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**The Broken Circle!**

CHAPTER XXI.  
"Most likely," answered Sir Arthur, briefly again.

The duke went on in his usual amiable manner, making very mild and pointless comments, which elicited but monosyllabic replies.

"I see you are busy," said his grace. "We will discuss the question more fully after dinner."  
Sir Arthur groaned as his friend went out. "Now surely I shall remain uninterrupted," he thought.

Fate was against him this morning, for the fourth time the door opened. It was Leah who now appeared. She was in her favorite colors of amber and white, with creamy roses at her throat. She did not observe the screen, much less wonder if any one were behind it. She knew it was a favorite recess of her uncle's, but she was not thinking of him. He recognized the gentle footstep, but her presence did not disturb him—he loved her too well, and he was accustomed to it; he did not think it necessary to tell her he was there.

For ten minutes there was almost complete silence. He could hear the sound of Leah's pen. She was writing rapidly. Then suddenly the door opened, and Sir Arthur's smothered groan was lost in the voice of the speaker. "Shall I disturb you Miss Hatton?" It was Sir Basil who put the question. "I am in trouble, from which a lady alone can release me."

"I am glad you sought me," she said. "And for the first time the general was struck with something peculiar in the tone of her voice as she answered him. "What can I do for you?" she asked.

"There is an old proverb which says that a stitch in time saves nine. Will you make that first stitch now, and save the nine hereafter, Miss Hatton?" "Of course I will," she replied.

"Where is the stitch needed?" "In this driving-glove," he replied; "the button is nearly off. Would you be so kind as to fasten it?" Leah laughed blithely.

"Certainly," she said, as she took the yellow driving-glove that he held out to her. "Will you excuse me one minute while I find needle and thread?" she added.

She went away, leaving Sir Basil looking over an open volume that lay upon the table.

"I hope," thought the general to himself, "that this good fellow will not find me out and begin to air his ideas on Indian politics to me."

But Sir Basil was in happy ignorance of the general's proximity. He read a few lines in the open volume, hummed a favorite air to himself, and then Leah returned.

"I am sorry to have kept you waiting," she said. "I will release you now in a few minutes."

The slender fingers soon accomplished their task. She held out the glove to him, and as she did so, her eyes fell on the spray of stephanotis that he wore in his coat.

"Your flower is faded," she said. Let me give you another. I have a superstition that it is unlucky to wear faded flowers.

"By all means replace it, if you will be good enough," he responded. She took the spray of stephanotis from him, and laid it upon the table. From one of the vases she chose a beautiful moss-rosebud, fresh as the dawn, and fastened it in his coat for him.

He thanked her briefly, stood talking to her for some few minutes, and then went away.

Sir Arthur, looking over the screen, was about to thank Heaven that he was gone; but no word came from his lips—he was stricken dumb.

What was she doing—his proud, beautiful niece—whose love no man had been able to win, whose smiles had been sought as a priceless boon? She had never seemed to care for love or admiration, for lovers or marriage. She had moved through the brilliant world like an ice-queen. What was she doing?

She had taken the withered flower in her hands, and was kneeling down by the table and covering the faded spray with kisses and tears.

"Oh, my love," she sighed, "my love, if you only loved me! But I am less to you than the withered flower you have thrown away."

The general would have spoken then and have let Leah know that he had overheard her, but surprise and wonder kept him silent. He saw her kiss the open volume where Sir Basil's hand had rested.

"I shall die," she sobbed, "just as this flower has died, and just as far from his heart! Oh, cruel world! I have asked but for one thing and it has been denied me. I wish I had never been born. Oh, my love, why can you not love me? I am fair enough for others, why not for you? I can win other hearts, why not yours? I would give my life for your love!"

The low smothered sound of her bitter sobbing mingled with the song of the birds and the whisper of the wind; it smote the heart of the old soldier with unutterable pain. He had rescued her from what he thought a shameful life, adopted her, and given her his love and protection; he had made her heiress of his vast fortune; and this was all that had come of it, this was the end of all his hopes for her. She was wearing her heart and her life away for a love that could never be hers, or at least, that was not hers. From the sight of the kneeling figure, the clasped hands, the proud head so despairingly bent, the general turned with tears in his eyes.

"If I could but die," she said to herself, "and be at rest; if I could but sleep and never wake; if I could but hide my love, and sorrow and pain!"

He was tempted to go to her, to take her in his arms and try to comfort her, but a sense of delicacy forbade him. She was so proud and sensitive, what would she think or feel if she

knew that he had possession of her secret? Yet the bitter long-drawn sob, fell on his ear and tortured him. He could not help her. He would not for the world let her know that he had overheard her; so he laid down his newspaper and passed noiselessly out through the open window on to the lawn, and not until he had walked some little distance did he feel at ease.

"I would not have her guess that I have been a witness of that scene for treble my fortune, poor child!" he murmured.

This was her fate—brilliant, beautiful, worshipped and wretched. This was the love he had never appreciated, never even understood. How strong, and deep and terrible it must be thus to torment one on whom the brightest gift of earth had been bestowed. He forgot the Indian news—all that had interested and puzzled him. So this was Leah's secret—she loved Sir Basil, and he did not love her!

"Poor child, poor child!" muttered the general. "How distressed she was. No wonder she loves him; he is the finest young fellow I have ever met. Any woman might love him. The wonder is why he does not love her. Perhaps," thought the simple old soldier, "he is like me. I did not understand such things until they were pointed out to me. I should never have proposed to dear Lady Bourgoyne if Major Wratte had not told me that she loved the very ground I stood upon. After that it was plain sailing. It may be the same with Sir Basil. Something must be done. It is a sad thing when girls lose their mothers; it is only women who understand each other. If Doris were here, she would know what to do."

His heart was heavy. He had meant this girl's lot to be so fair, and she was so unhappy. He grew nervous at the thought of meeting her again; but to his surprise, when he saw her at the luncheon table, there was no trace of sorrow on her beautiful face. She looked sadder and prouder than usual, but there was no sign of love-sickness about her.

"Who can understand women?" said Sir Arthur, appealing to some invisible power. They were beyond him altogether.

(to be continued.)

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