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THE NEW MAGDALEN.

BY WILKIE COLLINS.

FIRST SCENE.—*The Cottage on the Frontier.*

CHAPTER IV.—(Continued.)

As to Grace, in the first place. What injury was she doing to a woman who was dead? The question answered itself. No injury to the woman. No injury to her relations. Her relations were dead also.

As to Lady Janet, in the second place. If she served her new mistress faithfully; if she filled her new sphere honourably; if she was diligent under instruction and grateful for kindness—if, in one word, she was all that she might be and would be in the heavenly peace and security of that new life—what injury was she doing to Lady Janet? Once more, the question answered itself. She might, and would, give Lady Jane cause to bless the day when she first entered the house.

She snatched up Colonel Roseberry's letter and put it into the case with the other papers. The opportunity was before her; the chances were all in her favour; her conscience said nothing against trying the daring scheme. She decided then and there:

"I'll do it!"

Something jarred on her finer sense, something offended her better nature as she put the case into the pocket of her dress. She had decided, and yet she was not at ease; she was not quite sure of having fairly questioned her conscience yet. What if she laid the letter-case on the table again, and waited until her excitement had all cooled down, and then put the contemplated project soberly on its trial before her own sense of right and wrong?

She thought once—and hesitated. Before she could think twice, the distant tramp of marching footsteps and the distant clatter of horses' hoofs were wafted to her on the night air. The Germans were entering the village! In a few minutes more they would appear in the cottage; they would summon her to give an account of herself. There was no time for waiting until she was composed again. Which should it be—the new life, as Grace Roseberry? or the old life, as Mercy Merrick?

She looked for the last time at the bed. Grace's course was run; Grace's future was at her disposal. Her resolute nature, forced to a choice on the instant, held by the daring alternative. She persisted in the determination to take Grace's place.

The tramping footsteps of the Germans came nearer and nearer. The voices of the officers were audible, giving the words of command.

She seated herself at the table, waiting steadily for what was to come.

The ineradicable instinct of the sex directed her eyes to her dress, before the Germans appeared. Looking it over to see that it was in perfect order, her eyes fell upon the red cross on her left shoulder. In a moment it struck her that her nurse's costume might involve her in a needless risk. It associated her with a public position; it might lead to inquiries at a later time, and those inquiries might betray her.

She looked round. The grey cloak which she had lent to Grace attracted her attention. She took it up, and covered herself with it from head to foot.

The cloak was just arranged round her when she heard the outer door thrust open, and voices speaking in a strange tongue, and arms grounded in the room behind her. Should she wait to be discovered? or should she show herself of her own accord? It was less trying to such a nature as hers to show herself than to wait. She advanced to enter the kitchen. The canvas curtain, as she stretched out her hand to it, was suddenly drawn back from the other side, and three men confronted her in the open doorway.

CHAPTER V.

THE GERMAN SURGEON.

The youngest of the three strangers—judging by features, complexion, and manner—was apparently an Englishman. He wore a military cap and military boots, but was otherwise dressed as a civilian. Next to him stood an officer in Prussian uniform, and next to the officer was the third and the oldest of the party. He also was dressed in uniform, but his appearance was far from being suggestive of the appearance of a military man. He halted on one foot, he stooped at the shoulders, and instead of a sword at his side he carried a stick in his hand. After looking through a large pair of tortoise-shell spectacles, first at Mercy, then at the bed, then all round the room, he turned with a cynical composure of manner to the Prussian officer, and broke the silence in these words:

"A woman ill on the bed; another woman in attendance on her, and no one else in the room. Any necessity, major, for setting a guard here?"

"No necessity," answered the major. He wheeled round on his heel and returned to the kitchen. The German surgeon advanced a

little, led by his professional instinct, in the direction of the bedside. The young Englishman, whose eyes had remained riveted in admiration on Mercy, drew the canvas screen over the doorway, and respectfully addressed her in the French language.

