Mrs. Halstead is the purest woman on earth, and my going off with her was all a mistake, a trick, and I was a beast, and she was—'

'I know, everyone knows, it was your doing now. I suppose her husband will come back to her in time. She's living with an old governess of her's up on the next flat of this very house, and studying for the stage.'

'For the stage!' he said, aghast. Then it was true.

'It'll never come to anything. She only does it to pretend to herself that her husband's not coming back, and because she likes a little misery. Lots of people do. They should taste the real thing; that would cure them of pretending.'

'Yes, it would cure them,' he repeated. And you mean to say that she is in this very building. What a little world it is, it ought to get joined on to another planet. It isn't large enough even to hide its people.' He was talking to himself, not to her, and seemed to be considering something that had nothing to do with her. Suddenly, with a start, he looked up. 'Look here,' he said, you wanted someone to start you with a theatre. I'll give a couple of hundred pounds towards it, and I'll write and tell Sampson, my lawyer, that when you can satisfy him that it's not going into the gutter or to materially assist the devil, he is to hand it over—one doesn't remember seeing a man die for nothing. Keep straight; I am off.' He stood for a moment outside her door, looking at the stairs that led upwards. 'Have you seen her?' he asked.

'Once I passed her. Are you going up?'

(To be Continued.)

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