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HIGHEST AWARD ST. LOUIS, 1904.

Her Hidden Destiny

"Both girls were very beautiful; the elder was named Barbara. Why do you start? Barbara is not so uncommon a name. Barbara Orde does not sound amiss. They were beautiful and talented, and there can be no doubt that but for very untoward circumstances both would have achieved considerable eminence in the dramatic profession, where either beauty or talent is necessary, perhaps, but where in very few cases both are combined. You have both, Miss Hutton; you would undoubtedly achieve eminence on the stage. You are angry! There is no need; you may be glad to remember those words some day!"

"Are you not wasting time, sir?" she asked haughtily.

"Are you not sufficiently interested in my narration to listen to the preamble?" he queried with a smile. "I regret that I am so uninteresting, but, unfortunately, these dry details must be gone through."

"Be brief, then," she urged. "We may be interrupted."

"By whom? By some of our charming hostesses' guests?" he questioned. "I hope not, as that would necessitate another rendezvous. Well, to resume," he continued, as she made a gesture of impatience. "The two sisters, Barbara and Stella, went on the stage. Both, although undoubtedly possessed of talent, were yet inexperienced. When Stella left the boards to marry the Honorable Newell Hutton, who had seen her beauty, and had fallen a victim to her beauty. The marriage, as you know, was a secret one. Barbara went to live with her sister. Are you faint?" he asked abruptly, as Barbara swayed slightly and caught at the back of the garden seat near her, as if for support, then stood erect again, drawing her breath as if with an effort. "Shall I go on? Are you able to hear the rest?" he asked. "You are very pale, and a swoon here would be of all things most inconvenient."

"I shall not swoon," she assured him, adding, in a faint tone, "Go on, I am listening."

Quietly as she spoke, there was in her voice an intonation which touched him, and which, had he been less determined to attain his end, might have turned him from his purpose. He hesitated a moment, then went on rather hurriedly.

"Well, for a time all was couleur de rose in the unequal marriage. The Honorable Newell Hutton was deeply in love with his charming wife for at least six months. She, I fancy, was perfectly, blindly happy. Her sister probably was less so. Vicarious happiness is not always pleasing, and bling and cooling, however, charming to the doves themselves, becomes a trifle monotonous to the spectators. Barbara Orde, herself a woman of unusual beauty, ambition, and passion, found it so, and, having endured it as long as she could, left her sister and returned to the stage, greatly to the disgust of her aristocratic beau-frere, who forbade his wife to hold any communication with her sister. Pray allow me to leave the rest for another day," he broke off suddenly, "you look so ill."

"I am not ill," Barbara said quietly, but in a tone that acute suffering of which could not be concealed. "Go on. Do you think I could rest until I know all? Go on, I tell you—go on," she added, with sudden passion, as she put her hands to her heavily beating heart.

He went on, his voice a little less assured as he continued:

"Months passed; the devoted husband grew less devoted. Marriage is the death-bed of love, you know. He got weary of the constant conjugation of the verbs 'to love,' 'to honor,' and 'to

cherish'; he grew neglectful—worse, indeed—brutal, high-born gentleman though he was. When he deserted his wife it must have been a great relief to her, although his desertion left her alone save for the child whose birth she expected, which took place a few weeks afterward. Her husband had left her sufficient money to last her with care until she had sufficiently recovered to be able to work for herself, and, when she was strong enough, she returned to the stage, playing under the old name, knowing only too well that her husband would not trouble her again, and feeling that there was a chance that her sister would find her out and join her, although she herself entirely failed to discover Barbara's whereabouts. She had heard nothing of her sister when, a few months afterward, her child died, and she bore that sorrow alone. She buried her little son, registering his death as that of the son of Newell Hutton.

Barbara's trembling knees refused to support her. She sunk down upon the garden seat, her knees trembling, her hands pressed against her heart, as if she were trying to still its suffocating pulsations.

"After her child's death she returned to the stage—she was not rich enough to indulge in the luxury of grief, and a few months later, when she was playing in a provincial town where the theater was well patronized, her sister came back to her, bringing with her an infant child—a daughter."

"Ah!" The exclamation broke from the listening girl like a cry of pain; every shade of color had died out of her lips, all light had faded from her eyes; but even now she was not prepared for the blow he was going to inflict upon her.

