

## For Jack Armour's Amusement.

IN TWO INSTALLMENTS.

### CHAPTER III. CONTINUED.

'For, you know, although I believe she has almost more admirers than most girls, Jack,' she says. 'She's so quiet girl, and has such nice honourable notions, that she has never had an offer in her life; whereas we couldn't miss knowing about young Hunt, and I cannot help thinking that Mr. Colquhoun, poor fellow, is greatly taken by her. Of course, if it's so, one can't help pitying him, because, he's so plain and unpretending, he's a real good man.'

Jack bursts into a hearty and rather scornful guffaw.

'The Reverend Colquhoun! Good Heavens! You don't mean to say that he's after her? Poor beggar!'

'Yes; I'm sorry for him, very sorry, if it's the case,' says Mrs. Armour, gravely. 'But, of course, it may be merely a fancy of mine; only, I consider myself rather quick over these affairs, and I generally turn out right.'

'Ha, ha! I didn't know that one of Pen's admirers was the Irish parson,' laughs Jack, greatly amused, in a supercilious fashion, as he contrasts what a poor chance Patrick Colquhoun would have against his brilliant self.

'Now, Jack, don't go and think I've said I know this for a fact,' remarks his mother, reprovingly. 'And don't laugh like that—it isn't kind. Mr. Colquhoun will not only lose a very wealthy wife, but the dearest and sweetest girl in the world in Penelope. You won't delay, will you? You could ask her tonight.'

Jack is silent.

He looks suddenly rather harassed and impatient.

'Couldn't you?' asks Mrs. Armour, as he does not speak.

'No, not tonight,' says Jack, harshly, getting up to end the subject.

Before he asks his cousin to become his wife, there is something that must be done—he must break the news to Lizzie Talbot.

### CHAPTER IV.

The news must be broken to Lizzie because, although Jack feels a strange fancy for her, a much more natural affection than he has for the girl he has elected to share his future with, he sees their intimacy must end.

It would be far too dangerous to continue it when he has engaged himself to Penelope, and it is expedient that he should adopt this latter course at once, if he would not have the young and pretty heiress 'snapped up' by some other suitor.

So he determines, much against his inclination, to meet the girl tonight, and place the matter before her clearly.

He has found that Lizzie, despite her humble birth, is as good and high-principled a girl as even Penelope Graham.

All the women Jack Armour is surrounded by are so superior to himself that it is almost strange to one of them has been able to influence him very greatly for good.

Their example is such that he might well profit by it, but he goes on his easy, pleasant way, as he has always done since his birth.

He dreads the interview with the country girl, with whom he has amused himself during the last few months, but he has made up mind to enjoy Mrs. Stapleton's thousands, and stifles the few cowardly qualms—not of conscience—he feels, and endeavours to lay the blame on Fate, which is his usual practice when things go badly through his own wrong doing.

Lizzie's innocent trusting eyes meet his as he comes up to her on the common to-night, with, it seems to him, more of confidence than usual in their brown depths.

She loves him passionately and he knows it, but the knowledge has no power to stop his premeditated villainy.

'You are later a little to-night, aren't you Jack?' she inquires; adding hastily: 'Not that I mind waiting, you know, and it is such a lovely evening that I've quite enjoyed it. I always know you'll come in the end,' and she smiles with a sort of childish sweetness that touches him, although it does not move him in his purpose.

'Yes,' he says, bracing himself up. 'I am rather late to-night, Lizzie. The fact is, for the first time I didn't want to meet you. I hated the idea of it.'

He avoids her eyes, which give him an unpleasant feeling.

'Didn't want to meet me?' echoed Lizzie, with a sort of gasp.

'Yes. I have something so deuced hard to say to you; you'll despise me when you've heard it.'

He knows he has been too successful in teaching her to love him for her ever to despise him, however much he makes her suffer; but this is the form in which he prefaces the awkward statement he is about to make.

'Despise you I never shall,' exclaims Lizzie, indignantly. 'What can you mean, Jack?'

'I have something to confess to you,' he says, 'Lizzie, all this has got to come to an end.'

'All what?' demands Lizzie, rather frightened, but uncomprehending.

