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## THE NEW MAGDALEN.

BY WILKIE COLLINS.

SECOND SCENE.—*Mablethorpe House.*

CHAPTER XVIII.—(Continued.)

So far as he could estimate them, the probabilities were that the stranger from Mannheim had already made her way into the house; that she had been listening in the billiard-room; that she had found time enough to escape him on his approaching to open the door; and that she was now (in the servant's phrase) "somewhere in the grounds," after eluding the pursuit of the lodge-keeper's wife.

The matter was serious. Any mistake in dealing with it might lead to very painful results.

If Julian had correctly anticipated the nature of the confession which Mercy had been on the point of addressing to him, the person whom he had been the means of introducing into the house was—what she had vainly asserted herself to be—no other than the true Grace Roseberry.

Taking this for granted, it was of the utmost importance that he should speak to Grace privately, before she committed herself to any rashly-renewed assertion of her claims, and before she could gain access to Lady Janet's adopted daughter. The landlady at her lodgings had already warned him that the object which she held steadily in view was to find her way to "Miss Roseberry," when Lady Janet was not present to take her part, and when no gentlemen were at hand to protect her. "Only let me meet her face to face," (she had said), "and I will make her confess herself the impostor that she is!" As matters now stood, it was impossible to estimate too seriously the mischief which might ensue from such a meeting as this. Everything now depended on Julian's skilful management of an exasperated woman; and nobody, at that moment, knew where the woman was.

In this position of affairs, as Julian understood it, there seemed to be no other alternative than to make his inquiries instantly at the lodge, and then to direct the search in person.

He looked towards Mercy's chair as he arrived at this resolution. It was a cruel sacrifice of his own anxieties and his own wishes that he deferred continuing the conversation with her, from the critical point at which Lady Janet's appearance had interrupted it.

Mercy had risen while he had been questioning the servant. The attention which she had failed to accord to what had passed between his aunt and himself, she had given to the imperfect statement which he had extracted from the man. Her face plainly showed that she had listened as eagerly as Lady Janet had listened; with this remarkable difference between them, that Lady Janet looked frightened, and that Lady Janet's companion showed no signs of alarm. She appeared to be interested; perhaps anxious—nothing more.

Julian spoke a parting word to his aunt. "Pray compose yourself," he said. "I have little doubt, when I can learn the particulars, that we shall easily find this person in the grounds. There is no reason to be uneasy. I am going to superintend the search myself. I will return to you as soon as possible."

Lady Janet listened absently. There was a certain expression in her eyes which suggested to Julian that her mind was busy with some project of its own. He stopped as he passed Mercy, on his way out by the billiard-room door. It cost him a hard effort to control the contending emotions, which the mere act of looking at her now awakened in him. His heart beat fast, his voice sank low, as he spoke to her:

"You shall see me again," he said. "I never was more in earnest in promising you my truest help and sympathy that I am now."

She understood him. Her bosom heaved painfully; her eyes fell to the ground—she made no reply. The tears rose in Julian's eyes as he looked at her. He hurriedly left the room.

When he turned to close the billiard-room door, he heard Lady Janet say, "I will be with you again in a moment, Grace; don't go away."

Interpreting these words as meaning that his aunt had some business of her own to attend to in the library, he shut the door.

He had just advanced into the smoking-room beyond, when he thought he heard the door opened again. He turned round. Lady Janet had followed him.

"Do you wish to speak to me?" he asked. "I want something of you," Lady Janet answered, "before you go."

"What is it?"

"Your card."

"My card?"

"You have just told me not to be uneasy,"

said the old lady. "I am uneasy, for all that. I don't feel as sure as you do that this woman really is in the grounds. She may be lurking somewhere in the house, and she may appear when your back is turned. Remember what you told me."

Julian understood the allusion. He made no reply.

