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then, did you take such pains to give her a dose of medicine last night?" And Q entered from the room beyond.

"I didn't," said she. "Did I, Hannah—did I, poor girl?" stroking the hand that lay in hers with what appeared to be genuine sorrow.

"How came she by it then?"

"I don't know who you are, sir, but I can tell you this, the girl had no medicine."

"Yet I saw her swallow a powder."

"How could you see her do that? Hasn't she been shut up in this room?"

"Yes; but with a window like that in the roof, it isn't so very difficult to see into a room, madam."

"Oh," she cried, shrinking, "I have a spy in the house, have I? But I deserve it; I kept her imprisoned in four close walls and never came to look at her once all night. What was it you said that you saw her take? medicine?"

"I didn't say poison."

"But you meant it. You think she has poisoned herself and that I had a hand in it."

"No," I hastened to remark, "he says he saw the girl herself swallow something which he believes to have been the occasion of her death, and only asks you now where she obtained it?"

"How can I tell? I never gave her anything."

I believed her, and so felt unwilling to prolong the present interview. So motioning Q to depart upon his errand, I took Mrs. Belden by the hand and endeavored to lead her from the room. But she resisted, sitting down by the side of the bed, while Q, obdurate for the first time, would not move.

"Till that woman leaves the room, I don't."

Astonished, I left her side and crossed to him. "You carry your suspicions too far," I whispered.

"I cannot leave while she remains."

"Are you not assuming a trifle the master?"

"I don't know; perhaps. If I am, it is because I have something in my possession which excuses my conduct."

"What is that, the latter?"

"Yes."

"Let me see," I said.

"Not while that woman remains."

Seeing him implacable, I returned to Mrs. Belden.

"Mrs. Belden," I said, "your position makes it wiser for you not to invite suspicion by lingering any longer than is necessary in the room where her dead body lies. You can do no good here by staying. So listen to me, or I shall be obliged to leave you in charge of this man and go myself to inform the authorities."

This last argument seemed to affect her. "You have me in your power," she said, and left the room, seeing which Q handed me the letter.

"It was in the pocket of the dress Mrs. Belden had on last night. The other must be lying around somewhere, but I haven't had time to find it."

Scarcely noticing at the time with what deep significance he spoke, I opened the letter. It was the smaller of the two I had seen her draw under her shawl the day before at the post office, and read as follows:

"Dear, dear friend—

"I am in awful trouble. You who love me must know. I cannot explain, I can only make one prayer. Destroy what you have, instantly, without question or hesitation. The consent of anyone else has nothing to do with it. You must obey. I am lost if you refuse. Do then what I ask and save

"One who loves you."

It was addressed to Mrs. Belden; there was no signature or date, only the postmark, New York; but I knew the handwriting. It was Mary Leavenworth's.

"A damning letter!" came in the dry tones which Q seemed to think fit to adopt on this occasion. "And a damning bit of evidence against the one who wrote it, and the woman who received it!"

"A terrible piece of evidence indeed!" said I, "if I did not happen to know that this letter refers to the destruction of something radically different from what you suspect. It alludes to some papers in Mrs. Belden's charge."

"Are you sure, sir?"

"Quite; but we will talk of this hereafter. It is time you sent your telegram and went for the coroner."

And with that we parted.

I found Mrs. Belden bewailing her situation. Unhesitatingly I offered to do what I could for her, providing she would treat me with perfect frankness. To my great relief she expressed her strong desire to tell all she knew. "But first, she whispered, "tell me, for God's sake, how those girls are situated? I have not dared to ask or write. The papers say a good deal about Eleanore, but nothing about Mary; and yet Mary, herself, writes only of her own peril."

"Mrs. Belden," I said, "Eleanore Leavenworth has got into her present difficulty by not telling all that was required of her. Mary Leavenworth—, but I cannot speak of her till I know what you have to divulge. What we want to learn from you, is how you became connected with this affair, and what it was that Hannah knew which caused her to leave New York and take refuge here."

But Mrs. Belden, clasping and unclasping her hands, met my gaze with one full of the most apprehensive doubt.

"You will never believe me," she cried, "but I don't know what Hannah knew. She merely said that Miss Leavenworth wished me to secrete her for a short time, and I, because I loved Mary Leavenworth, weakly consented."

"Do you mean to say," I interrupted, "that after you knew of the murder, you, at the mere expression of Miss Leavenworth's wishes, continued to keep this girl concealed, without asking her any questions?"

"Oh, sir," she gasped, "I thought I understood it all; that Mary, the bright young creature, who had stooped from her lofty position to make use of me and love me, was in some way linked to the criminal, and that it would be better for me not to know any more, only to do what I was bid, and trust it would prove all right, I did not reason about it; I only followed my impulse."

"And you love Mary Leavenworth, a woman whom you yourself seem to consider capable of a great crime."

"Oh, I didn't say that. She might be in some way connected with it, without being the perpetrator. She could never be that, she is too dainty."

