

IF WE KNEW.

Could we but draw back the curtains That surround each other's lives, See the naked heart and spirit, Know what ap the action gives, Often we should find it better, Purer than we judge we should— We should love each other better If we only understood.

"I'm poor, and so runs this world away! Heigho!" "But you told me last evening that you were rich!" "Did I? I must have been drawing on the future, or possibly I meant to imply that a man with such a wife as you are rich! But, presently, I am not overburdened with money."

"But you would sell yourself for it as readily as ever, I suppose?" "How well you know me! Yet I could desire a greater delicacy of expression, Kathleen. Anything that I have or am which is marketable I should be glad to convert into money."

—Woman's Work.

LADY KILDARE; Or, the Rival Claimants.

CHAPTER X.

The guardians of the young Lady Kildare remained for an hour or more in close conversation with Mr. Wedburn, Sir Russell's lawyer, but the result of their private conference differed in no way from the other. The three gentlemen were equally convinced of the justice of Redmond Kildare's claims, but determined to proceed with the investigation as agreed upon, but merely for form's sake.

The two guardians were united in thinking Nora's engagement to Lord O'Neil a wild folly, from the consummation of which the girl must be rescued, at whatever cost. Sir Russell, grim and stern as he was, was honest to the core, and he believed Nora would take him at some future day for preventing the sacrifice of herself to a man who was not only poor, but burdened with debts.

Subsequently Mr. Michael Kildare saw his young kinswoman alone, and in broken tones assured her of his love and sympathy, and of his care and protection in the future. The poor young Lady Nora clung to him in her storm of sorrow as to a firm support.

"I have no reason to complain, Michael," she said, smiling up at him through her tears. "I had lost my fortune, I have learned how true and steadfast are my friends. You and Kathleen are 'friends in need,' and 'friends indeed'!"

Michael Kildare kissed her sweet brow softly and tenderly, as the seal of his promises of devotion.

"You know how clammy I am, Nora!" he said. "The old saying's true: 'Blood is thicker than water.' And so it's through thick and thin I'll stick to you, my darling, my Lady Nora! But I could wish that you would look kindly on the young Earl. He has a good heart, and he'll make you a happy and a rich woman."

But Nora shook her little head willfully, while her young face grew grave and almost stern in its expression.

"Think it over during the next two weeks. You may change your mind, Nora. I won't bother you now, while your trouble is new to you."

He kept his word, saying not another word, about Redmond Kildare or the desired marriage.

The guests remained to dinner, which was served at five o'clock. Directly after dinner their horses were brought to the door, and they mounted and rode away on their journey to Dunloy, whence they were to proceed by rail to Belfast.

Redmond Kildare made one of the party, and Kathleen was left to the peace and quietness that usually enveloped it.

The step sisters drew a great breath of relief when they found themselves once more alone. They watched the departing horsemen until they had disappeared down the elm-bordered avenue, and they then tied on their broad-brimmed hats and went upon the terrace, where they remained a long time in conversation and reverie.

CHAPTER XI.

BASSANTYNE SEEMS SAVES QUARTERS.

The days drifted by at Kildare Castle, after the visit of the guardians of the young Lady Nora, and, despite the girl's heavy cares and anxieties, every day had its share of sweetness and joy.

This was not to be wondered at, for Nora's lover, Lord O'Neil was a daily visitor at Point Kildare.

There was another daily guest, Nicol Bassantyne, but the young nobleman rarely crossed the castle, the Lady Kathleen's husband choosing to conceal himself from observation, and spending hours in lounging alone in the park and shrubberies, or else accompanied by the man who had escaped with him from Australia, and who was now serving his wretched sentence in the day subsequently to the departure of the Lady Nora's guardians, and that of Redmond Kildare, Bassantyne took occasion to announce his marriage to the Kildare chaplain, tenantry, and servants.

And on the fourth day thereafter appeared in the Belfast papers, under the caption of "Romantic Marriage in High Life," an announcement of the union of the Lady Kathleen Connor, of Ballyconcor, Wicklow, daughter of the late Lord Kildare, of Kildare, Castle, to Mr. Nicol Bassantyne! The announcement stated that the marriage was a happy Scottish one but the engagement of which it was the finale had been of long standing, the Lady Kathleen having plighted her troth to her gallant suitor some years before. It was understood that Mr. Bassantyne had recently returned from India, whence he had recently returned, and where he had accumulated a handsome fortune.

It is needless to state that this flimsy notice had been written by Bassantyne himself, and that its insertion had been liberally paid for.

On the day after the publication of this announcement Lord Treham arrived at the castle, riding in his horse, and demanded to see the Lady Kathleen.

He was shown into the great drawing room, and Lord Treham hastened to summon her ladyship.

Lord Treham looked haggard and worn, as if he had known days of anxiety and nights of sleeplessness since the night of the fatal marriage between the Lady Kathleen and her mysterious husband.

Nervous and restless, he strode to and fro the long and ground apartment with a quick stride. His eyes looked almost wild in their expression. His mouth was drawn into an expression of settled anguish.

Presently the door opened and the Lady Kathleen slowly entered during the past days! She looked thin and wan and woeful. There were dark lines under her beautiful azure eyes, and her face was almost ghastly in its pallor. But instead of the quick and nervous restlessness which characterized Lord Treham, her manner was calm and cold, as if her sorrows had turned her to stone.

Lord Treham stretched out his arms to her, but she made no sign.

"Kathleen!" he said, in a hollow voice. Kathleen made a swift movement, as if to obey his call and sprang to his embrace. But, remembering herself, she recoiled, and looked up at him piteously.