"May I ask if I am speaking to a French lady?" he said.

"I am an Englishwoman," Mercy replied.

The surgeon heard the answer. Stopping short on his way to the bed, he pointed to the recumbent figure on it, and said to Mercy, in good English, spoken with a strong German accent—

"Can I be of any use there?"

His manner was ironically courteous, his harsh voice was pitched in one sardonic monotony of tone. Mercy took an instantaneous dislike to this hobbling, ugly old man, staring at her rudely through his great tortoise-shell spectacles.

"You can be of no use, sir," she said, shortly. "The lady was killed when your troops shelled this cottage."

The Englishman started, and looked compassionately towards the bed. The German refreshed himself with a pinch of snuff, and put another question:

"Has the body been examined by a medical man?" he asked. Mercy ungraciously limited her reply to the one necessary word "Yes."

The present surgeon was not a man to be daunted by a lady's disapproval of him. He went on with his questions.

"Who has examined the body?" he inquired next.

Mercy answered, "the doctor attached to the French ambulance."

The German grunted in contemptuous disapproval of all Frenchmen and all French institutions. The Englishman seized his first opportunity of addressing himself to Mercy once more.

"Is the lady a countrywoman of ours?" he asked gently.

Mercy considered before she answered him. With the object she had in view, there might be serious reasons for speaking with extreme caution when she spoke of Grace.

"I believe so," she said. "We met here by accident. I know nothing of her."

"Not even her name?" inquired the German surgeon.

Mercy's resolution was hardly equal yet to giving her own name openly as the name of Grace. She took refuge in flat denial.

"Not even her name," she repeated obstinately.

The old man stared at her more rudely than ever—considered with himself—and took the candle from the table. He hobbled back to the bed, and examined the figure laid on it in silence. The Englishman continued the conversation, no longer concealing the interest that he felt in the beautiful woman who stood before him.

"Pardon me," he said; "you are very young to be alone in war-time, in such a place as this."

The sudden outbreak of a disturbance in the kitchen relieved Mercy from any immediate necessity for answering him. She heard the voices of the wounded men raised in feeble remonstrance, and the harsh command of the foreign officers, bidding them be silent. The generous instincts of the woman instantly prevailed over every personal consideration imposed on her by the position which she had assumed. Neckless whether she betrayed herself or not as nurse in the French ambulance, she instantly drew aside the canvas to enter the kitchen. A German sentinel barred the way to her, and announced, in his own language, that no strangers were admitted. The Englishman, politely interposing, asked if she had any special object in wishing to enter the room.

"The poor Frenchmen!" she said earnestly, her heart upbraiding her for having forgotten them. "The poor wounded Frenchmen!"

The German surgeon advanced from the bedside, and took the matter up before the Englishman could say a word more.

"You have nothing to do with the wounded Frenchmen," he croaked, in the harshest notes of his voice. "The wounded Frenchmen are my business, and not yours. They are our prisoners, and they are being moved to our ambulance. I am Ignatius Wetzel, chief of the medical staff—and I tell you this. Hold your tongue." He turned to the sentinel, and added in German: "Draw the curtain again; and if the woman persists, put her back into this room with your own hand."

Mercy attempted to remonstrate. The Englishman respectfully took her arm, and drew her out of the sentinel's reach.

"It is useless to resist," he said. "The German discipline never gives way. There is not the least need to be uneasy about the Frenchmen. The ambulance, under Surgeon Wetzel, is admirably administered. I answer for it, the men will be well treated." He saw the tears in her eyes as he spoke; his admiration for her rose higher and higher. "Kind as well as beautiful," he thought. "What a charming creature!"

"Well!" said Ignatius Wetzel, eyeing Mercy sternly through his spectacles. "Are you satisfied? And will you hold your tongue?"

