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HILDA; OR, THE MERCHANT'S SECRET.

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CHAPTER XVIII.—Continued.

"How did you get all this information? or rather how did your young friends learn so much of this lady's history?"

"Eva's mamma knew her in England when she was called Mrs. Mordaunt. She was then an actress, and it was at that time she married Mr. Harrington, the old man who left her so much money."

"Maud! who are you talking about?" exclaimed Mrs. Castonell, putting down her work and staring at her daughter in unusual excitement.

Maud looked surprised, and a sudden thought flashing through her mind, she asked:

"Was not grandpapa's name Harrington? I suppose it was him she married, and—"

"Maud, you are talking nonsense!" and Mrs. Castonell resumed her work, thinking of what she had heard, and fearing that her daughter's suspicion might be true, yet unwilling to let such a painful idea rest in her mind.

A small clock on the mantle-piece now struck the hour of ten, and at the same moment the door-bell rang. Maud jumped up.

"It is papa! and he will be angry to find me up so late!" Then, fondly kissing her mother, she retreated through one door as Mr. Castonell made his appearance at the other.

This little incident showed very plainly the nature of Maud Castonell's feelings towards her father. There was no lingering to bid good-night; there was a very evident fear of being met with angry words rather than a fond caress, if she remained till his entrance. His temper, naturally irritable, was soured by the great disappointment of his life, and he was accustomed on the slightest occasions to vent his ill-humour on his young daughter and gentle wife, crushing affection in the hearts of both, and exciting in its stead fear, if not dislike. Alas for the happiness of that domestic circle where the father's presence brings no sunshine, where his step is heard with dread!

It was Wednesday night, and the Rev. Mr. Castonell had been doing duty at St. Mark's, holding an evening service there for a few devout members of the congregation. The majority never worshipped in God's House on week days, one day in the seven being considered sufficient for that purpose. After service he had been called to visit a death-bed, and this will account for his returning so late from his parochial duties.

On entering his humble home, the incumbent of St. Mark's hung up his hat and coat in the hall, and laid aside with them his ministerial deportment—his bland manner, his equable temper being only for show, they were never exhibited in the domestic circle.

The sudden retreat of his daughter had not passed unnoticed. His quick eye had caught a glimpse of the slight figure as it vanished, and this apparent disregard of his wishes excited his displeasure.

"Why did Maud sit up so late?" he asked angrily, approaching his wife. "I thought I had sufficiently expressed my wishes on this subject. Late hours are injurious to children."

"She was so deeply engaged telling me some news she heard at school about Mrs. Grant Berkeley, that she quite forgot the hour until the clock struck ten, just as you rang."

"And what was the news?" The tones were gentle. Mr. Castonell's displeasure was quickly merged in curiosity—forgotten in the sudden interest this name awakened.

"Have you any idea who this Mrs. Berkeley is?" asked Mrs. Castonell, looking steadily into her husband's face. He had taken Maud's easy chair on the other side of the work-table.

"No, although it has occurred to me that I have seen her before. Has Maud learned anything of her? I must confess I feel some curiosity about this elegant-looking woman. I always have admired grace and beauty," Mr. Castonell remarked with assumed carelessness, but Edith saw that the interest he felt was greater than he wished to acknowledge.

"Maud heard her first husband's name was Mordaunt; that she has a son called Frank Mordaunt. Does that name recall no one to your recollection?"

"By George, yes! your former friend, Pauline Falkner. She married a person called Mordaunt," and there was a sudden animation

in Mr. Castonell's manner and a brightening of his still handsome face, which sent a thrill of jealous feeling through the heart of Edith.

"And now that accounts for the likeness to some one which I perceived in Mrs. Grant Berkeley! but could not remember to whom. The expression of her eyes haunted me as familiar. Those eyes of hers are splendid, flashing like diamonds, yet with such a soft expression when anything reaches her heart and stirs up the deep sympathies of her nature." And Mr. Castonell, leaning his arm on his wife's work-table, shaded his face with his hand, and gave himself up to the pleasant thoughts which this unexpected information called forth.