'Kiss me once, and then I'll try and explain it to you,' he says, finding his task more and more difficult.

Bashfully Lizzie turns her face to his, and Jack kisses once again the beautiful lips that she fondly and foolishly imagines will be his and his alone.

'Now tell me what you mean?' she says. 'What has to come to an end?'

'This—our friendship,' says Jack.

She gives a sort of shriek in her dismay, and Jack stops her rather harshly in fear that some chance ear may learn their secret.

'Don't scream like that, darling. I thought you were a brave sort of a girl, not hysterical and foolish. You make everything much harder for me by behaving in this way.'

Lizzie is cowed by his manner and too overwhelmed to ask for explanation.

In an instant her smiling blue sky is covered by an ink pall, and if it be true what her lover has told her—namely, that they are to part—she does not very much want to discover the reason, for the fact is enough.

'I have not been behaving very well to you, Lizzie, dear,' goes on Jack, seeing she is almost dazed by his sudden declaration. 'My love for you must be my excuse. How could I help forgetting everything when I met your sweet little face? I ought to have shut my eyes and my heart to it, but I was weak like all men, and never thought of anything but the present. I ought to have remembered that I belonged to someone else.'

'Someone else?' echoes Lizzie, dully.

Yes, my cousin. We have been practically engaged since our childhood. There isn't, as you may guess, much love on my side, though she's a nice enough girl; but she, it appears thinks a great deal too much of me. If she guessed how I have wandered from her, I'm afraid she would feel it bitterly, but she doesn't. She thinks I will care for her. In fact, she expects me to marry her soon, and that's why I've had to make a clean breast of it all to you to-night.'

'Jack has concocted this plausible story after much thought.'

It is, of course, impossible, he feels, to tell Lizzie boldly that his cousin, Miss Graham, between whom and himself there is not the shadow of a tie, has recently come into a very large fortune, and that he, therefore, intends to marry her.

It is better to put it that he has lapsed from the allegiance he rightly owes her, and must now return to it.

Lizzie gives a stifled moan.

How much kinder it would have seemed to her to have had a knife plunged into her heart than to hear such a story as the one she has just been forced to listen to!

'Go on,' is all she murmurs, faintly.

'Well, that's all,' replies Jack, trying to speak in a matter-of-fact voice. 'That's all, and quite enough, too. I think I'm the most unlucky beggar that ever walked!'

'And are we not to meet again? Am I not to see you now?'

'It would be much better not. You see, the wrench would have to come, however much it was put off, and it's better to bear things bravely, dear,' says Jack, unhesitatingly but very firmly. 'Hanged if something unpleasant isn't happening all the time in this world!'

I never cared for a girl before as I care for you, Lizzie, and I never shall; and yet I have to come round to declare that it's better never to see you again.'

He is a little surprised that she has not once reproached him or murmured against his decree.

There are so many points against him any other girl would have seen and resented, but his heartless conduct only appears to have stunned her.

He is infinitely relieved, and cannot help congratulating himself that he has got so well out of it, though he is, at the same time, genuinely sorry that his pastime has come to an end, and a little bit ashamed of himself and grieved for Lizzie.

Still, he is relieved that she has taken it as she has.

He is suddenly, however, dismayed to find her in his arms, clinging to him, and looking up at him with an almost ghastly face of frantic appeal.

'Oh, Jack, Jack!' she cries, 'tell me it is a dream! Say you have been joking! I can't believe it! Oh! you can't mean to give me up—me, who love you so? I can't live if I'm never to see you again, and you're to marry somebody else!'

'Lizzie, Lizzie, what's this!' he tries to remonstrate. 'This is very foolish.'

But the girl prevents his going any further.

She is crouching at his feet on the damp turf, clinging to him despairingly.

Jack, Jack, I can't live without you! she is moaning.

Her voice and face seem to have altered in these few minutes—to have lost their

girliness and become those of a woman. 'Perhaps you thought, when you first came after me, that I shouldn't feel anything like this so much. You don't know me—you don't know what you've got to be to me! You're all the world to me—all, and if you forsake me—her voice seeming to die away hollowly—I'd rather be dead than go on living.'

