

POOR DOCUMENT

Literature.

FOR PET'S SAKE.

"I say, Calcott, come and dine with us next Thursday."

"A thousand thanks, but don't be offended at my refusing. You know my ways. It is to be a merry-making, and I am not a sociable man."

"No, by Jove!" laughed the other, pleasantly, "a confirmed old bachelor at five-and-thirty. Mais, nous verrons, your time will come. We shall see you yet with a wife by your side, and a tiny olive-branch on your knee."

Owen Calcott shook his head, as he stooped to pick up his glove which had fallen.

"When you see that, Cardon," he replied, "you may reckon it as the eighth wonder of the world."

"Nonsense! How you can bury yourself in your lonely rooms, never cheered by any woman's smile but Mrs. Crispin's, I can't tell."

"We have each our separate likings," answered Owen; your home to you is perfect—so is mine. You have four wife and children—I have my books."

The other shrugged his shoulders. "Poor company at times," he exclaimed. "Even if I said my pretty cousin Joan is coming, and has fallen over her little ears in love with you, that would not induce you!"

"Rather strengthen my refusal," smiled Owen, as together they passed from the hall of their club into the street.

"I see you have forewarned women's smiles and children's laughter."

"I avoid both."

"What an old Scrooge. There, ta, ta. Ugh! Here's a night!"

A dull, stately, wintry night, with a keen east wind, that came down the streets like charges of cavalry. It charged at Owen, who had to bend his face to protect it, as he parted from his friend; but it was not all the east wind, bad as it was, which caused the wrinkles on the brow and the tightened corners of the mouth, as he walked quickly homeward.

He had for five years rented the drawing room suite of one of those old houses in Bloomsbury which have seen better days, and about whose staircases and passages the shadows of the past seemed ever to linger. Mrs. Crispin called him the best of lodgers, as he was, and regarded him as an annuity.

Letting himself in with his key, he ascended to his sitting-room. So methodical was he, that the argand reading-lamp was already lighted, the tea placed as usual, ready for when he wanted it. When he began reading, he did not like being disturbed. By his additions to the furniture, the room was well furnished; large book-cases held many books, and if solitary, it was in appearance comfortable.

Owen, drawing his chair to the fire, adjusting the lamp, opened the book he had taken from a shelf, but he did not at once begin to read; placing the volume on his knee, he seemed to drop into a reverie.

Then he gave a short, quick laugh, and began his customary evening's study. The house, evidently, was well suited to a student. It was as still, hushed as the grave.

What was that?

Owen, startled, raised his head with an absolute expression of horror. Suddenly through the house had rung a child's silvery, merry laugh. As abruptly, it had been followed by a cry, a burst, it might be, of tears—then a door closed; silence reigned once more.

"Some friend of Mrs. Crispin's," Owen thought, irritably. "I wish she would have all grown-up friends."

But before a week was out, it was made apparent to Owen, by repetitions of those first sounds, that the child was a fixture. He was annoyed—indeed, angry. When he had taken those rooms he had made one decided stipulation. If Mrs. Crispin let other rooms, there must never be any children. Now for three nights he had been disturbed by the crying or laughter of one, though it evidently was speedily checked.

"Mrs. Crispin," he said, when next she appeared, "I thought it was understood there should be no children in your house!"

"Oh, Mr. Calcott! you heard it, then?" ejaculated his landlady, with a frightened expression. "But lor', how could you help it now. I'll just tell you how it is, sir. I knew the pretty dear's mother before she was married; and when a week ago, she came up to London, a widow, in grief and sorrow, and came to me and says, 'Oh, Mrs. Crispin, do give me and my little one shelter, until I can look about me; for I don't know a soul here but you, I hadn't the heart to refuse the young thing, so I give her the very top attic. Though a born lady, she can't afford more, and she molls and tells a-giving drawing and music lessons all day, to pay that and live. But—I'll tell her you object—'"

"No, no," broke in Owen; "do nothing of the kind. Only perhaps the child can be kept quiet while I'm at home; and—and I can put a heavier curtain over the door."