"The people at the police-station close by," pursued Lady Janet, "have instructions to send an experienced man, in plain clothes, to any address indicated on your card the moment they receive it. That is what you told me. For Grace's protection, I want your card before you leave us."

It was impossible for Julian to mention the reasons which now forbade him to make use of his own precautions—in the very face of the emergency which they had been especially intended to meet. How could he declare the true Grace Roseberry to be mad? How could he give the true Grace Roseberry into custody? On the other hand, he had personally pledged himself (when the circumstances appeared to require it) to place the means of legal protection from insult and annoyance at his aunt's disposal. And now, there stood Lady Janet, unaccustomed to have her wishes disregarded by anybody, with her hand extended, waiting for the card!

What was to be done? The one way out of the difficulty appeared to be to submit for the moment. If he succeeded in discovering the missing woman, he could easily take care that she should be subjected to no needless indignity. If she contrived to slip into the house in his absence, he could provide against that contingency by sending a second card privately to the police-station, forbidding the officer to stir in the affair until he had received further orders. Julian made one stipulation only, before he handed his card to his aunt.

"You will not use this, I am sure, without positive and pressing necessity," he said. "But I must make one condition. Promise me to keep my plan for communicating with the police a strict secret."

"A strict secret from Grace?" interposed Lady Janet. (Julian bowed.) "Do you suppose I want to frighten her? Do you think I have not had anxiety enough about her already? Of course I shall keep it a secret from Grace?"

Reassured on this point, Julian hastened out into the grounds. As soon as his back was turned, Lady Janet lifted the gold pencil-case which hung at her watch-chain, and wrote on her nephew's card (for the information of the officer in plain clothes): "You are wanted at Mablethorpe House." This done, she put the card into the old-fashioned pocket of her dress, and returned to the dining-room.

Grace was waiting, in obedience to the instructions which she had received.

For the first moment or two, not a word was spoken on either side. Now that she was alone with her adopted daughter, a certain coldness and hardness began to show itself in Lady Janet's manner. The discovery that she had made, on opening the drawing-room door, still hung on her mind. Julian had certainly convinced her that she had misinterpreted what she had seen; but he had convinced her against her will. She had found Mercy deeply agitated; suspiciously silent. Julian might be innocent (she admitted)—there was no accounting for the vagaries of men. But the case of Mercy was altogether different. Women did not find themselves in the arms of men without knowing what they were about. Acquitting Julian, Lady Janet declined to acquit Mercy. "There is some secret understanding between them," thought the old lady, "and she's to blame; the women always are!"

Mercy still waited to be spoken to; pale and quiet, silent and submissive. Lady Janet, in a highly uncertain state of temper—was obliged to begin.

"My dear!" she called out sharply.

"Yes, Lady Janet."

"How much longer are you going to sit there, with your mouth shut up and your eyes on the carpet? Have you no opinion to offer on this alarming state of things? You heard what the man said to Julian—I saw you listening. Are you horribly frightened?"

"No, Lady Janet."

"Not even nervous?"

"No, Lady Janet."

"Ha! I should hardly have given you credit for so much courage after my experience of you a week ago. I congratulate you on your recovery."

"Thank you, Lady Janet."

"I am not so composed as you are. We were an excitable set in my youth—and I haven't got the better of it yet. I feel nervous. Do you hear? I feel nervous."

"I am sorry, Lady Janet."

"You are very good. Do you know what I am going to do?"

"No, Lady Janet."

"I am going to summon the household. When I say the household, I mean the men; the women are no use. I am afraid I fail to attract your attention?"

"You have my best attention, Lady Janet."

"You are very good again. I said the women were of no use."

"Yes, Lady Janet?"

"I mean to place a man-servant on guard at

every entrance to the house. I am going to do it at once. Will you come with me?"

"Can I be of any use if I go with your ladyship?"

"You can't be of the slightest use. I give the orders in this house—not you. I had quite another motive in asking you to come with me. I am more considerate of you than you seem to think—I don't like leaving you here by yourself. Do you understand?"