In vain Jack tries to think of suitable words to assuage her passionate misery—she departs as usual.

Nothing will be of any avail here, he can see, and he feels inclined to curse his ill-luck aloud.

Just when he thought all was going smoothly!

He pulls her up, however, from the ground, and holds her firmly, almost impatiently away from him.

'Now, Lizzie, if you loved me, you'd listen to reason!' he says, and forthwith calls up every plausible and well-sounding argument he can think of to persuade her to return to her old quiet life without more ado; but, though the girl listens without protest, he cannot quite flatter himself she thinks there is much comfort in what he says.

She listens apparently, but he cannot be quite sure even of that.

A desperate, dull, stricken look is upon her face, and he carefully turns his eyes away from it.

She makes no more appeal to him no effort to detain him—when, after a long farewell, addressed to what seemed to him almost a block of marble, so white and lifeless is the girl who started out brimful of happiness, he at last leaves her—manages to leave her—manages to leave her, he puts it to himself.

She remains standing, looking at the ground at her feet.

She stays for a long long time after his departure.

Suddenly, however with a wild, abrupt movement, she raises her head, and dashes forward across the common towards some meadows.

She hurries through them blindly until she comes to a little, narrow towing path running by the side of a dark smooth canal.

It is a deserted looking spot, and one we have seen before.

Nobody is about, though she does not glance around to ascertain this fact.

She only runs forward in a headlong fashion to the low bank, and then, without even a cry, plunges herself into the depths before her.

It is the morning after his parting from Lizzie Talbot when Jack seeks out his Cousin Penelope, to ask her to become his wife.

He has not attempted it on the previous night, being somewhat shaken out of his usual easy going nonchalance by what he has just accomplished, though he is, after all, glad that it is over, as it has weighed upon him, ever since he first heard of Penelope's sudden accession to wealth, as a thing that must be done.

Penelope is in the drawing-room alone, sitting in a pretty wicker-and satin armchair in one of the windows, and she seems lost in thought.

Jack thinks an indefinable but none the less decided change has crept over his cousin of late, as his eyes now rest upon her.

She looks slightly harder and graver than of old, though, perhaps, nobody but himself would perceive it.

He wonders if he has chosen a propitious time for his proposal, but the next instant he almost smiles, for he feels any moment would be propitious in this case, as there is no doubt Penelope has been attached to him for years.

He cannot help the regret that crosses his mind at this inopportune instant, that it is not Lizzie Talbot instead of the girl before him to whom he is about to vow himself for life.

Somehow, nobody has ever gained such a hold upon what he imagines his heart as the little country maiden, and possibly never will.

He sits down by Penelope, and begins the conversation by a few commonplace.

After, as he calls it to himself, 'dodging about' for some little time, Penelope not affording him much assistance, he comes to the point with a dash.

I won't put off any longer what I came to speak to you about this morning,' he says. 'I daresay you can guess what it is, Penelope, and he sinks his tone to one of tender meaning.'

'No,' replies Penelope, with truth.

Since her discovery of her cousin's clandestine love-affair, she has dismissed the faintest idea from her mind that he has ever regarded herself with affection.

'Why, Penelope?' he exclaims, smiling and seizing one of the hands that lie in her lap. 'You must know I love you—you must have known it ages ago. I thought I had shown it plainly enough. Will you be my wife? and he bends forward eagerly, looking for a response in her face that does not come.

'Be your wife?' she echoes, in a sort of cold astonishment. 'Certainly not!'

'Not?' he exclaims, hardly believing his ears. 'But why?'

'Because I don't care for you,' she replies calmly. 'I must love the man I marry with my whole heart.'

'But, Penelope,' he argues, so amazed and disgusted that he almost stammers. 'You do love me, don't you? I thought you did.'

'I can't help what you thought, Jack,' she replies, as coolly as before. 'The fact remains the same—namely, that I do not.'

Jack is confounded; never has he imagined a blow like this.

And Penelope looks so undisturbed, so pretty, so almost mocking as she sits facing him, that his mortification increases.

