

## THE LITTLE OLD SECRETARY

(CONTINUED.)

Lord Melton's keen glance and the slight asperity which had grown into his voice and manner passed away, and in a tone of the most fatherly kindness he continued, "And now about your brother. It was the most wonderful chance, my lighting on that history to tell you; for I had made up my mind to wait till I had got leisure to go over to Ireland myself to investigate the matter, rather than entrust the secret to any stranger. But your story of the famine, and of your father's and mother's quixotic conduct, as the world has called it, and the brave and honorable way in which your parents have met the pecuniary troubles that have in consequence fallen upon them, and have also taught their little daughter to meet them," he added, looking into Kathleen's eyes with an approving smile, "inspired me with so complete a confidence in their integrity and delicacy of feeling, that I felt I could trust them even better than I could trust myself."

"Oh! thank you for speaking so highly of my dearest father and darling mother," exclaimed Kathleen, tears of delight starting into her eyes; "they so thoroughly deserve it, and no one before has ever seemed to appreciate them."

"They have acted upon motives above the ordinary world," said Lord Melton, softly, "doing harm to themselves in order to do good to others. Perhaps I might not have appreciated them myself if I had not seen the effect of their teaching upon their child, at the very moment that I was seeking anxiously for a superior home for my little Eva. It is I who have cause to be grateful, my child," he added, with a bright smile, taking up Kathleen's hand and squeezing it gently. "But now tell me," he went on more gaily, "what brought the idea first into your brain that it was Ewan?"

"I don't know," said Kathleen, flushing with a sudden pain as the remembrance of those painful moments was renewed. "The instant you began about the young cadet it brought my brother to my mind. I felt hot all over; and a sort of feeling came over me that my fate was there, only waiting to seize upon me. Then when you described his words and bearing after he had been condemned by the court martial—Ewan's very self when he was god-mother's familiar words about our duty of asking for forgiveness—you had painted a picture to the life; what wonder if I recognized it with absolute certainty?"

"What do you propose to do about Cochrane's prize money?" asked Lord Melton. "Knowing nothing of where to find your poor brother, is there not risk, in revealing all you know to your father and mother, of opening up old wounds, while you have such meagre shreds of consolation with which to assuage them?"

"But surely we ought to return Captain Cochrane's money," objected Kathleen. "He gave it in the full belief that he had caused my brother's death, but now—"

"Harbor no such thought as that, my dear child," interrupted Lord Melton. "I know my nephew well enough to answer for him in this. I know that nothing would give him more pain than your refusing to accept what in his own words he expressed to me as the most inadequate reparation for this most cruel conduct towards your brother. If you compelled him to take it back, I know

that he would give it away to some work of charity."

"Can he ever be told of my brother's escape?" asked Kathleen softly.

"Yes, I will take care of that. Poor fellow, it will remove a heavy load from his heart, for he has suffered greatly."

"I think, then," resumed Kathleen, "it will be better to tell my parents. To know the whole truth will be a consolation to them. It will be an assurance that Ewan, however faulty, gained the love and even the esteem of his comrades. And, besides, I shall try and make them see that the money is a sort of reparation on poor Ewan's part. I do not know what state my father is in, and, of course, my mother will only let him know what will soothe him; but," she added, her voice shaking, and her earnest eyes becoming very tearful, "I feel certain that Ewan will never rest till he has seen his parents, and cried out to them, as he has done to his Father in heaven—"I am not worthy to be called thy son . . ."

The sentence died away on her lips. The picture of what that meeting would be overpowered her, and the tears rolled fast down her cheeks and choked her voice.

Lord Melton was glad to see her weep. It would do her good, and relieve her from the unnatural strain upon her feelings, which she had borne for so many days past. He took out a couple of letters from his travelling bag, and occupied himself in reading them and writing marginal notes on their edges. When his young companion had quite recovered her composure, he replaced them in his bag, and then he wrote a short pencil note and directed and stamped it.

"There now," he said, as he slipped the note into his pocket, "I will post that directly we arrive in Liverpool, and then I shall have nothing to do but to see you comfortably established on board your boat. I only regret that I have not the time to go with you. But it is impossible," he continued, with a sigh, "I must make you the messenger to your parents of my esteem and gratitude." He hesitated a moment, then added, "I think it would be as well not to mention my nephew's name in the story you have to tell them. Speak of it as a testimony of affectionate respect from one of his brother officers sent through me."

Kathleen looked up gratefully.

"You are sending me back to the ark with the olive branch, after all," she said. "That was my dearest father's last wish as I left him; and all this time I have been fancying the little glimmer of hope was growing fainter and fainter, till, at last, it seemed to go out. This money will put an end to all the harass about Dermot's Hill and, if it is not too late, it will give my father a chance of recovery. And then, the charge of Eva! My mother will be so glad, and I am so happy."

There was an end now of all reserve between the old soldier and the young girl, whose strength of principle had inspired him with perfect confidence, and whose simplicity and sorrows had won his fatherly compassion. Lord Melton talked to her freely of all his anxieties concerning Eva, who was the orphan child of an idolized sister—how she had become still dearer to him from the solace she had been to his lamented wife, after the loss of her own little girl—how, two years after his wife's death, he had been obliged to send her to England, and had placed her in a school

which had been highly recommended to him, and how she had come back to him nearly a year ago with brilliant accomplishments, but having received no education of mind and heart—how he felt she wanted a mother's training, and how anxious he was to find some one who would exercise a maternal influence over her.