Then this charming stranger who had evidently fallen in love with his preaching, if not with himself, was Pauline, the young girl he had once so much admired and yet forsaken for another.

That Pauline Falkner loved him in those by-gone days he knew very well. Could it be that now, when fate had thus unexpectedly brought them into the same path in life, she was anxious to renew their acquaintance? that the old admiration and *penchant* had not quite died out. The idea was very flattering, very gratifying to the vanity of Mr. Castonell, and he allowed it to occupy his thoughts, forgetful of the presence of his wife, who sat there thinking, too, but not so pleasantly, while her weary fingers darned his well-worn socks. At length she broke the train of his pleasant reflections by saying somewhat abruptly:

"It seems that Mrs. Grant Berkeley has been married three times. She is living now with her third husband."

There was a slight sarcasm in Edith's tones as she made this observation.

Mr. Castonell removed his white hand from his face, and looked at his wife in surprise.

"Three times! and she is yet so young! about your age. I think, although you look many years older."

"Yes, Pauline and I are both thirty-five; we were eighteen when we were married," replied Mrs. Castonell quietly, betraying neither by voice nor look the pain which her husband's unkind remark caused her.

"And who was her second husband?"

"That was the strangest part of Maud's story. She says his name was Harrington; that he was an old man who left her the fortune she is now enjoying."

Mr. Castonell was listening very attentively. At the name of Harrington he started, and Edith saw in his face the same idea which had occurred both to herself and Maud.

"How very strange!" he exclaimed. "Can it really be your father she married?"

"The thought did suggest itself to me, Maud said she was an actress at the time of her second marriage. Poverty perhaps compelled her to marry for a home, and I cannot help thinking that the old man was my father. I should like to see this Mrs. Grant Berkeley," Edith continued after a short pause. "Although she is changed I am sure I would recognize Pauline Falkner."

"You will have an opportunity of seeing her in church next Sunday. She has taken a pew in St. Mark's."

"So Maud told me, and I am surprised that a lady so fashionable would prefer St. Mark's to the Cathedral."

"I am not at all surprised. No doubt she admires pulpit eloquence." There was a conscious superiority in Mr. Castonell's tones, a proud smile curving his lip which revealed the overweening vanity of the preacher.

"Maud says Mrs. Grant Berkeley dresses magnificently; will she not seem out of place among the plainly-dressed congregation of St. Mark's?"

"But if she chooses to worship with them that is nobody's business; besides, her coming to St. Mark's will attract others in her set, and in that way our church will become fashionable."

"And you would like it?"

"Of course I would! I feel that a man of my talent is out of place in my present sphere. The Cathedral pulpit is my proper place. The congregation there begin to appreciate my talents. The dean sent me an invitation to preach again next Sunday. Flattering, is it not?" and Mr. Castonell's fine eyes flashed with the pride of intellect.

"But where did Pauline meet this Mr. Harrington?" he asked, suddenly resuming the subject of such engrossing interest to him and Edith.

"In England. You know father went to Europe after our marriage, and once that period we lost sight of him altogether," and Mrs. Castonell sighed as she thought of his estrangement and of the little probability there now was they should ever again meet. She felt almost persuaded that the Mr. Harrington Pauline married was indeed her father.

"Where did Maud get all this information?"

"At school, where all the gossip of the day is discussed; the girls repeat to each other what they hear at home."

"And what else did Maud gather? Did she hear how much money the old man left her? Grant Berkeley was a fortunate fellow to get

such a rich and beautiful wife. Many men in Montreal will envy him."

"If report speaks truly he is not so much to be envied," rose to Edith's lips, and the wish to allude to the gossip Maud hinted at, injurious to the character of Pauline, was strong within her, but the uncharitable words were not spoken, and nothing was said which might lower Mrs. Grant Berkeley in the estimation of Mr. Castonell.

CHAPTER XIX.

MRS. GRANT BERKELEY.