'Penelope,' he says, endeavouring to hide his real feeling, remembering what is at stake, 'since you say you do not care for me now, I must believe you; but can you tell me as positively that so short time ago—only a few weeks—it was the same?'

Penelope, don't be so cruel to me. Con-

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fact that you loved me then at least, even if now you have changed.'

Penelope has intended to keep her knowledge of his underhand conduct a secret, but at his assumed reproach her anger rises so suddenly and vehemently that it sweeps away all the intentions she has formed.

'Loved you?' she cries. 'How dare you insult me by this conversation? How dare you ask me to marry you—you who have plighted your faith to another woman?'

'Another woman?' echoes Jack, thoroughly taken aback. 'What do you mean? Who has been telling you such tales?'

'I do not need anyone to tell me 'such tales' I answer his cousin, scornfully. 'I have known the truth some time.'

'And what do you call 'the truth'?' she demands, wondering how on earth Miss Graham could have gained her information.

'The truth is this, that while you are asking me openly to marry you, you are making love to a girl named Lizzie Talbot secretly, roused out of her usual quiet depths by her indignation, thus wronging both. Have the goodness never to address me again in the way you have today, nor on the same subject.'

'Why, my dear little cousin!' exclaims Jack, suddenly, as he thinks, 'seeing light,' 'you cannot possibly be jealous of a girl like that—'

'Furious!' interposes Penelope. 'Are you mad?' contemptuously.

'You cannot mean you think seriously of a fellow just walking out once or twice with a girl in her class in life—just having slight flirtation with a pretty country lass, a flirtation with no shadow of harm in it?'

goes on Jack, little judging the effect his words are making upon his right minded companion. 'A man does not ever regard an affair with that sort of girl seriously, Penelope. You couldn't look graver if you thought I intended to marry her.'

'Stop!' says Penelope, in a low intense tone of such bitter scorn and loathing that her cousin looks at her in amazement.

'If you could guess how low your words render you in my eyes you would cease them. Your making light of the claims of the girl upon you, shows me more clearly that you are no gentleman, but a cur.'

If any girl is good enough to flirt and amuse yourself with, she is good enough to marry, and if she is not a girl good enough for you to marry, she should not have seemed good enough to amuse you. But it would be useless to try to impress you or such as you. Only please let us end this conversation at once.'

'It is preposterous!' exclaims Jack. 'You make the case out to be totally different from what it is. It was the merest fun. Won't you listen to me and forget all about that nonsense? I know that perhaps you may feel angry just now but I assure you you should have nothing to complain of in the future, Penelope.'

'The subject is ended between us,' interposes his cousin, coldly. 'As I have told you before, when I marry I shall love the man who is to be my husband. I shall also honour him. I entertain neither sentiment for you; therefore I must ask you to spare me any further conversations of this nature, and sweeping by him haughtily, she passes out of the room.'

If ever Jack Armour has felt furiously, vindictively angry and humiliated, this is the moment.

He has been so sure of his gentle, affectionate cousin.

He could curse aloud, and does so, there being fortunately nobody to take the least notice of his outburst.

He has given up Lizzie for no advantage after all!

It is certainly an aggravating situation, and he feels that, for the future he is likely to look small in three persons' eyes, it not in his own.

He can see that it will be of no avail to appeal from Penelope's decision.

As she has said, the matter is at an end!

### CHAPTER V.

As the young man, a few minutes later, is passing through the hall, he encounters Mrs. Armour is looking very grave, it not sad.

'Such a terrible thing has happened, they say, down the village, Jack!' she exclaims, as they come up to each other.

'Indeed! What is that?' he inquires, indifferently.

'A very pretty young girl, a daughter of the woman who does the washing for most of the best families in the neighbourhood,

drowned herself in Sutton Canal, replies Mrs. Armour.

'What?' exclaims Jack, with a violent start.

'Yes. Is it not sad? A veritable village tragedy! Her name was Elizabeth Talbot. She was only about eighteen, and quite exceptionally pretty—not of a common diary maid order at all. I have seen her several times, and thought her lovely. It's a terrible thing!'

Jack has become as pale as death.

He turns aside, so that his mother may not see his face.

