

No High and Low Water Mark

No hit and miss—sometimes one thing, sometimes another.



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NOT LOVED, YET WEDDED

CHAPTER XXXV.

The shock the Earl of Lethington had received, though it had struck to the heart, was displayed in no outward form.

Tears, for a stroke foreseen, afford relief; but unprovided for a sudden blow like this, we must grow, and with grief.

Dryden's words were exemplified in Gerard. His eyes were grave, his complexion pale, his bearing silent and weary. The very lethargy of grief was upon him. That he and Lucille must part he recognized as one of those facts which dared not be disputed; also he acknowledged the plan she had adopted, the long and bitter journey, to learn the truth from his lips, and that the truth should be accompanied by the intelligence that he, the deepest wronged, forgave and pitied. But one thing he refused himself, with the indomitable resolution of a just, right-minded man; this was again to see Lucille. His very soul craved for her, hence his determination. He had acquainted her with it, and she, from her own feeling, readily understanding, had approved.

Not lip to lip, not heart to heart; merely with one long hand-grasp—one passionate, pitying gaze—they had parted, breathing farewell forever.

On the morning of her departure, for appearance sake, Gerard intended to drive her to the station; but, there, leaving her with her attendants, he would come quietly back and see the marquis. After which he purposed to bury himself at Lethington, the living monument of a dead memory.

Until Lucille left he remained in his study, tutoring himself to support his trouble. It was no easy task; his very life seemed plucked away with her.

The following morning, looking from the window on hearing carriage wheels, he saw Lucille veiled, pass quickly into the brougham, and going out—why? On some mission, no doubt to do with her departure.

"Poor, poor child!" he murmured; "and she so ill! May not this blow kill her, after all? Heaven! why was she so innocent, so beautiful, born to so cruel a destiny?"

Then he thought of her hour of trial which one day must come, and, bowing his head, the strong man sobbed like a woman.

The poor, nameless babe—the little innocent child to whose advent the parents had looked forward with joy unspeakable.

"Oh, Father," he cried in agony; "might it not prove thy greater mercy to take them both?"

It was some space before the earl could conquer this outburst of sorrow. He had hardly succeeded when there was a tap at the door, and the footman, entering, announced that a visitor desired to see him.

"Did I not give orders, Fern, to be denied to everyone?" demanded the earl sternly.

"You did, my lord, but this one would not be refused," replied the servant. "He says, my lord, that his business is most important—that he has come all the way from Italy to see you."

"From Italy! Is he a gentleman?" "He is a Roman Catholic priest, my lord; he calls himself Fra Anselmo de Pezzara."

A Roman Catholic priest who had traveled from Italy to see him! What could his errand be? The earl reflected a while; then finally bade the visitor to be shown in.

After a few seconds there entered a man, middle-sized, with an ascetic expression, and attired in the garb of a priest.

"You desire, I understand, to speak to me on business of a peculiar nature?" remarked the earl, after greeting him.

"Exactly, my lord," answered the Fra, taking the chair the footman placed. Then, having remained until he had watched the domestic from the apartment, he proceeded:

"I am the bearer to you, my lord, of a death-bed confession; for I did not leave the poor penitent until her eyes had closed on this world."

"Your words convey a mystery to me," said Gerard. "I know no one in Italy who could feel interested enough or have cause to occupy their last moments with thoughts of me. I fancy you labor under an error."

The priest merely inclined his head, as he rejoined, decisively:

"My mission is to you, my lord. To you as the living representative of the earls of Lethington, I come, the bearer of a confession of sin committed, deception practiced, confessed to me, and taken down here in writing from the dying woman's lips."

While speaking, he drew a small roll of manuscript from his pocket. Gerard was filled with a perplexity which his countenance did not fail to express. The Fra continued:

"The matter, I own, does but indirectly concern you, my lord; rather it is reference to your late uncle, 'Lord Beauchamp Mortmain'—interrigato the earl, leaning forward with sudden interest.

"The same—and to his daughter," "Lady Esmer?"

"The priest inclined his head as he proceeded:

"Though at the period you were young, nevertheless you are possibly aware that Lord Beauchamp Mortmain, purposing to travel in the East, left his little daughter, who was delicate, in charge of a lady residing at Mentone?"

