

If she had been an experienced maid, she would not have stopped to wonder and displayed no hesitation. But now she bethought herself of Mrs. Timmins' instruction and opened her lips to utter the "did you ring, sir?" It seemed absurd to say that and while she wondered why he did not speak to her she brought her soft lips together in a characteristic little contraction which she had inherited from her mother. At the sight of it Milluns drew in his breath with a sharp hiss. "That trick, too!" he ejaculated, almost collapsing in his chair.

Mary's warm heart was touched at the sight of such feebleness, and she found her tongue at last. "What can I do for you, sir?" she said, stepping forward.

"How old are you?" he demanded. "What an odd question; he must be getting childish. I'll just have to humor him, poor, old fellow. I am twenty."

"Twenty, eh? Seventy-two, hum—no, impossible, and still perhaps," he muttered to himself, still staring at her. His eyes slowly took on a soft light. The cold, almost cruel, look about his thin lips vanished, and a half smile took its place, which made it, old as he was, very attractive.

"What a fine-looking man he must have been in his youth, but how queerly he behaves! What does he want of me, I wonder?"

"Please raise the shade a little, Miss—Miss—"

"Mary!" she supplied, politely obeying.

"Mary! Did you say Mary?"

"Yes, it is a common name."

"True, certainly! It is a common name."

He watched her graceful movements fascinated. "Come and sit down here." He indicated a chair in the full path of the sunshine. Mary seated herself, not as a maid might, he noted but as one to the manner born.

"How long have you been in service?" he asked.

"Only the short time I have been here."

"Ah! I thought you were no servant. Your people—your mother—does she live here?"

"No, she is dead. They are all dead except my little sister, and she is at the convent."

He was silent awhile, leaning his head on his hand and screening his face. Mary felt vaguely troubled. Surely her affairs could not affect him and still her words seemed to have made him sad. What a strange person he was!

The wine William had poured for him stood within reach and presently he drank it, absently turning the glass and seeming to forget that he was not alone.

"What is your last name?" he asked at length.

"Bullene."

The glass fell to the floor and smashed to bits.

"What! What! Bullene? She married him?"

Completely surprised, Mary slid to her knees and began to collect the fragments of glass. It brought her very close to his chair and after a moment he leaned forward and put his hand beneath her chin, lifting her face and looking at it as one might look at that of a child.

There was something so gentle in the act, such anguish burned in his eyes, that she did not start or draw away but returned his gaze, her own eyes full of questioning sympathy.

"Same broad forehead, same eyes like purple pansies, same mouth," he whispered. "Mary, my Mary. Oh, God! No! Mary Bullene! Get away! I can't bear the sight of you, nor sound of your laugh of the dead in my garden. Go, go, go!" He pushed her roughly aside and turned his head away.

The action was so violent and unexpected that she lost her balance, and, in recovering it, cut her hand on a splinter of the glass. Too much surprised to think clearly, she slowly rose and retreated toward the door, binding her handkerchief on the cut as she went.

At the door he stopped her, hastening after her and laying hold of her

hand. "Oh, Mary, forgive me!" he said humbly. "Don't go. I must talk to you a little." She let him lead her back to the chair, feeling as if she were in a dream.

"You remind me of someone I used to know," he began, "and I am a little upset, so don't pay any attention to my rudeness, but tell me about yourself—your mother—everything. I wish to know."

"There is not much to tell. Did you know my mother? People used to say I looked like her."

"What was her maiden name?" said Milluns.

"It was Morton. Mama was not married until she was over thirty-five, so you see she was quite old before she died. Father died soon after my sister was born and left us very poor, but—"

"But what?" said Milluns quickly.

Mary flushed and hesitated, and then said frankly: "I was going to say that we didn't much mind, for he was never kind to mother, or us. After that we left the little town in Alberta, where we were all born, and got along as best we could. When poor mama died, I was almost glad, for she was never happy. Still she was once, she said, and, surely, she looks so here." Mary extended a large, old-fashioned locket which she wore concealed by her collar.

Milluns gave a cry of delight when he saw the face it held. "It is she! My Mary! Ah, my girl, my girl! I treated you badly and myself worse—and Bullene got you at last. If only I had gone back, as I promised, things might have been different now. Money! I sold myself and you for money. Mary—money," he said hoarsely, speaking to the face in the locket, his head bent and tears dripping through his fingers.

Mary watched him with a full heart, for she knew a little of her mother's romance. Enough to rejoice at the poetic justice of his grief.

It had been the old story of the love of the ambitious country boy and the prettiest girl in the village. He left to seek his fortune, vowing to return and claim her and she had promised to wait.

How long she had waited in vain, thought Mary bitterly, faithful through years of neglect and finally forgotten entirely. Years after her people had badgered her into marrying Tom Bullene who knew her story and made her suffer every day he lived.

SHIFT.

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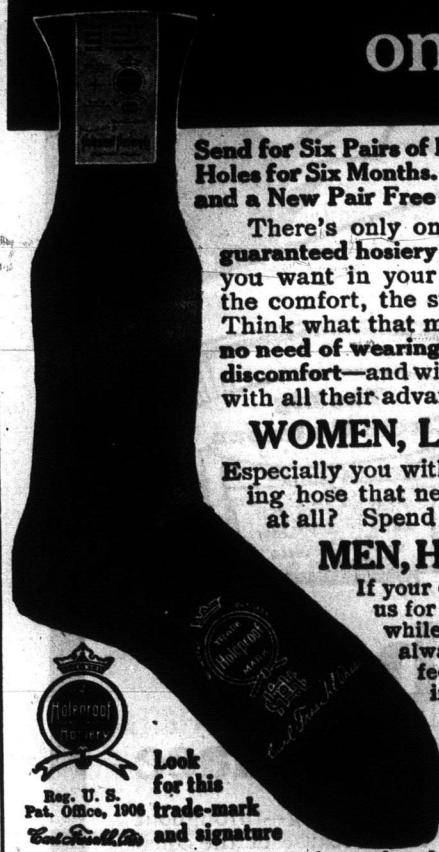
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