"I am much obliged to your ladyship. I don't mind being left here by myself."

"You don't mind? I never heard of such heroism in my life—out of a novel! Suppose that crazy wretch should find her way in here?"

"She would not frighten me this time, as she frightened me before."

"Not too fast, my young lady! Suppose — Good Heavens! now I think of it, there is the conservatory. Suppose she should be hidden in there? Julian is searching the grounds. Who is to search the conservatory?"

"With your ladyship's permission, I will search the conservatory."

"You!"

"With your ladyship's permission."

"I can hardly believe my own ears! Well, 'Live and learn' is an old proverb. I thought I knew your character. This is a change!"

"You forget, Lady Janet (if I may venture to say so), that the circumstances are changed. She took me by surprise on the last occasion; I am prepared for her now."

"Do you really feel as coolly as you speak?"

"Yes, Lady Janet."

"Have your own way, then. I shall do one thing, however, in case of your having over-estimated your own courage. I shall place one of the men in the library. You will only have to ring for him, if anything happens. He will give the alarm—and I shall act accordingly. I have my plan," said her ladyship, comfortably conscious of the card in her pocket. "Don't look as if you wanted to know what it is. I have no intention of saying anything about it—except that it will do. Once more, and for the last time—do you stay here? or do you go with me?"

"I stay here."

She respectfully opened the library door for Lady Janet's departure as she made that reply. Throughout the interview she had been carefully and coldly deferential; she had not once lifted her eyes to Lady Janet's face. The conviction in her that a few hours more would, in all probability, see her dismissed from the house, had of necessity fettered every word that she spoke—had morally separated her already from the injured mistress whose love she had won in disguise. Utterly incapable of attributing the change in her young companion to the true motive, Lady Janet left the room to summon her domestic garrison, thoroughly puzzled, and (as a necessary consequence of that condition) thoroughly displeased.

Still holding the library door in her hand, Mercy stood watching with a heavy heart the progress of her benefactress down the length of the room, on the way to the front hall beyond. She had honestly loved and respected the warm-hearted, quick-tempered old lady. A sharp pang of pain wrung her, as she thought of the time when even the chance utterance of her name would become an unpardonable offence in Lady Janet's house.

But there was no shrinking in her now from the ordeal of the confession. She was not only anxious, she was impatient for Julian's return. Before she slept that night, Julian's confidence in her should be a confidence that she had deserved.

"Let her own the truth, without the base fear of discovery to drive her to it. Let her do justice to the woman whom she has wronged, while that woman is still powerless to expose her. Let her sacrifice everything that she has gained by the fraud to the sacred duty of atonement. If she can do that, then her repentance has nobly revealed the noble nature that is in her; then, she is a woman to be trusted, respected, beloved." Those words were as vividly present to her, as if she still heard them falling from his lips. Those other words which had followed them, rang as grandly as ever in her ears: "Rise, poor wounded heart! Beautiful, purified soul, God's angels rejoice over you! Take your place among the noblest of God's creatures!" Did the woman live who could hear Julian Gray say that, and who could hesitate, at any sacrifice, at any loss, to justify his belief in her? "Oh!" she thought longingly, while her eyes followed Lady Janet to the end of the library, "if your worst fears could only be realised! If I could only see Grace Roseberry in this room, how fearlessly I could meet her now!"

She closed the library door, while Lady Janet opened the other door which led into the hall.

As she turned and looked back into the dining-room, a cry of astonishment escaped her.

There—as if in answer to the aspiration which was still in her mind; there, established in triumph, on the chair that she had just left—sat Grace Roseberry, in sinister silence, waiting for her.

(To be continued.)

## Varieties.

An engaged young gentleman got rather non-ly out of a little scrape with his intended. She taxed him with having kissed two ladies at some party at which she was not present. He owned it, but said that their united ages made only twenty-one. The simple-minded girl thought of ten and eleven, and laughed off her point. He did not explain that one was nineteen and the other two years of age. Wasn't it artful?

