THROUGH FIRE AND WATER

A Tale of City Life.

By FREDERICK TALBOT.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FLAME IN THE SKY.

As the hour approached for Lucy Dyer and his fortunes disappeared among the river mists, Patty, with her eyes full of tears, turned away from the wharf and went back to the house. Within, the close confined air seemed to choke her, for all she knew that she was exceedingly tired, and oppressed with trouble and evil foreboding. The excitement she had felt in meeting Edward he got away had kept her up hitherto; now all of a sudden she gave way; she felt sickening lifeless and unstrung, a mere bundle of jarring fibres. The aspect of things about her, too, was anything but enlivening. She had been honoured with the best bed-chamber, a glorious catalogue of a bed, with faded mouldy hangings, stood in one corner; old-fashioned ratting-press soft chairs of drawers crowded up the room. The window looked out on the black dull side of a warehouse.

Patty couldn't go to bed here; she felt the appearance of every thing was repellent and uninviting. She took up a book and began to read, but the letters danced before her eyes, the words she read conveyed no meaning to her mind. Her head grew opposite here—Lucy's bed-room—rushed open, and some one stole gingerly out which down the stairs. The front-door was quietly opened and shut; then the footsteps crunched and jarred the gravel walk. Lucy had gone out! What could she be doing abroad so early as this? Perhaps she was merely taking a morning walk for the sake of fresh air—she hoped, poor girl, it was something of the cleanness and dullness of the house.

Lucy was out for no such thing. She came in as cautiously and quietly as she had gone out. The day was fully opened now, and sounds of life and freshness—the ringing of carts and waggons, the cries of the street traders. Patty had an hideous desire to go down. She was hungering for a little sympathy and consolation. Lucy, if she had a good-hearted girl friend, might find it in her home now for the asking, and having her breakfast. It would be comforting to sleep in open lodgings and sheathe great. She couldn't stay here any longer, she felt, now that Edward was gone. Nobody cared to be here. Mrs. Hulse was kind, but cold and dignified, and Lucy—Lucy was sullen. Patty sat down a little while. Mrs. Hulse—saying she knew Lucy wanted her breakfast, she would not disturb her—was out of no further use; but that she would come in the evening with Markwood, Edwards friend, and see if Lucy had any thing to send to them. That was carrying out the place she had laid out with Mrs. Hulse. These arrangements Patty mentally recapitulated, in order that she might not forget any thing she had to do. Edward had promised to come back from Southampton, he was to call at Sydney Square for Patty. Then she was to tell him about the vault, and John Jones, who was a prisoner there, and they were to go and release and release poor John. Lucy had chosen Edward and his father would be beyond the reach of pursuit.

Next they had agreed that the best course would be to hire a couple of vans, and clear the house out of every thing valuable in the way of furniture, and sell it to a broker. It would realize sixty or seventy pounds, Lucy had said, and Mrs. Hulse and Lucy till they heard from America. As soon as Ned got a situation, over there, he had told her that he would send for them all to join him—Patty as well, although in her own mind she had not decided for it.

In the meantime there was a whole clear day before her to do as she pleased, and she let herself out of the postern door with a strange feeling of elation and recovered liberty. She ran all the way home, but after all she was not in time for breakfast. Her father had come home early this morning, and her mother was just clearing away the breakfast things; they had finished long ago.

"What, home already, Patty," she cried, in high-pitched, unmusical tones. "Couldn't you get on more quickly than an hour and than that? You don't want your breakfast, I hope?"

"Indeed I do, mother."

"Then you must make do with that drop of cold coffee and a bit of bread. We didn't you get your breakfast with them? Why ain't she asked you, have they?"

"Oh no, they've been very civil to me, mother, but I felt kind of homesick."

"Pish," cried Mrs. Robinson, "such nonsense! Why, Patty, I hope you haven't had no quarrel with Edward? You don't—you fret, whatever you do, and keep your temper for such times as you have him book-at all, eh?"

"Mother," said Patty, loftily, "do you think I'd make myself difficult from what I really am to desert Edward, or that I'd hold him to me if he wanted to break away?"

"Well, your father and me would, anyhow, cried Mrs. Robinson. "You no patience with such nonsense. If he wanted to break away, he hasn't, and that's the very worst, and more if it comes to an action against Edward, and evidence about letting him go!"

"Why, mother," cried Patty, with a touch of dignity, "I tell you Edward's going to America this very morning. How will you get your five hundred pounds out of him then?"

"Gone to America?" screamed Mrs. Robinson, putting down the teapot with the polishing with a crash among the rest of the crockery. "Gone to America, and you let him—leave it, and never have the money in your mine?"

She threw herself into a chair, and began heavily piecously.

"Why, what good should I have done by bellying the poor lad?"

"Do you think I'd have let him go? Oh, you stupid! Not with your back turned, I wouldn't—opportunity lost as he's come back again, or else give you your dues."

"Mother, you should have stopped him, mother," cried Patty, scornfully.

"Then I'd have gone with him. Yes, I'd have stuck to him like wax, or you may say, will he'd done you justice."

"Not father wouldn't have liked your giving off to see with a young man."

"Father be bothered!" cried Mrs. Robinson; "much good he is, or you either. I've no patience with you, silly noodle-pipes! "Oh, let him alone, father, says you; "oh, don't bother him, mother; oh, he's a gentleman, and mustn't be spoken roughly—he, he, he! Much good it's done you, I'm sure! Leave off to see with a young man."

"Mother," said Patty, lofty, "do you think I'd make myself difficult from what I really am to desert Edward, or that I'd hold him to me if he wanted to break away?"

"Well, your father and me would, anyhow, cried Mrs. Robinson. "You no patience with such nonsense. Five hundred pounds, in her pocket, and she talks brave! Why, I'd be proud of a lad with faded mouldy hangings, stood in one corner; old-fashioned ratting-press soft chairs of drawers crowded up the room. The window looked out on the black dull side of a warehouse.

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