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THE GODMOTHER

A Story in Four Parts

PART III.

Then Sunday came. The eight o'clock bell rang, and lest his friend should question him later, he went out while the Vicar was still in church leaving a message that he was gone for a long walk. Thus he escaped Sunday-school and morning service. The clergyman's kind heart was sorely grieved and he went through his duties without his usual buoyant interest. Little did he guess that as he went into his pulpit and gave out the awful text that had been haunting him

all the week, the one over whom his heart was yearning, crouched on a grave beneath the north transept window, heard every word.

"And it was night." First he drew the contrast. The lighted room, the Master's presence, the homely company of his fellow-disciples, and then the outer darkness. Why? What did he gain by it? Thirty pieces of silver, came the scornful voice. Did Judas sell his soul for that? Let not the paltriness of the sum surprise you. Even now a young man may sell his soul for a few pounds.

The listener started to his feet and drops of perspiration rolled from his face, and on and on went the awful indictment. This was the climax of many dark deeds, petty frauds, self-justified acts glossed over by expediency or apparent necessity, but all leading up to this culmination of guilt—the betrayal of his Master. Then when the preacher had painted the dreadful darkness of the night, with impassioned entreaty he called upon the victims of a first crime to clear themselves at once before their bonds become riveted. "Arise, and play the man now whatever shame it cost you while there is time. Judas went out into the night; he could not see the Saviour's face. Peter looked back at Him, and met His eyes, and his heart broke. The Lord is turning to look at you, my brother. Oh, if you must go out, let it be to weep bitterly!"

George did not turn up at the Vicarage all day, but after the evening service a knock came at the vestry, and a stricken man with a new face and a new bearing passed in. In the early morning he took the first train to London.

That same morning Lady Sherwell sat at her old-fashioned davenport, and made up her accounts. She always insisted on the return of her bank book on the first day of the month and, being a conscientious woman, though not a very rich one, she looked very carefully into every item of her expenditure. Presently, as she turned over the returned cheques, something puzzled her. "Ten pounds last week! Nonsense! I didn't draw a cheque to self, except that day when I went out without my purse and wanted to pay the Registry fee. I took it to the bank myself, too—What's this? I never wrote those words. Ah! I know I sometimes forget to fill up that line, I suppose the clerk did it. Anyhow, there is some mistake; I'll go to Dolman's at once and find out what's wrong." Then, aloud, "Miss Leigh, my dear, I am going out for a few minutes; please order the carriage while I get ready, I am rather in a hurry."

"Shall I come with you?" "It is hardly worth while; I am going to Dolman's Bank."

"Dolman's! That is where my brother, Mr. Heathcote, is."

"Your brother who got you out of your scrape?"

"He's not really my brother, you know, but we were brought up together."

"Never mind now, my dear, I am



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in a hurry," and the old lady hastened away.

But not to put on her bonnet. She locked herself, instead, into her room, opened a drawer, and took from it a miniature framed in brilliants. It represented a beautiful girl, with a rosy babe in her arms. The romance of Margaret Sherwell's life lay there.

For that girl friend she had given up the sweetest hope of a woman's life. Not to break Agatha's heart, she had stood aside and seen her marry Gerald Heathcote, for she—Margaret—was much older, and had had some experience, and knew herself of tougher fibre than the frail, gentle creature who could not have survived the discovery of her mistake. She had consented to be godmother to her first-born, but the effort was great, and was not repeated. They had not met again; her subsequent marriage, which had taken her to India, made a break in their correspondence, and when she heard of Gerald's death, it seemed impossible to write ordinary words of condolence to his widow, so she let the opportunity slip and contented herself with praying for her godson, hardly realizing that he was already grown up, and might need her help.

And now it had come to this! For it was not possible to ignore the terrible suspicion which forced itself into her mind against her will. She remembered that the face of the young clerk in the bank was familiar to her. Could it be her own godson—her prayer-child, who had robbed her? It was indeed a bitter thought. Presently she went downstairs again. Betty was waiting in some impatience as the carriage had been some time at the door. Lady Sherwell went into the library and sat at her bureau.

Betty did not dare to follow her. With trembling hands the old lady tore the cheque across, and threw it into the waste paper basket. Then she tore the counter-foil, out of her cheque book, and called Betty.

"I am ready to go out now, dear, but I don't need to go to the bank; we will have a drive together."

What a drive it was in the summer sunshine, through Hampstead and Highgate and down unfrequented Middlesex lanes! How Betty enjoyed it! Lady Sherwell drew her out about her home until at the moment when she was again explaining the nature of her relationship with her so-called

brother, she was startled by the question: "Is his name George?"

Betty thought that she had often spoken of him by his name, and answered, in rather a surprised tone: "Oh, yes, didn't you know?"

"I guessed," replied the old lady grimly. "Miss Leigh, he is my godson."

(To be Continued.)

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