Gerard signified that he was.

"This lady, who was middle-aged and lived alone, procured for the child an Italian nurse, who soon won her mistress's favor by the strong love she manifested for her charge."

"Time passed, when the lady, Signora Graham, was seized with a sudden illness; it proved as fatal as sudden. She had but time to confide the child to Fatina's care, and bid her communicate at once what she had learned to Lord Mortmain, then she expired."

"Fatina so far complied—she wrote at once. Your uncle's rather erratic mode of traveling evidently prevented the letter reaching him; and the nurse, finding the sum placed at an agent's for the child's maintenance a great benefit, did not write again, but returned to the hamlet where she had been born, taking the child with her."

"Now, my lord, comes the important part of my story. Fatina had passed herself off as a single woman, when, in fact, she had been married, and was a widow. Her husband, a fisherman, and a man of violent temper, had treated her most harshly. One evening he quarreled with her, and, despite the delicate state of her health at the time, struck her to the ground. Then he went off to sea in his boat; he never returned. That very night he fell overboard, got entangled in his nets, and was drowned with Fatina."

"The intelligence produced with Fatina premature confinement. Her child was born delicate, of a dwarfish make, and slightly deformed."

"Great heaven!" cried Gerard, starting up excitedly.

"Pardon me, my lord," interrupted the priest. "I see you divine the conclusion of my recital; nevertheless, permit me to proceed. I shall soon end. When Fatina was well again, she found herself and baby on the brink of starvation. Hard she fought for a living, but everything seemed against her; her child stood in her way."

"At last she heard of a nurse being wanted, only the proviso was the applicant must be single. Fatina, urged by poverty, resolved to part with her child for her child's sake. She left it in a poor woman's care, and, putting away her wedding ring, applied for, and obtained the situation. The love and experience of her charge the priest tried to think it was her own little Pepita, both the children being about the same age, and dark and handsome—obtained her her employer's perfect confidence."

"When she returned to the hamlet, Lord Mortmain's allowance enabled her to live very comfortably. All she told the neighbors was that it was a dear child, and it was her delight to see the two playing together, the Lady Esmer and Pepita. Not very long after her arrival, however, during a village festa, some Bohemians came and displayed their amusements. Fatina, as the rest gazed on them with pleasure, when all eyes, even the Bohemians, were attracted to Lady Esmer, who, with infinite grace in her baby's limbs, was imitating the wild dance of one of the female gipsies. Alarmed at the attention she was attracting Fatina took the child and Pepita home, then returned to the festa."

"When dusk fell, and the Bohemians had departed some little while, Fatina went to her cottage, where, to her horror, she found only Pepita—the other had gone. Eagerly she questioned her child, and learned sufficient to know that the gipsies had stolen Lady Esmer. The wretched woman was distracted; she would have called her neighbors, but fear sealed her lips. She dared not say who the child was—the daughter of an English nobleman. She dreaded that she might have incurred punishment for having taken it to her humble home. She hurried down the road by which the gipsies must have gone; but though she ran, it was all in vain. The people she met knew nothing of them; they must have gone away through the fields and lanes."

(To be continued.)

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(To be continued.)

In Woman's Interest

The Girl Who Is Thin.

The era of the slender woman has arrived. Dressmakers revel in the fact. A noted one said to me recently: "One can always make figure where it does not exist, but one cannot unmake it," which was logical, though perhaps not over-elegantly expressed. In the days of the slender woman, if pressed with due regard to the concealment of her bad points, has a far better chance of looking her best than her stout sister possesses. As a rule, too, unless her face is also very thin, she looks the younger of the two—no inconsiderable thing with a woman. And, then, careful dressing will do so much—there is no end to its possibilities. Even the grand, and, I admit, main difficulty of evening dress can be got over with a little care, and, though many things modish are of necessity forbidden fruit to the thin woman, she has yet her compensations if she only views the matter from the right standpoint.

With regard to evening gowns, a timely word of advice here may, perhaps, be useful; therefore, I would say to the thin girl, "Do not wear a dress of even dress can be got over with a little care, and, though many things modish are of necessity forbidden fruit to the thin woman, she has yet her compensations if she only views the matter from the right standpoint."

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