A smile of satisfaction hovered over Mrs. Crispin's pleasant features, as, assuring him every care should be taken, she withdrew.

For a week Owen never heard that silvery laugh.

"I trust they don't gag the mite," he reflected, one evening, thinking of it, as he opened the street door with his latch-key.

Then he stood still, gazing into the hall. Beneath the hanging lamp, the rays of which fell full upon her, was a small child of about four. There are children and children. This seemed rather to partake of the fairy species. The tiny figure was so slender and graceful, the features so refined and delicate, the complexion, the eyes so clear and soft, like dew-washed violets in the shade.

As Owen looked at her, she sat silently, almost as curiously, looked at him. Then, as he came in, she slowly advanced, extending the olive-branch of peace in the form of a book.

"It's full of pictures," she whispered. "How do you like to see it? Oh, may. Dere's a dog in it, 'like my Puffy who died."

Owen saw the pearly tears spring to the eyes.

"Poor Puffy. No. I's not going to ky or laugh any more, 'cause oo don't 'like it, mamma says."

Owen flushed.

What an orge they must have been making of him to the child. But this was a bit of scheming on Mrs. Crispin's part.

"Who told you to stand there?" he asked.

"No one," shaking her golden head. Mamma's out, Mrs. Crispin is asleep by the fire, so I come to see oo. I won't laugh or ky."

"That's a good child," remarked Owen, a trifle confused, and passing on.

"Are oo doing upstairs?" asked the child. "So's I."

"And with the trustful confidence of children, running after him, she took his hand."

What is there of magic in the touch of a little child's fingers! What strange electric thrill does it send through the heartstrings! Heaven pity those who do not feel it. Owen felt it. He was vexed, annoyed. Yes, glancing down at his captor, he would have no more thrown that little hand off than he could have struck the owner of it.

Feeling immensely ashamed, though alone, he ascended with his tiny companion. Of her own will she released him at his own door, drawing back.

"What is your name, little mite?" he asked.

"Pet."

"Well, Pet," what made him say it he did not know, "one day I'll bring you a prettier picture-book than that."

"Oh—h—h!" exclaimed the child, drawing a deep breath.

"Yes. Now go upstairs."

"Ees. Dood bye," and she went softly, noiseless, on baby tip-toe, more than once looking back, and nodding at him for—why ever did he?—he stood on the landing watching her.

Owen went in and shut the door; but somehow he could not shut out that child face. All came between him and his book. He caught himself listening for that merry laugh, until he remembered that "Pet" had evidently been told never to laugh loud when he was at home.

"What an orge she must think me!" he thought again, petulantly throwing aside his book. Then felt rather, or a good deal pleased, that "Pet" did not think him one, or she never would have had the courage to have descended to face him in the hall.

The next day with a certain sheepishness and consciousness how Cardon would laugh, did he know, Owen paid a visit to a bookseller's in Fleet street, and carried home certain wondrous picture books.

"What an idiot I am," he reflected, half angrily; "but then she is such a pretty little thing."

He opened the door, with an appropriate speech on his lips, and felt grievously disappointed to see the hall was empty. Pet was not there to meet him.

He was very disappointed, even angry, not understanding why, and gloomily ascended the stairs.

Before he reached the landing, a voice fell upon his ear.

"P'ese 'av oo dot it? The book with the boofor pictures?"

And there was "Pet" sitting on the top stair, awaiting him.

Yes, he had got it, and as Pet could not see it there, Pet must come into his room. Then as Pet was not tall enough to look on the table, she said:

"P'ese take me up on oo knee. Me ain't heavy."

So, a little confused, Owen obeyed her, when Pet at the sight of the books began to agitate her legs and clap her little waxen hands in delight, crying:

"And what is dis about? What is dat man saying?" until Owen found himself concocting wondrous stories to describe the plates.

After that Pet always met him, and there was half an hour spent over the picture books, Owen deriving as much pleasure as Pet herself, and owing solemnly to himself that he felt a better man for it.

One evening, however, a fortnight later, there was no Pet waiting. Why? He made an excuse to ring the bell and enquire.