A BRIGHT pleasant autumnal day. In Canada the Fall is the finest season—the sun nearing the meridian, climbing azure depths and gossamer clouds which might rival the skies of Italy; the streets alive with passers to and fro in their holiday garb, some richly attired, others more simply clad—all answering to the call of the solemn church bells—ringing out distinctly in the clear atmosphere, and hurrying to pay their homage to the Most High on this Sunday morning. Through a suburban part of the city of Montreal a handsome carriage with prancing steeds dashed rapidly along towards St. Mark's Church.

Its only occupant was a lady, richly and elegantly dressed. Her beauty, as well as her elegant equipage, attracted many eyes as the carriage drew up before the entrance of the church, and as she advanced up the aisle to her pew she was followed by the admiring gaze of the congregation.

In the incumbent's pew were Mrs. Castonell and her daughter. Anxiously had Edith watched for the appearance of this lady, and now, instead of giving her usual attention to the service, she allowed it to be attracted towards the beautiful stranger. The mesmeric influence of Mrs. Castonell's eyes attracted hers. She looked towards her, and a pleased look of recognition flashed over the handsome face of Mrs. Grant Berkeley. She was then Pauline Falkner. If Edith had any doubts on this subject they were now removed. What painful reminiscences did the sight of this former friend bring to the mind of Edith! What bitter waters in the fount of memory did she stir within her! How handsome Pauline looked! changed she certainly was, seventeen years must effect that! but Edith could not help acknowledging that she was even more attractive now in her matured beauty and grace than when she last saw her. No doubt her stylish costume gave its own attraction to her appearance. That exquisite little bonnet—a perfect gem of French millinery—would make even a plain face look well! And then Edith looked at her own unfashionable style of dress, and she remembered the plain faded face her glass had revealed that morning as she made her simple toilet.

Then a very natural feeling of regret, nay of something very like envy, stole into her heart, and the painful thought—what a contrast her husband would see between them—would not be dismissed, but kept recurring constantly, disturbing her devotion as well as her peace. Back through seventeen years of wedded sorrow did memory carry the thoughts of Mrs. Castonell to that winter night when Pauline and she first saw Mr. Castonell. What vain regret filled her mind! what yearning for the girlish happiness she then enjoyed! From the face of Mrs. Grant Berkeley Edith's eyes would wander to her husband. Was it because she felt intuitively that there was some secret affinity between them? How well he still looked! unusually handsome this morning. And how he did preach! What a burst of eloquence the sermon was! To those who did not know the man he must appear a saint, but in the eyes of Edith, how fallen! How had the glory with which she had first invested him in bygone days departed! As she looked at him and listened, contrasting his public character with his private, she writhed under the painful thought that he was a hypocrite, and, alas! her husband—the father of her child!

When the service was finished, Mrs. Grant Berkeley walked slowly down the aisle and lingered near the church door, until Mrs. Castonell joined her.

"You here in Montreal, Edith! and not call to see me!" she exclaimed, reproachfully, holding out her hand with a great show of affection.

"I was not aware you were in the city; it is quite a surprise to meet you."

"An agreeable surprise, I hope, Edith," and Pauline looked anxiously at her friend, doubtful it seemed, of the nature of her feeling towards her.

"I am glad to meet you again, Pauline; but why did you not come to see me? You must have known that if Mr. Castonell was in Montreal, I was there also."

"And so I did; but to be candid, I thought you would not care to see me. And now that we have met, Edith, you must come home with me and we will have a talk about old times. I have much to tell you."

Mrs. Castonell hesitated before accepting this very cordial invitation. "I do not like visiting on Sunday," she said.

"You do not call spending the day with an old friend, visiting. Do you forget how many Sundays we have spent together. You have become very religious, Edith; that is a neces-

sary consequence, I suppose, of having married a clergyman?" and Pauline's chiselled lip was wreathed with a sarcastic smile.

"You forget, Pauline, that Mr. Berkeley is a stranger to me, and—"

"Oh, Grant will not be in the way! he is in England at present—went home on business. So we shall be all alone, and can have a delightful *tête-à-tête*. Come, Edith! get into the carriage, I really can take no refusal."