"Shall I tell you how she came back, this proud, beautiful Barbara?" he continued, dwelling upon his words with a strange appreciation of the terrible story he was telling. "Stella Orde returned home one night from the theater to the humble lodging she occupied. The night was cold and wet, and she had come from the theater in a cab—even then her chest was delicate, and she was obliged to take every precaution. As she dismissed the cab and put her key into the door, a woman came up to her and muttered a few inarticulate words, then fainted and fell at her feet, making a desperate effort to save the child she carried from being hurt in her fall. Hastily pushing open the door, Stella Orde knelt down and lifted the woman's head upon her knee, and a great and terrible cry escaped her, a cry half of joy, half of anguish, as the light from the hall lamp fell on the pale worn face. She had found her sister!"

There was a short breathless silence; the girl's miserable eyes kept their rapt fixed gaze upon him; her face was bloodless, deathlike, as the chill wintry sunlight filtering through the trees touched it. In those few moments, when the quiet melodious voice which told the story with such dramatic effect was stilled, it seemed to Barbara Hutton that her heart died within her.

"How did you know all this?" she asked suddenly, in a strained voice.

"How did I know all this? Well," he rejoined carelessly, "I belonged to the company which followed the one to which Stella Orde belonged, and I was her successor in the lodging where Barbara died."

"Died?"

"Yes. They carried her into the house that cold night, and took the child from her arms. It was warm and dry, for she had wrapped her shawl around it, and it was flushed and rosy in its sleep. When they consciousness made her try to retain it. When she recovered from her swoon, her first words were of it; but, when she saw it in her sister's arms, she seemed satisfied. The woman of the

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Miss Hutton," Bryant said, gently—"Miss Hutton!"

As he uttered for the second time the name by which she had been called for three happy joyous years, the girl shivered and raised her eyes to his with a dazed unseeing look in their glassy depths. He had paused between the words, and the first time it seemed as if he had spoken in a dream; the second time he spoke in a slightly raised tone, and she heard him—heard him dimly, vaguely, with a confused sound as of rushing waters mingling with his voice, a darkness before her eyes which made his face and the leafless trees and the wintry sunbeams all confused and dull.

"Can you hear me?" he asked, startled at the girl's agony, for which he was scarcely prepared; until a few minutes since he had never thought that she knew nothing of the truth of her parentage.

She looked at him only vacantly; all life seemed crushed out of her. In her agony of shame she hardly realized all that his words had meant; she only felt the horror of the darkness over her, the chill which shook her from head to foot.

"Rouse yourself," he urged sharply. "Do you want to betray your secret to Lady Rose Darley's guests? Do you want them to know who and what you are? Do you want them to find you here like this, and know the truth, when they never need know it, if you will?"

"Never know it," she repeated, vaguely, with pallid, parched, quivering lips—"never know it!"

"No one need know it unless you choose," he continued, speaking with slow, distinct utterances. "I will not betray you unless—unless you force me to do so."

She raised her head slowly and looked at him; the darkness was gone; her less dense now, she saw him more clearly, his words reached her with some meaning in their sound.

"No one need ever know of this," he said, hurriedly, "unless you insist upon betraying yourself. I had not thought you were so weak."

A faint shade of color stole back to her lips, a flickering gleam of light

house where they lived never spoke of that scene without tears."

Barbara's head drooped; an icy chill benumbed her limbs; she shivered under her seakins.

"They took her scanty clothing off her—she was wet and chilled—the bone; then they lifted her into bed, she but half conscious the while and swooning from sheer exhaustion and fatigue. They gave her every care; but it was too late. Her strength was too much reduced; exposure and want had done their work but too well; she was dying, and glad to die, so far as she could be glad of anything, poor girl!"

There was a tone of real feeling in his voice; the woman of whom he spoke he had known in her radiant beauty; it touched even him to think of her in her agony.

"There was a knocking-ring on the fourth finger of her thin hand," he continued; "and, when the faintness which for some hours obscured all her senses ceased, she was able to tell her sister what little there was to tell. She, too, had been betrayed—she was a mother—she had never been a wife. She managed to tell so much of her story; there was no need to tell more. Her child had come into the world nameless, without a claim of any name save on the mother who bore her, and, for the mother's sake, on the aunt who sheltered her."

"It is not true! It is not true!"