'Terrible!' he mutters.

'The butcher's boy has just told the servant,' goes on Mrs. Armour.

But I don't suppose it is true, cries Jack suddenly. 'Such things get about! It is not likely—not at all like!'

He speaks almost incoherently, and disappears, as his mother is looking at him, through the hall door, and into the garden.

A terrible horror has descended upon him.

Can this news his mother has just imparted to him be the truth?

Lizzie drowned! Himself a sort of a murderer!

The shock is an awful one.

He feels as if he dare not venture into the village to hear anything further.

He walks about the grounds in a distracted sort of way, or half crouching upon a seat far from the high road.

This latter calamity has quite driven from his mind the chagrin consequent upon his cousin's rejection of his suit, and one day has never proven so disagreeable to him before in his life.

Meanwhile, Penelope, still vibrating with scorn and anger, decides to try and get rid of her unpleasant feelings in a long walk.

She turns mechanically to the common, and crosses it, entering the village.

An unusual stir and commotion strikes her as she walks up the straggling street; some excitement seems to be in the air, and she glances wonderingly at the small groups of chattering men and women in her path.

At last she addresses one of the latter. 'Is anything the matter, Mrs. Morris?'

'Oh! dear, yes! We've had something very mysterious happen here. Haven't you heard nothing of it?'

And the speaker, a pleasant faced, rough-haired woman, stares at her in surprise.

'I have heard nothing out of the way,' replies Penelope.

'Why you haven't heard as a young Lizzie Talbot, tumbled into Sutton Canal last night, when it were getting dark! exclaims Mrs. Morris, lifting her hands. 'Tumbled in, or thrown herself in—people don't know which it were—and she were almost done for by the time she were got out. A man, John Thomas, one of my neighbors, reeked her. He heard a splash as he were coming home along the edge of the water, and when he makes out it were a girl, in he goes after her. My word! it was a noble deed, all in the dark as it were! And that Sutton Canal is a nasty place, and very lonesome looking, miss, if you've seen it. I wonder they ever came out alive!'

'And did they? Is the girl livin'? Did you say her name was Lizzie Talbot?'

asks breathlessly.

'Lizzie Talbot, miss, daughter to Mrs. Talbot, the laundry-woman, over there—pointing to the cottage Miss Graham has often visited. 'Not a bad looking girl—like most of her class, Mrs. Morris is an admirer of a more florid type of beauty than Lizzie's and speaks very moderately of her attractions—and a good girl, too—'

'Did you say there was a suspicion that she threw herself into the water?' break in Miss Graham.

'It's not known, miss, how it happened,' replies the woman. 'She might have thrown herself in or been thrown, or, as I said, she might have slipped in—'

'But she's not dead?'

'No, miss, thank goodness! she ain't, but she's precious bad, they say, answers Mrs. Morris. 'It's give her mother a shock too, poor thing! I see the Rev. and Mr. Colquhoun going in some time ago. Eh, miss, he's a good man, he is! Where there's trouble there he is you may depend!'

Penelope acquiesces with all her heart.

The contrast between the man she has just left and the hardworking curate, whose unprepossessing appearance has often been the jest of Jack Armour, strikes her forcibly.

A thrill of admiration for the trick Colquhoun's noble qualities runs through her at Mrs. Morris' words of praise, and she turns away with a little flush that, if he could but see it, would make his heart beat with joy.

Further on she comes to Mrs. Talbot's cottage.

Many neighbors are congregated around the doors of their own homes.

Penelope walks quietly up the path and the women make way for her, for she is well known and greatly liked.

The mother's first words show her that Lizzie's story is unknown to her.

'There's no making it out, you see, miss. There's no reason Lizzie could have wanted to drown herself, as some of these neighbors of mine—who have retreated and left the visitor with Mrs. Talbot—try to make out. Nor has the child an enemy that I know of. Yet though she's well enough to tell me anything there is to tell not a word does Lizzie say. She lies there upstairs perfectly quiet and never opens her mouth; but all the same, there must be a lot behind.'

'Perhaps she's scarcely strong enough

(CONTINUED ON FIFTEENTH PAGE.)

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