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The Heir of Bayneham

—AND—
 Lady Hutton's Ward.

CHAPTER X.

"Claude," continued Barbara, laying her hand gently upon his arm, "I tell you whom you love best in the world. It is that fair young girl you met in Brynmar woods, Hilda Hutton. You love her as you never have—never can love another."

"I should never have said so," replied Lord Bayneham sorrowfully. "I know it," said Barbara, "you would have married me and tried to forget her. I prefer making the sacrifice myself, Claude. It would be useless," she continued, "for me to affect that I do not love you. As long as I can remember you have been all the world to me. The strength and depth of my love will be best proved by what I am going to do. Your welfare and happiness are dearer to me than my own; therefore, I release you from your promise—from all the ties that bind you to me; I give you your freedom. You are at full liberty to love and marry whom you will, and I do this because I love you and wish to see you happy."

"But, Barbara," remonstrated Lord Bayneham, "I would never have asked for this—I cannot consent."

Even as he spoke Barbara saw a half flutter of joy in his face, and her own grew paler.

"I know that," she said, "but do you think, Claude, I could marry you, knowing full well that you love another? It would be impossible," she continued, for he made no reply; "if you were to kneel and abjure to be your wife I would not. I do not blame you for loving her; she is a thousand times more fair than I; but loving her, could you be so unjust as to offer to marry me?"

"I wish I were dead," cried Lord Bayneham; "I wish I had died rather than have brought unhappiness to you, Barbara. I do love you, but in a different way."

"I shall be very unhappy for a little time," said Miss Earle sorrowfully; "but then I am a brave woman, and brave women have to live down sorrow. All my happiness will come from seeing you happy."

"You are a noble woman, Barbara," said Lord Bayneham. "You are as noble as you are true."

He held both her hand in his, and for the first time his lips touched her brow, and Barbara grew deadly pale as he did so.

"Go now," she said gently, "and leave me to speak to Lady Bayneham."

Claude turned away; he could not have spoken another word. She watched him with eyes that grew dim with tears. How quietly he had taken his dismissal! He had nothing to say. With joy and sorrow strangely

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mingled in his heart, Lord Bayneham did not then know the value of what he on that morning lost.

CHAPTER XI.

Deep in Lord Bayneham's heart there lingered a half feeling of regret for Barbara. Not that he loved her; he had never cared more for her than he did at this present time. Her true nobility of character struck him as it had not done before. He could not quite forget her words—so true, so free from all affection, so full of love for him. While they lingered that day in his ears he did not seek Hilda.

Barbara Earle was not one who did anything imperfectly. The rest of that day—the one on which she had given her lover his freedom—was spent in her own room. What it cost no one ever knew. Barbara shut herself up with her sorrow, and spoke not a word of it. The morning after, when she came down to breakfast, there was new beauty in her face, the beauty of calm, serene resolve; the storm had passed over, and all outward trace of it had disappeared.

"We are going to Mr. Seaton's to-day, aunt," she said to Lady Bayneham. "You said two o'clock, I think. Are we to call for Lady Hutton?"

"No," replied the countess, "we are to meet her at the studio. I hope Miss Hutton's portrait will be a success; she has an exquisite face; and, Barbara, remind me that we have to call at Storr & Mortimer's to see about the resetting of the diamonds. The Bayneham diamonds are considered among the finest in England; you must wear them on your wedding-day."

Barbara smiled, and had Lady Bayneham watched her attentively she would have seen the firm lines of her face flushed deeply. The countess, serenely unconscious, continued her remarks.

"I should like to have your portrait, Barbara. Mr. Seaton is one of the first of living artists; we will speak to him about it to-day. We shall be side by side then in the great gallery."

Barbara made no reply. She was thinking of the fair young face that would be next to that of the stately lady before her, while she, Barbara Earle, would never be portrayed as one of that race. Claude walked unobtrusively up and down the room, longing to make an end of the painful scene, but not knowing how. At last, to his intense delight, Lady Bayneham rose and quitted the room, still serenely unconscious of all wrong.

"This is intolerable," he cried; "Barbara, I cannot forgive myself for allowing you to go through such a scene. My mother must be told at once."

Barbara raised her clear, dark eyes to his face, and though the warm tears shone brightly in them she smiled, and said bravely, "It could not be helped. Do not be vexed, Claude. I was wondering if diamonds looked so well with golden hair. And that reminds me that time is precious. Take a cousin's advice, and see Miss Hutton to-day. We may still call at Storr & Mortimer's, you know."

"But, Barbara," said Claude gently, "I think more of you than you do of yourself. I cannot bear to think of love or happiness while you are—" He stopped abruptly, not knowing quite what to say.

"While I am unhappy, you mean, I suppose," said Barbara half haughtily, yet with a smile of amusement. "How candid you are, Claude. Never fear for me. The past is all dead; its ghost will never haunt me. With all my heart I intend to help you, and when you marry Miss Hutton I shall stand by her side, for two reasons. One is that the sight of your happiness will more than repay me for any pain I may suffer; and the second is, that no one shall say Barbara Earle led like a love-sick schoolgirl. No one shall ever know the truth of this affair but you and I, Claude."

"The truth is," said her cousin with a smile, "that you have dismissed me. Your reasons for so doing concerns no one but yourself!"

bara; "she will take it better from me than from you. And now, Claude, go. I can see impatience in every line of your face. I venture to predict if you call you will find Miss Hutton at home."

For once Barbara was wrong. When Lord Bayneham reached Lady Hutton's he found both ladies absent, and was obliged to wait until two o'clock, when he intended to be at Mr. Seaton's. Nor was Barbara more fortunate. She made several efforts to obtain an interview with the countess, but on that particular morning her ladyship was unusually engaged, and when they left home Lady Bayneham was still in happy ignorance. Barbara knew her aunt too well to attempt any communication of that kind in an open carriage. She knew what the storm of anger would be.

"I should be better satisfied," said Mr. Seaton, as the group of ladies stood round his easel, "of Miss Hutton had the same bloom upon her face that she had when I first saw her. She looks pale—something like a drooping flower. Late hours and much dancing do not improve our fair and fashionable ladies."

Lady Hutton looked anxiously at her ward; then for the first time she noted how changed was the fair young face. There could be no mistake about it. Hilda might laugh and sing, but that look could only come from sorrow—sorrow too that had taken deep root. What could it be? Surely the child could not have fallen in love—she, so innocent, so fresh and pure, so untouched by the world, so utterly unconscious of all passion. Yet nothing but love could have stolen the bloom from that lovely face, and yet have left greater beauty in its place. When Mr. Seaton spoke a deep flush covered Hilda's face, and her eyes fell.

"The loss of a little color is easily remedied," said Barbara with a smile; "art can do anything where nature fails; there are plenty of blooming roses in that color-box, Mr. Seaton."

Lady Bayneham was busily engaged criticising Lady Diana Forecler's portrait.

"I call that a perfect work of art, Mr. Seaton," said her ladyship graciously; "without flattering Lady Diana you have brought out the chief beauties of her face. I should like my niece, Miss Earle, to have her portrait taken exactly in this style—it would suit her."

"Miss Earle's face is one of the few I should fear to undertake," said Mr. Seaton.

"Why?" asked Lady Bayneham in surprise.

"Because," replied the artist, "its beauty lies in the soul that shines through it. How can I reproduce that faithfully on canvas? It would not be a mere portrait, it would be what you have kindly called this, a work of art."

"Then a work of art let it be," said Lady Bayneham, looking up with wonder at the artist's enthusiasm. "We have some magnificent portraits at Bayneham Castle, and this one—"

(To be continued.)

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