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AGNES VINING—A CANADIAN TALE.

BY MRS. R. BOTHWELL, AMHERST ISLAND, ONT.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

My Dear Sister,

I received your letter two days ago, and if I have allowed forty-eight hours to elapse before answering it, it was that I might not scold you too much for considering it necessary to ask the question it contained. I have, however, reflected that all you do is wise and right, and take for granted you are so in this instance; and therefore answer you in one word: *yes*. Where should you find a home, but with your brother? Alone in the world as we are, and attached to each other as we have always been, I shall be but too happy to have my sister to share the home I have contrived to make for myself. Therefore I only add, come, and come at once.

I postpone all discussion on your letter until we meet. My poor father! He was a kind and indulgent parent to me while no one came between us. I know he loved me in spite of all; and deeply do I mourn his loss.

You say you have money enough for your present needs; but I know how fast it disappears, and enclose you all I can spare; it is but little, for you know I am a poor man, Agnes, and if you come to me you will find but a poor home. All I can offer you is a heartfelt welcome, and the freedom and independence you cannot enjoy in England now; but, if I know my sister, she values the one more than she fears the other.

I suppose you will not leave Mrs. Vining until her plans are formed; but when those are arranged, I shall expect you as soon after as you can come. It is an easy voyage to make. You know I was never much of a hand at long letters, and having said all in the word "Come," will leave off.

Ever your affectionate brother,

PHILIP VINING.

The murky light of a dull February

morning struggled through the clouded casement, and fell on the black dress and bent head of the girl who read this letter. A few tears had fallen on the page, but there were none now in the eyes that still scanned the words, though their sense had long been mastered. Agnes Vining was not one to bestow much time on evidences of emotion; quick to feel for others, she had not much sympathy to spare for her own griefs. She had brushed away the drops hastily, as if ashamed of the weakness they showed; and her face was calm and resolute as she raised the paper affectionately to her lips, with the low-spoken words, "Dear Philip! I might have known that he would help and comfort me."

It was a comfortless abode for one who two months before had enjoyed every luxury of life, and who, all her life long, had never known a wish unfulfilled which wealth could gratify. The parlor of a poor lodging house in a poor street in a country town is not in general a cheerful place, and the room in which Agnes Vining sat was no exception to the rule. The meagre curtains at the windows, the gaudy paper on the walls, the poor and scanty furniture, formed a painful contrast to the splendid home that had been hers so lately; but it was not of that Agnes was thinking. It was the remembrance of the far deeper, the irreparable loss, of which the black seal and her own black dress reminded her, that had drawn the rare tears from her eyes. She