"Don't tempt me, Barry," she whispered. "It's all over between us now—all over forever."

Lord Treham's face darkened. He drew from his pocket a Belfast paper containing the announcement which we have described, crumpled it in his hands, and tossed it on the table fiercely, exclaiming:

"That is true, then? The fellow is your old suitor, and he has acknowledged him as your husband? Fool that I was, to believe in the love and honor of a woman!"

"And I am tied to this man!" thought the Lady Kathleen, in horror, when he had gone. "God pity me! Poor, poor Barry!"

Bassantyne went down to the spot where he had left his small boat on the beach, and an evilly exultant smile lit up his wretched face.

"So I have provided a safe retreat for myself!" he muttered. "Kathleen fears me, and it is well! The police may search the whole realm in vain, while I rule in her house as master, and control the strings of her purse, and as to making love to her, I'll see about that. I own, however, that I'd rather see her sailing away and drop her, leaving me no interesting widow with plenty of money. By Jove! There's an idea! I wonder if I could make it work!"

He pushed off his boat, stepped in, and sailed away, a strange deep thoughtfulness, that was full of sinister meaning, obscuring his features.

It will be one of the two he said to himself as he sat in his whistler. "She'll become loving and tender after a while, or she'll leave me a widow and the heir to her fortune! I wonder which it will be!"

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which I gave you a hint Had I known that Bassantyne lived, I should never have consented to marry you. I thought him dead. I read a notice of his death in an Australian paper a year ago.

"Then he was an old suitor of yours?" "Yes."

"What is the mystery between you and him?" cried Lord Treham passionately. "Tell me, Kathleen. Let us share the secret together. Perhaps I can help you."

"It is impossible!" returned the Lady Kathleen despairingly. Had he been dead I could have told you, Barry. And now that he lives, I dare not!

Lord Treham took a hurried turn about the room, struggling with a fierce agitation. Presently he came back, and said: "Kathleen, I trust you still. I know that those blue eyes of yours mirror a pure and noble soul. But how dark the whole case looks. You cling to a man you hate, and deliberately wreck your own life and mine—"

"Yes it is better as it is," said Lady Kathleen, lifting her pale face, with a desperate smile on her quivering lips, to his. "Suppose we had been married and he had come back! Oh, Barry, you know not what you have escaped! Your proud old name remains unscathed, and your heart is spared a deeper anguish than it now knows. And I—heaven only knows the terror, the awful fear, the constant apprehensions, I would have been called to endure! Better that the blow should fall sharply as it fell!"

Lord Treham uttered a groan. "It seems to me," he said, "that I could have borne any sorrow if you had only loved my wife, Kathleen, is it all over? Will you not apply for a divorce?"

She shook her head sorrowfully. "I cannot!" she answered. "And if I did, a divorce would do me no good. I could not marry you, Barry, you must leave me to my fate. I shall be to this man a wife in name only, but only in name, for he has no claim upon my love or tenderness. He will go with me to my home in Wicklow, and we shall bury ourselves from the world. And you must forget me!"

"Never!" cried Treham passionately. "You are the one great object of my life. I know that you love me. I know that you are in the power of a villain, and you need a friend in your life, Kathleen, you need one now. I mean to be that friend. I will not intrude upon you; I will not force my attention upon you. I will remember that as you cannot listen to my protestations of love without pain, I must not utter them. But I shall devote my life to watching over you unseen. Should you ever need help or comfort or a friend, I shall be ready to give it."

The tears flooded the Lady Kathleen's eyes. The chivalric tenderness of her last lover went to her soul. His tribulation almost broke her heart. The story calmed of the few last days was broken up, and a passionate grief filled her being.

"Barry," she said brokenly, "trust and tenderness of lovers. I must not permit this sacrifice of your life to me. It is better that you leave me utterly. I have brought all my sorrows on myself. Leave me to bear them alone. Do not cause me the added anguish of knowing that I have wrecked your life also."

Lord Treham, coming near, took her hands again in his. "I am not utterly hopeless, Kathleen," he said, more calmly than he had yet spoken. "I shall seek to deliver you out of this snare into which you have fallen. As you refuse to tell me the mystery which links you and this villain Bassantyne together, I must, as I said once before, seek its solution myself. And I shall be faithful to you unto death, Kathleen."

She clasped her hands, still looking with eyes of passionate sorrow into her despairing face, when the drawing-room door opened and Nicol Bassantyne came swaggering in.

He had come over from Ballycastle a little earlier than usual, and had entered the castle with the air of an honored guest. In truth, he had been invited by the lady of the castle, and he should be domiciled at Kildare until his departure with her ladyship for Ballyconcor.

As usual, Bassantyne was elegantly dressed, but the style of his attire bordered on loudness, his velvet waistcoat having a brilliantly colored floral pattern, and his handsome black scarf being richly embroidered in gold thread. A diamond pin, set in his hair, and a diamond ring sparkled on one of his little fingers. His long beard had been crimped and braided like a girl's hair, and now fell in two long wavy points upon his breast. His hands were delicately gloved, and he carried a carved ivory walking stick.

He halted just within the door, opening his eyes widely as he regarded the pair he had so long sought.

"Ah!" he said smoothly, although his eyes glittered with a dangerous light. "This is a pleasant spectacle for a fond husband's eyes! Had I less confidence in my lady wife, or were I inclined to jealousy, I might fancy that Kathleen was coquetting with her discarded lover."

Lord Treham's face flushed. He fell full Kathleen's hands, and confronted Bassantyne with imperious sternness.

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