

so I resolved to wait a few minutes. I could not avoid hearing the conversation that was going on within, though I had not gone there to listen.

"I heard Mr. Stuart tell his wife there had been a robbery at the bank. He mentioned the sum, and it was the same as you gave to me; again I heard him mention the date of the robbery, so far as they could guess, and it was on the very day on which you brought me the money—the evening of the thirteenth of August. As I crouched there, trembling as I listened, I knew that you were the guilty one. Aye; even when I heard Mr. Stuart say that Mr. Neal Despard had owned to the crime; even then I never doubted that you were guilty. I could not at first understand why Mr. Despard should take the blame upon himself; but when I recalled what the landlady had said about him being Miss O'Brien's lover before she married you; it was all clear to me, and I knew that to save her from the misery of her newly-made husband's exposure, Neal Despard had taken your guilt upon him. I thought of the fair young girl who loved him, and I blamed him bitterly for doing her this great wrong. He surely could never have loved her. Then when Miss Stuart herself came into the room and they told her the truth, how her lover was guilty and had been sent away, never to return to her, the awful look in her face cut me to the heart, and I cursed myself for being the cause of this trouble which had fallen upon her. I told myself the money was cursed; and I resolved to fling it from me, and denounce you to the world for a villain. And when I saw her lying pale and still in a faint, with her pretty young face like the face of the dead, I could bear it no longer, but rushed away calling upon God to pardon my sin. You, no doubt, wonder why I kept your secret, instead of betraying you, as was certainly my duty. I meant to do it, but could not bring myself to it. All night long I wrestled with myself and tried to harden my heart against you sufficiently to deal you this blow; but I could not, and when the morning came, I fled with the child and kept your secret—for heaven forgive me! I loved you even then."

Grace Roberts stopped speaking for a moment and looked up at Arthur. His face was livid and there was a look of fiendish hate in his eyes as he fixed them upon her face. He was about to speak when she interrupted him.

"Let me finish; I shall not be long, for I will not trouble you with the history of my miserable life for the last few years. It is enough to say that your money brought its curse with it; for my child sickened and after lingering for a year, died. I, myself, fell ill amongst strangers in a strange land, and when I recovered, I found I had but two hundred dollars in the world. I would have gone home to my father and mother, but I soon discovered the fact of their deaths, and that the old house was in the hands of strangers. I was obliged then to go into service, which I did; and it was at my master's house I learned of the death of Mr. Neal Despard. I read it in a Toronto paper which I chanced to take up one day. As I read, a dreadful remorse took hold of me. Had it not been for me he would be still living, honored and happy. My scruples on your account had vanished, for my fatal love for you had died with my little child. As I read of poor Neal Despard's death, I seemed to realise more fully than I had ever done, the depth of your villainy; and my heart ached with a ceaseless pain for Miss Stuart. I resolved that I would do what I could to atone for my sin. I could not bring the dead to life, but I could wipe the stain from his name and memory; and for that I have returned to Canada."

"Why have you told me this?" asked Macdonald, mockingly. "Why did you not go straight to my wife, to Miss Stuart and others with your precious story?"

"Because," answered Grace slowly, and without a trace of anger in her sad voice, "I wished to spare your wife one pang at least. She is beautiful and good; she will suffer keenly when she learns of your treachery to that dead man; what I would spare her is the knowledge of your villainy to me. If you will own to the robbery and clear Neal Despard's name from dishonor, I will go away and not trouble you again, and your wife will never know of me."

"You must take me for a precious fool," he said with a jeering laugh.

"You will not do it then?"

"No," he answered with an oath, "and now you had better get out of my way, I'm in a hurry."

"No, no, wait; you *shall* listen to me."

She sprang forward and grasped the reins, jerking them from his hold. Cursing her, he raised his whip and brought it down with all his force upon her face. She let go the bridle and fell back with a cry; and at the same instant the terrified horse suddenly plunged and dashed off at a mad gallop, and then the woman, taking her hands from her face, saw the figure of Arthur Macdonald lying across the road, outstretched and motionless, with his face, all ghastly and bloody, upturned to the quiet sky.

"He is dead and I have killed him!" she shrieked; and kneeling beside him, raised his head and rested it upon her bosom.

"Oh! Arthur, Arthur, my love, my love!"

All his villainy to her, all her anger and resentment and bitter revenge were utterly forgotten when she uttered that passionate, despairing cry. This man who lay, with his still, white face upon her breast, was the handsome young lover of her girlhood, and Sybil O'Brien, Mollie Stuart and Neal Despard had never existed.

CHAPTER XXI.

"AULD LANG SYNE."

"Are you quite resolved to go then, Sybil dear?"

"Oh yes! quite; I could not stay here now after what has passed; my heart is too sore for that. I must get away. I cannot breathe here where everything reminds me of my husband; for though he sinned, he is dead now; and I loved him, Mollie, I loved him dearly."

"Yes dear, I know."

"If I could only atone to you, for the unhappy past, if I could bring Neal Despard back to life and restore you to one another I would be free of half the great weight of pain that is breaking my heart; but I cannot—I cannot; I can but beseech your forgiveness."

"I have nothing to forgive, dear Sybil," answered Mollie as the widow covered her face with her hands and wept.

"When Neal made the sacrifice he did, it was for love of you, his old friend, and because of the promise made to poor Alice on her death bed; he never dreamed of atonement to be made. It was a voluntary sacrifice on his part."

There was a break in Mollie's voice as she said this and a swift rush of tears to her eyes.

"I know; it was noble of him, but Mollie it was wrong and unwise; he should have thought of you."

"Then you would have had him break a most solemn promise to a dying woman for the sake of his love? He would never have done that; and then remember that it was on the evening of your wedding day that the—crime was discovered; that very morning we had seen you made a wife; had seen the perfect happiness and content shining in your face when you drove away with your husband, and how was it possible for Neal to destroy your happiness with one cruel blow ere the first day of your wifehood had drawn to a close. And he had loved you Sybil remember that; yes, I know that. Long before he knew me, he had known and loved you; he had such a big, tender heart, say how could he have dealt you such a blow as that would have been?"

"But he was cruel to you Mollie, for you loved him."

"Yes, I loved him and he loved me, answered the girl simply. "He knew that I would trust him, and his honor was more to him than his love and I would not have had it otherwise."

"His honor?"

"Yes, he pledged his word of honor to Alice."

Ah! poor Alice; had she dreamed of all the sorrow the keeping of that fatal promise would entail, she would never have exacted it," said Sybil sorrowfully.

"Tell me, and truly," said Mollie, earnestly, "has Neal's sacrifice saved you from sorrow at all? Would it have been better to let you know the truth seven years ago, instead of finding it out now? Uncle George, Katie and Tom and all the others say it would have been better. But you have been happy all these years dear, have you not?" asked the girl looking wistfully up into the widow's face, for Sybil had risen and was standing by the window, a tall sombre figure in trailing robes of deep black with a widow's cap on her auburn hair.

(To be Continued).