"Mrs. Belden," I said, "what do you know of Mary Leavenworth, which makes even that supposition possible?"

"Well," said she, "it is this, that Mary was in an emergency from which nothing but her uncle's death could release her."

"Ah, how's that?"

But here we were interrupted by the sound of steps, and, looking out, I saw Q entering the house alone. Leaving Mrs. Belden, I stepped into the hall.

"Well," said I, "haven't you found the coroner?"

"No, gone away to look after a man that was found some ten miles from here, lying in a ditch beside a yoke of oxen."

"Have you telegraphed to Mr. Gryce?" I asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you think he will come?"

"Yes, sir, if he has to hobble on two sticks."

"At what time do you look for him?"

"You will look for him as early as three o'clock. I shall be among the mountains, ruefully eyeing a broken-down team or some such thing."

Going back to Mrs. Belden, I explained that the coroner was out of town; that we had, therefore, some hours before us which could not be better employed than by her giving me a full account of what she knew concerning the matter in hand.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Mrs. Belden's Narrative.

It will be a year next July, since I first saw Mary Leavenworth. I was living at that time a most monotonous existence. Loving what was beautiful, hating what was sordid, drawn by nature toward all that was romantic and uncommon, but doomed by my straitened position and the loneliness of my widowhood, to spend my days in the weary round of plain sewing. I had begun to think that the shadow of a humdrum old age was settling down upon me, when one morning Mary Leavenworth stepped across the threshold of my door, and with one smile, changed the whole tenor of my life.

This may seem exaggeration to you especially when I tell you that her errand was simply one of business, she having heard I was handy with my needle. The fact is, I was dazzled by

her beauty and her charms. And when, a few days after, she came again, and, crouching down on the stool at my feet, asked leave to sit with me awhile and rest, saying she so longed at times to run away and hide with some one who would let her act like the child she was. I experienced for the moment, I believe, the truest happiness of my life.

The next day saw her in the same place; and the next.

But the fourth day she was not there, nor the fifth, nor the sixth, and I was beginning to feel the old shadow settling back upon me, when one night she came stealing in at the front door, and, creeping up to my side, put her hands over my eyes with such a low, ringing laugh, that I started.

"You don't know what to make of me!" cried she, throwing aside her cloak, and revealing herself in the full splendor of evening attire. "I don't know what to make of myself, only," she whispered, "I felt that I must run away, and tell some one that for the first time in my life I am fully alive; that a certain pair of eyes have been looking into mine, and that not Mary of Scots ever felt herself more of the sovereign or more the woman than I do to-night."

"And so the Prince has come for you?" I whispered.

"I don't know, I am afraid not. I—I don't think anything about that. Princes are not so easily won," she murmured.

"What, are you going?" I said, "and alone? Let me accompany you."

But she only shook her fairy head, and replied: "No, no; that would be spoiling the romance indeed. I have come upon you like a sprite, and like a sprite will I go." And flashing like the moonbeam she was, she glided out into the night and floated away down the street.

When she next came, I observed a feverish excitement in her manner that assured me that her heart had been touched by her lover's attentions. Indeed, she hinted as much before she left, saying in a melancholy tone, when I spoke of kisses and marriage, "I shall never marry!"

"And why? What reason can there be for such rosy lips saying their possessor will never marry?"

"I said I should never marry, because I have been so weak as to admire a man whom my uncle will never allow me to marry."

And she rose as if to go, but I drew her back. "Whom your uncle will not allow you to marry?" I repeated.

"Why, because he is poor?"

"He is an Englishman," cried she, in the same bitter tone as before. "In saying that, I say it all. Uncle will never let me marry an Englishman."

I looked at her in amazement. Such a puerile reason as that had never entered my mind.

"He has an absolute mania on the subject," resumed she. "I might as well ask him to allow me to drown myself as to marry an Englishman."

"But that is mere tyranny! Why should he hate the English so? And why, if he does, should you feel yourself obliged to gratify him?"

"Why? Shall I tell you, auntie?" she said, flushing.

"Yes," I returned; "tell me."

"Well, then, if you want to know the worst of me, I hate to incur my uncle's displeasure, because I know that if I should marry contrary to his wishes he would leave me penniless."

"But," I cried, my romance a little dampened by this admission, "you tell me Mr. Clavering has enough to live upon, so you would not want; and if you love—"

"You don't understand," she said; "Mr. Clavering is not poor, but uncle is rich. I shall be a queen!" There she paused, trembling and falling on my breast. "Oh, it sounds mercenary, I know," she sobbed, "but it is the fault of my bringing up. I have been taught to worship money. And yet"—her whole face softening with the light of another emotion—"I cannot say to Henry Clavering, 'Go! I love my riches better than you!' I cannot, oh, I cannot!"

Then with a change in her mood she turned quickly round with a half-suspicious look, saying lightly:

"My dear old Mamma Hubbard looks horrified. She did not know she had such a very unromantic little wretch for a listener."

(To be continued.)

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