She yielded; it was plainly useless to per-

sist. But for the surgeon's resistance, her devotion to the wounded men might have stopped her on the downward way that she was going. If she could only have been absorbed again, mind and body, in her good work as a nurse, the temptation might even yet have found her strong enough to resist it. The fatal severity of the German discipline had snapped asunder the last tie that bound her to her better self. Her face hardened as she walked away proudly from Surgeon Wetzel, and took a chair.

The Englishman followed her, and reverted to the question of her present situation in the cottage.

"Don't suppose that I want to alarm you," he said. "There is, I repeat, no need to be anxious about the Frenchmen, but there is serious reason for anxiety on your own account. The action will be renewed round this village by daylight; you ought really to be in a place of safety. I am an officer in the English army—my name is Horace Holmcroft. I shall be delighted to be of use to you, and I can be of use, if you will let me. May I ask if you are travelling?"

Mercy gathered the cloak which concealed her nurse's dress more closely round her, and committed herself silently to her first overt act of deception. She bowed her head in the affirmative.

"Are you on your way to England?"

"Yes."

"In that case, I can pass you through the German lines, and forward you at once on your journey."

Mercy looked at him in unconcealed surprise. His strongly-felt interest in her was restrained within the strictest limits of good breeding; he was unmistakably a gentleman. Did he really mean what he had just said?

"You can pass me through the German lines?" she repeated. "You must possess extraordinary influence, sir, to be able to do that."

Mr. Horace Holmcroft smiled.

"I possess the influence that no one can resist," he answered—"the influence of the Press. I am serving here as war-correspondent of one of our great English newspapers. If I ask him, the commanding officer will grant you a pass. He is close to this cottage. What do you say?"

She summoned her resolution—not without difficulty, even now—and took him at his word.

"I gratefully accept your offer, sir."

He advanced a step towards the kitchen, and stopped.

"It may be well to make the application as privately as possible," he said. "I shall be questioned if I pass through that room. Is there no other way out of the cottage?"

Mercy showed him the door leading into the yard. He bowed—and left her.

She looked furtively towards the German surgeon. Ignatius Wetzel was again at the bed, bending over the body, and apparently absorbed in examining the wound which had been inflicted by the shell. Mercy's instinctive aversion to the old man increased tenfold now that she was left alone with him. She withdrew uneasily to the window, and looked out at the moonlight.

Had she committed herself to the fraud? Hardly, yet. She had committed herself to returning to England—nothing more. There was no necessity, thus far, which forced her to present herself at Mablethorpe House, in Grace's place. There was still time to reconsider her resolution—still time to write the account of the accident, as she had proposed, and to send it with the letter-case to Lady Janet Roy. Suppose she finally decided on taking this course, what was to become of her when she found herself in England again? There was no alternative open, but to apply once more to her friend the Matron. There was nothing for her to do but to return to the Refuge!

The Refuge! The Matron! What past association with these two was now presenting itself uninvited, and taking the foremost place in her mind? Of whom was she now thinking, in that strange place, and at that crisis in her life? Of the man whose words had found their way to her heart, whose influence had strengthened and comforted her, in the chapel of the Refuge. One of the finest passages in his sermon had been especially devoted by Julian Gray to warning the congregation whom he addressed against the degrading influences of falsehood and deceit. The terms in which he had appealed to the miserable women round him—terms of sympathy and encouragement never addressed to them before—came back to Mercy Merrick as if she had heard them an hour since. She turned deadly pale as they now pleaded with her once more. "Oh!" she whispered to herself, as she thought of what she had purposed and planned; "what have I done? what have I done?"

She turned from the window with some vague idea in her mind of following Mr. Holmcroft and calling him back. As she faced the bed again, she also confronted Ignatius Wetzel. He was just stepping forward to speak to her, with a white handkerchief—the handkerchief which she had lent to Grace—held up in his hand.

(To be continued.)

Art and Literature.

Gounod has written a new chorus, "The Wolf and the Lamb," for the choral society at Spa.