Edith's curiosity to know more of Pauline's history conquered her religious scruples; besides her naturally great anxiety to find out whether the Mrs. Harrington her friend had married, was her father, justified her in her own opinion.

When Mr. Castonell left the vestry he saw his wife driving away from St. Mark's, with Mrs. Grant Berkeley, and his belief that she was Pauline Falkner was confirmed.

That evening he was to preach at Christ Church Cathedral. Mrs. Grant Berkeley was there, accompanied by Mrs. Castonell. After the service he found both ladies waiting for him at the entrance leading to the vestry. The night was unpleasant,—it was raining heavily, and Mrs. Grant said she would drive the Castonells home.

Her greeting of her old admirer was very cordial. He, too, showed considerable pleasure at meeting her again.

"How is it that you did not remember me?" she asked, with a pretty affectation of anger, as they drove homeward. "Edith says you did not recognize me, and I knew you at once the night I first saw you at the Cathedral."

"But did she tell you also how your face haunted me? I knew I had seen it somewhere. I never can remember faces or localities. It is a natural infirmity. Nothing else can excuse my not knowing you."

This was said in Mr. Castonell's sweetest voice, and as the light of a lamp which the carriage was passing, fell upon his face, Pauline saw that the expression of the dark eyes fixed on her was very tender,—something of the old passionate admiration flashed on her once more.

CHAPTER XX.

EVELEEN.

WE must now return to Hilda, whom we left traversing the lonely passage leading to the apartment of old Eveleen. On reaching the door she paused,—the sailor might be there she thought; but on peeping into the room she found it was unoccupied. Crossing the small hall into which it opened she approached an opposite door, attracted by a light within. This she perceived was the apartment into which the captain of the wrecked vessel had been put. He was lying on a bed at one end,—there was no other person in the room. Now, therefore, was the time to satisfy her doubts. Cautiously she entered, fearful of disturbing his repose, for by the regular and quiet breathing she knew he was sleeping the deep sleep which succeeds exhaustion. The dim light from a candle burning on a table in the centre of the room was not sufficient to enable her to distinguish the features of that wan face lying there so motionless. With a noiseless tread she took it in her hand and approached the bed. One look at that laggard countenance, so expressive of the suffering he had endured, convinced Hilda that she had not been mistaken that Dudley lay before her,—his well-remembered features met her agonized gaze. Like one petrified she stood gazing at him. The light of the candle glancing on his face awoke him suddenly. He opened his eyes wide in astonishment at seeing the beautiful being over him. In that look Hilda saw at first uncertainty then recognition. Instantly she extinguished the light and stole, trembling, from the room, closing the door noiselessly behind her. This precaution was necessary, for just at this moment Eveleen was seen crossing the hall, carrying a light and a tray filled with refreshments for the shipwrecked sailor. She uttered an exclamation of surprise at meeting her young lady so unexpectedly. Placing her hand upon her mouth to impose silence, Hilda drew the nurse hurriedly into her own room, then shutting and locking the door, she hung herself distractedly into a chair and burst into a wild passion of tears, stifling her sobs, however, lest they might reach the ears of Dudley in the opposite room.

"Holy Biddy! what ails ye, Miss Hilda?" exclaimed the nurse, gazing at her in pitying surprise. "Och, what, alanna! it brakes me could heart to see the tears pouring like rain down your beautiful cheeks."

The wild burst of weeping relieved Hilda's anguish, pent up since the shipwreck, some hours before. She was soon calmer, and in the urgency of the danger from discovery which threatened her, she determined to make a confidante of the faithful servant of her family, on whom she knew she could depend. Dudley had recognized her. He would mention the circumstance of his having seen her to Eveleen, therefore, it was necessary that she should be made acquainted with this beforehand, so as to be on her guard when questioned—as she would undoubtedly be—about the family to whose house he had been removed.

"Eveleen, you loved my mother," Hilda began in low, sad accents.