"I came to England," he said, in conclusion, "determined to trust to no one's report, but to examine and to find out for myself. And when, Kathleen, you talked of your home and your mother, the conviction came to me that I had found exactly what I wanted."

How happy Kathleen was; how, in the interest with which she listened to him, she kept forgetting who her companion was, and caught herself several times calling him Mr. Everard instead of Lord Melton; and how more than delightful were his plans for their spending a year in Italy for her father's health, where she and Eva were to learn Italian and to have the best masters for music and painting. "And mind," wound up Lord Melton with a laugh, "your best picture is to be kept for the 'Old Sea King.'"

After this he went on to explain to her all the money arrangements he meant to make—"for Eva's benefit," he remarked—and especially that there was a certain sum that Kathleen was to see applied to the refurnishing of the dear old home at Dermot's Hill.

"You see," he said, with his accustomed tact, "I shall like Eva's future home to look cheery and homelike, so it is really my business. And I trust the expending of this little sum to you, my dear little friend, because you will understand, better than either of your parents, the pleasure it is to me to give expression to my admiration of their noble conduct, by in some measure restoring what they so generously stripped themselves of for others. So you will mind and see particularly about a grand piano and the pictures; and you will make your parents understand that this money is for that purpose and nothing else."

The old, child-like, unclouded face came back to Kathleen, as she discussed with Lord Melton how she could contrive to smuggle in the piano at once, unknown to her mother, so that she should find it in the drawing-room open, with her music on the desk, as if the sorrowful past had never been.

Lord Melton listened to her low, sweet laugh with infinite satisfaction.

"Kathleen, there were days last week when I feared I had quenched your youth," he remarked at last.

"You!" she cried in surprise. Then, catching his meaning, "I do hope you will never be sorry you have let us know the truth," she said, earnestly. "My mother always says, 'Anything for truth.' We know now how to pray for Ewan; we shall know better how to act. Besides, he will strive secretly to see us, I am certain, and then, oh! the joy of having to tell him, 'You are no longer a banished and outlawed man.'"

"But if you should have to wait many years before you see or hear of him?" questioned Lord Melton in a low voice.

"Then we shall wait patiently for God and trust in Him, and He will give us our heart's desire," replied Kathleen in a tone of deep reverence, and with a look of such calm and steadfast confidence that her companion wondered how one so young could be so strong.

A shade of deep thought gathered on Lord Melton's brow, and Kathleen perceiving that he was indisposed to talk any more, occupied herself in jotting down in a very business like way the various directions she had been listening to.

After a while Lord Melton looked at his watch and then consulted the train paper.

"It has almost come to last words, my child, and there is a special last word, Kathleen, which must be said. Eighteen years ago I took from her home and her people to be my wife, one not much older, and as innocent as you are now. I did my best to make her happy, but I failed. I failed, partly because from timidity she did not speak out, and I had not the most distant idea that I was compelling her to go against her principles. It is all too late to see it now, but it might have been so different! She was a Catholic, and I had promised never to interfere with her in any way in the practice of her faith. And I kept my promise to the letter, but I took no pains, as I might have done, to put the means of practising it in her way. In my secret heart I was glad when circumstances removed her far away from priests and churches. She was young; I wanted her to be gay; and in my folly I thought religion would make her gloomy. Not till we had been three years married, not till after the birth and death of our last child, did I become aware how the deprivation of its services and sacraments had saddened her young life. Then over the coffin of her dead baby she took courage and spoke. Poor, innocent young creature; there was one thing that especially troubled her through all the last year of failing health, and at last grew into a horror. The tenantry of her estate had been left in the hands of a bailiff, who had abused his trust, and under whom they had suffered greatly. My poor Mary somehow got intelligence that in their misery they had invoked justice on her head, and she felt herself weighed down by the curse of the poor. They thought, too, from never hearing from her, that she had apostatized from her creed, and she used to moan that no dew would fall upon her in the fires; that no voice of her own people would say, 'God rest her soul.'"

Lord Melton covered his face with his hands and was silent for a few moments; when he lifted his head to speak again, his lips quivered.

"I promised her," he said, softly, "with a heart wild in its regrets, that I would do all I could to re-establish her memory in the love and affection her people had once borne towards her. It was a sacred promise; but, except in removing the oppressive bailiff, and putting a kind one in his place, I have never exactly known how to fulfill it. Kathleen, I trust this to you. Eva has been brought up so differently; she would never know how to get at the hearts of the people. Will you teach her? Will you help her in this? Will you fill up all that may be wanting in her? You understand what my poor Mary felt."

"Perfectly," said Kathleen in a low tone of inexpressible sympathy.

She knew what it must have cost Lord Melton to re-open that deep wound, and she comprehended now why he had questioned her so closely about the famine, and yet seemed so irritated at what she said.

"I would have some simple memorial stone put up in the chapel of Ordara," she went on gently, "around which the people could pray; and I would have Masses said for her there;

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