The Milan public, enchanted with Signor Verdi's "Aida," have presented him with a splendidly jewelled sceptre.

Kopp, the great Paris Comedian, committed suicide recently owing to legal troubles, leaving a fortune of 150,000 francs.

The unveiling and presentation to the New York Municipality of Walter Scott's monument will take place to-day (Saturday).

A daughter of Signor Ardit, the celebrated composer and conductor, will appear for the first time this season in Paris at the Italiens.

His Excellency the Governor-General of Canada has given his special patronage to the Rosa d'Erina's musical evenings in Canada.

The autograph letters, orders, memoranda, etc., of the Czar Peter the Great, including those of a private as well as of a public character, are shortly to be published under the auspices of the Russian Government.

Henri Rochefort has received \$10,000 from a London publishing-house for the English translation of his "History of the Second Empire." The principal feature of the work is a detailed biography of the ex-Empress Eugénie previous to her marriage to Napoleon III.

It is proposed to organize an art association in Ontario under the name of "The Ontario Society of Arts." It will include in its membership all who follow art as a profession, whether male or female, including painters, sculptors, architects, civil engineers, draughtsmen and engravers.

Four thousand three hundred and sixteen works were published in Germany during the first six months of the present year. It is characteristic of the country that of these the greatest number—550 were works of instruction, and the next—500, theological publications, novels numbering only 135, and theatrical and musical works 131.

The Post-Laureate's new volume is to be published by Messrs. Strahan & Co., on the 24th of October. It will contain a new Arthurian Idyll, "Gareth," which will recount how that personage came to Court in disguise, served there, and at length, in face of scorn, approved himself a true knight. This, with "The Last Tournament," which will also be included in the new volume, completes the Arthurian series.

The exhibition of antiquities at the Hôtel de Ville, Paris, has just been enriched by a very valuable object, belonging to M. Cockuy—the sceptre of Mary Stuart. It is about thirty-two inches long, and artistically carved in ivory, with portraits of the Queen and her husband, as well as the emblems, devices, and arms of Scotland, England, and Francis I. of France. It bears the date of 1553, and is composed of four pieces, mounted in brass, and adorned with medallions in silver.

The recent fistic fizzle of that notorious bruiser, Mister James Mace, recalls a sentence written in 1864 by Charles Lever on Louis Napoleon, who was then at the pinnacle of his fame, but whom Lever always regarded and wrote of as a political charlatan. He says:—"Nothing shall persuade me that the Emperor of the French is other than a third-rate man, who might possibly have distinguished himself as a police functionary or a solicitor, but has as much claim to high statecraft as Jem Mace to be an authority on the Pentateuch."

John Walter, Esq., of the London Times, recently had all his literary and mechanical staff—over three hundred in number—at his country-seat, Bearwood Hall, and gave them a grand banquet. The only newspaper man in this country who does the same kind of thing, though on a larger scale, is Mr. Childs, of the Philadelphia Ledger. He takes his entire force once a year to Cape May, or some other cape, gives them a superb entertainment, makes many presents, and keeps the lives of his principal editors, cashiers, etc., well insured for the benefit of their families.

The well-known French novelist, the Vicomtesse Cisterne de Courtiras de Saint-Mars, alias the Comtesse Dash, has just died at Paris of rheumatic gout, at the age of sixty-seven. Her works were numerous, well written, and taking, although not of any striking importance, and in some cases not particularly remarkable for their morality. Her characters were principally drawn from the higher ranks of society, and her subjects frequently chosen from historical traditions, her style being in all cases especially easy and graceful. Amongst others of her writings we may mention "Madame de la Sablière," "La Princesse de Conti," "Le Nain du Diable," "La Pomme d'Éve," "Mlle. Robespierre," "La Belle aux Yeux d'or," and "Notre Dame des Belles Fontaines." The Countess, who, by-the-by, took to literature on account of great pecuniary losses, also collaborated with the elder Dumas in some of his writings.