The words were spoken hardly above a whisper, yet there was a terrible despair in the hoarse tones; a convulsive trembling shook Barbara from head to foot. Before any great physical danger—her man was all for her sister—she would have faced it bravely, gallantly, unflinchingly; but before this she was powerless.

"It is not true!" she went on, wildly, flinging out her hands as if to keep off something terrible that was coming toward her. "It is not true! You hate me—always hated me—and you have intended this just to hurt me, to wound me!"

"You give me credit for a great and vivid imagination," he said, quietly. "No, I have spoken the truth—unwillingly enough, Heaven knows, and only because I was forced to tell it."

"Forced! It would have been less cruel to take a dagger and plunge it up to the hilt into my heart!"

He looked at her and smiled.

"You said that 'very well,' he remarked, "as well as you could have said it; and she would have been a great actress but for—"

He stopped, with as light shrug of the shoulders and an expressive look. Barbara had sunk down on the seat again, her head drooping on her breast, her hands hanging helplessly at her sides, her face like the face of a dead woman in its ghastliness and pallor.

The sun rose higher, the mother quivered into; and he was satisfied. Bryant was false, base, treacherous; his words had been false as himself. It was not true!

He repeated the words more than once; she told herself that he had lied; that he had some wish to get her into his power; he was angered against her for her coldness to him, he had some spite against Mark Robson and tried to injure him through her. He had perhaps seen her unacknowledged dread that he would make her visit to Mark public; he had thought her a coward, and wished to trade upon her cowardice.

All these things she told herself, again and again when the power of thought had in some measure returned to her, for at first she could not think, could not reason, could only suffer; then, as the faintness passed, she rallied all her pride and all her strength to meet her foe. But, though again and yet again she muttered that piteous denial, she knew in her inmost heart that what Bryant had said must have some foundation in the story he had told her of the appearance of truth. She herself had often wondered that she was not like either her father or her mother—at least, like the only mother she had known.

"She could not have loved me so much unless I had been her own child," she said to herself, as she remembered all the love and tenderness and care which had surrounded her during her childhood; and at the remembrance blinding tears filled her eyes.

[To be Continued.]

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except into her dark, somber eyes. She rose slowly to her feet, then faltered, and would have fallen but that he caught her on his arm. For a moment she rested there; then it seemed as if his touch revitalized her back into full life and strength, for she stood erect and faced him as he continued hurriedly—

"That is right. Command yourself—let no one see. I myself will say nothing; I have not kept your secret so long to betray you, unless you force me to it."

"Ah," she cried, "it is not true! You have startled me. You act so well, you play upon my nerves. But I do not believe you; you have been acting falsely, perhaps acting a scene out of an unpublished drama!"

"It is unpublished so far," he rejoined. "What I have told you is true. If you do not believe me, ask Mark Robson; he—"

"He does not know," she interrupted, in a voice full of pain.

"He knows now—I told him before I came to see you. He did not know before, of course, for he is a man of too high a sense of honor to have connived at such a deception," he added, with a slight sneer. "Go to him; he will tell you whether I have spoken truth or falsehood."

"I will ask him."

She turned away with her usual grace and dignity; save for her intense pallor, there was nothing strange in her manner. A gleam of admiration came into Bryant's eyes as he followed; she was brave, and he, base though he was, respected courage.

"When you have had time to consult him, I shall call, we will have another chat. There is much to be decided, you know."

"I must see him," she muttered. "I will hear no more until I have seen him."

"As you will. He is at Leeds now. If you telegraph to him you can see him tomorrow. You will not care to write, I suppose?"

They passed out of the shrubbery into the avenue. The great hall door was open, and they entered the house side by side. Walter Bryant watched her as she went slowly yet steadily up the shallow oaken stairs, her head held high, her eyes proud and calm, her lips colorless, but still and firm.

"She is brave," he muttered; "but she is not brave enough for that!"

He did not see her, though, as, once freed from his close gaze, she slipped under "my lady's corridor" with tottering step and falling eyes, crushed, bowed, despairing.

When she reached her apartments she was utterly alone. Her man was all for her sister—she would have faced it bravely, gallantly, unflinchingly; but before this she was powerless.

"It is not true!" she went on, wildly, flinging out her hands as if to keep off something terrible that was coming toward her. "It is not true! You hate me—always hated me—and you have intended this just to hurt me, to wound me!"

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