Suppose a man owns a skiff; he fastens the skiff to the shore with a rope made of straw; along comes a cow; cow gets into the boat; turns round and eats the rope; the skiff thus let loose, with the cow on board, starts down stream, and on its passage is upset; the cow is drowned. Now has the man that owns the cow got to pay for the boat, or the man that owns the boat got to pay for the cow?

Mendelssohn the philosopher—grandfather of the great musical composer—was, when a youth, clerk to a very rich but exceedingly commonplace, in fact stupid, employer. One day an acquaintance commiserated the clever lad on his position, saying, "What a pity it is that you are not the master, and he your clerk!" "Oh, my friend," returned Mendelssohn, "do not say that. If he were my clerk, what on earth could I do with him?"

In the recently published memoirs of Baron Stockmar we find the following story of the Princess Imperial of Germany, then Princess Royal of England, and a child: "Pratorius, one of the German secretaries of Prince Albert, was not a good-looking man. The queen was once reading the Bible with her little daughter, the princess. They came to the passage, 'God created man in his own image; in the image of God created he him.' Upon which the child, gifted with an early sense of beauty, exclaimed, 'But, mamma, surely not Dr. Pratorius!'"

Two SIDES TO A QUESTION.—An instance of a somewhat amusing nature occurred a short time since in one of the Midland counties of England. A magistrate, whose zeal in all reformatory and philanthropic matters has been conspicuously developed, was congratulating some of his brother justices on the great diminution of crime effected by recent legislation. In confirmation of his opinion he appealed to the clerk. "Do you not think, Mr. —, there has been a great diminution of criminals during the last twelve months?" "Thank God, no, sir!" devoutly exclaimed the clerk, who, it is needless to add, was paid by fees.

An old woman came to Flamstead, the first Astronomer Royal, to ask him whereabouts a certain bundle of linen might be, which she had lost. Flamstead determined to show the folly of that belief in astrology which had led her to Greenwich Observatory (under some misapprehension as to the duties of an Astronomer Royal). He "drew a circle, put a square into it, and gravely pointed out a ditch near her cottage, in which he said it would be found." He then waited until she should come back disappointed, and in a fit frame of mind to receive the rebuke he intended for her; but "she came back in great delight, with the bundle in her hand, found in the very place."

It must have been with infinite amusement that Henry Ward Beecher, during a late vacation, heard one of his own published sermons delivered in an obscure village. At the close of the service he accosted the divine, and said, "That was a fair discourse; how long did it take you to write it?" "Oh, I tossed it off one evening when I had leisure," was the reply. "Indeed," said Mr. Beecher; "it took me much longer than that to think out the very framework of the sermon." "Are you Henry Ward Beecher?" "I am," was the reply. "Well, then," said the unabashed preacher, "all that I have to say is that I ain't ashamed to preach one of your sermons anywhere."

At a recent dinner of the Salisbury Working Men's Constitutional Conservative Association, the Earl of Pembroke sang a comic song in the Wiltshire dialect with great spirit. The earl, who was received with enthusiastic rounds of applause, thanked them very much for the kind way in which they had received him. He really did not know what to say to them. He was once told a story about a great missionary meeting. All the missionaries came up one after another, delivered their reports, and told what they had seen, and what they thought about it. In the corner of the room they noticed a very quiet, lean, dark-brown man, half baked and dried, as if he had lived in all kinds of climates, and they asked him how it was that he had nothing to say to them. He thereupon gathered himself together, got up on the platform, and said, with a great stammer, "I-ladies and g-gentlemen, I-I can't say you a song, and I-I can't make you a s-speech; but if it will afford any amusement or s-satisfaction to the company, I-I-I have no objection to show my person as it has been t-tattooed by the natives."

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