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One in a Thousand, BUT TRUE TO THE LAST

CHAPTER II. HE NEVER CAME!

So father lifts her out of the cab and carries her upstairs into the drawing-room, where he places her on the sofa, and sits down beside her. When Theo sees who it is, she gives a little cry, and buries her face on his shoulder.

"Oh, daddy, daddy!" she sobs; "he never came!"

"Who, my lamb?"

"He—he never came! Oh, why did he never come?"

"Because he is a villain, my darling. Because he is some low snob who has played a trick upon you—probably done it for a wager, to show how great a fool he could make of you."

Theo shivers through all her slight young body, and gathers herself together away from her father's arms.

"Daddy," she says, gravely, "do you really think that was the reason he did not come?"

"I do."

With some difficulty, she rises to her feet, and goes up to Mrs. Dickenson, who stands on the hearth rug.

"You have always been very kind and good to me," she says, humbly, "and I have rewarded you very ill. I hope you will forgive me, for I have been very bitterly punished. I am

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"I wonder who the man is?" says Loys, musingly. "How very strange that daddy did not tell us!"

"It is, rather; but, then, he wrote in a great hurry, and I suppose he thought we could hear it all next week."

"Dear, pretty Theo," says Loys warmly; "I am glad! I was so afraid she would be pining away after that wretch. Do you remember the night before she went that I asked her if she really cared for him, and she said, 'I shall cease to love him when I die?' I dare say she laughs at herself now, though, of course she really meant it all then."

"Oh, that's the man," says father; "Lord Lasselles!"

"Theo's man?" I say, aghast.

"Yes, dear."

"Good Heaven!" I mutter, angrily. "She is easily consoled!"

"As we come through the station gate together, father says, as cheerfully as he can:

"Here are my babies, Lasselles—Loys and Audrey!"

Lord Lasselles lifts his hat two inches from his head, and informs Loys that the horses are fresh—very fresh, in fact, too fresh for him to get down. Then he puts his cigar back into his mouth, and with his whip flicks the flies buzzing about the horses' heads.

Loys and I, when the luggage is in, pack ourselves behind, father mounts up on the box, and we are off.

Then Loys looks at me blankly.

"Ugh, what a beast!" I relieve myself by saying.

"Hush; he will hear you!" admonishes Loys, glancing at our future brother apprehensively.

"I don't care," I say, recklessly. "Theo must be mad to go and marry a vulgar little stump like that. She is doing it out of pique."

"He is a lord," says Loys; "but—"

"I am ashamed of Theo!" I cry, sully; "selling herself for an empty title and a handful of money—just like a Circassian or a heathen Chinese!"

The drive home is not a very long one, and when we draw up at the door, I do not spring out to greet Theo as eagerly as I had done at the station. I wait until Lord Lasselles comes round and helps me down; and I decide that I like his face less the nearer inspection I have of it. Then I walk leisurely into the hall, where Theo comes out from the drawing-room quickly. The instant I see her I forget that I am angry and disappointed, for something in her face puts all that aside, and I rush impulsively toward her, and fling my arms about her neck. For an instant she clasps me closely to her, and then puts me resolutely away, as if she were afraid to keep me there longer.

Loys and the others come in, and she becomes cold and dignified. I perceive that Theo's youth has passed away from her, and that she has become a woman of the world—highly fashionable in matters of dress, polished to the last degree in manners, a little artificial, and as hard and frigid as a statue of marble.

When Theo has kissed Loys, we all go back with her into the drawing-room. She sits down upon a low seat near the large bay window, and Lord Lasselles at once draws a chair close up to hers. He has thrown his cigar away before entering the room, so now I am able to get a clearer view of his face.

I decide that he looks better in a hat than without one—and that is not saying much in his favor. He is a light-colored man; if he were dark, he would be utterly repulsive. His eyes are set much too closely together; they are not large, but appear smaller than they are, by reason of being so deeply set. His nose is of no particular shape, but considerably too small for the rest of his face, and his mouth is huge; besides being huge, it is coarse and heavy. I look from him to Theo, and I shiver. How, after daily seeking her own image in the glass, she can have consented to take such a man for a husband, I cannot tell! Perhaps she thinks his face will serve to brighten the beauty of hers. Who can say? But, then, that tells another way—and, surely, he must have sense enough to know that his ugliness would be less apparent near a plainer woman.

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He is looking at Theo now, not at me.

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