Poor Pet had caught a roup cough. The doctor had been called, and spoke gravely of the child's delicacy, and the poor young mother was distracted.

Owen could not read that evening, and slept ill. He tried to laugh at the hold

Pet had taken upon him. He should like to do something to help her; but could do nothing. The doctor in attendance he knew to be skillful; besides, how could he have interfered had he not been ill? He had never seen Pet's mother in his life. He did not even know her name. Mrs. Crispin always spoke of her as "my young lady," interpolating these adjectives to which her class are addicted, such as "poor," "dear," or "poor dear."

More than once he had seen a slim, middle-height figure, attired in mourning, fitting up or down the stairs before him, and he had an idea that she must be like Pet, but that was all.

No; any interference of his, a simple man, would be taken as an impertinence. He could but send up endless picture-books, which poor Pet was too ill to look at, and flowers, and hothouse fruits, which latter she could not eat.

His first question, night and morning, was, "How is the child?"

A week had elapsed when, coming home punctually, he found Mrs. Crispin at the door.

"Oh, sir, I've been looking anxiously for you."

"How is the child?" asked Owen, with sudden fear.

"The doctor says twelve hours will prove sir; but, oh! Mr. Calcott," bursting into tears, "she gives next to no hope."

Owen turned to put down his hat. Bah! why should he be ashamed of this moisture in his eyes? Was it not proof of his humanity?

"The pretty dear, for the last hour," proceeded Mrs. Crispin, "has been asking for you. Would you—would you mind seeing her?"

"Mind!" cried Owen. Certainly not. Indeed, Mrs. Crispin, I am not quite a bear."

"Dearie me, Mr. Calcott, you're the best and kindest gentleman as ever lived, I do declare," exclaimed the old lady, as she led the way to the top of the house, where, opening the door, and whispering in, "He's come, dearie," make way for him, and on his entrance closed the door after him.

Owen saw a little bed with poor Pet upon it, and a slim figure kneeling at the side; then the slim figure rose up, and stood trembling before him.

A flush, a sudden pallor, a quick step back, almost a cry, "Helen."

Then she was on her knees, her face bowed in her hands.

"Forgive, forgive," she sobbed. "I never knew you were here when I came. Indeed, indeed, no! Pardon, Owen—I have been sadly punished. Oh! I have repented in sackcloth and ashes."

It was the old story—rental will, a girl's weakness, a hard heart, which was his sin. He had rejected; a life of misery and woe, then unexpected ruin, and her husband's death.

"Owen," she ended, resting her hand on the little bed, "will you not pardon for Pet's sake?"

He had turned from her, angry with remembrance of past wrong, agitated by sight of one he had so fondly loved. At the moment, Pet, aroused by the mention of her name, held out her thin little arms.

"It is oo—it is oo. Oo tum an' show me picture. P'ese tias Pet—Pet sooo ill."

The arms dropped, the smile died from the child's face, the ivory lids quivered down.

Uttering a scream, the mother threw her arms about poor Pet.

"Oh! Heaven! my darling! my child!" she cried. "Father, have mercy—help me!"

Owen too had sprung to the bed, forgetful of all but Pet.

Was she dead?

Thank Heaven! no! Reviving, it was his hand Pet clasped.

"P'ese take me up," she whispered; "me so ill."

Poor Pet, how could he refuse! On Owen's arm she dropped into the sleep from which she awakened back to hope. And while she slept again, the mother, in tears and contrition at Owen's feet, entreated pardon, only pardon, and one kind word.

How could he refuse, with Pet's fingers clasping his, her golden head upon his breast? Beside, did he not love her, this fair, slight woman, still!

That upper room is a nursery now, and when Owen Calcott comes home of evenings, there are a wife's smile and a child's laughter to greet him, and though his books are not so frequently taken from the shelves, he does not complain.

E. W. P.

She's Listening.

A most remarkable spring is located on the farm in Ellsworth, Maine. The spring is located upon a hill and the water is conveyed by a pipe to a watering tub by the roadside. There is an abundant flow of water till about 10 in the morning when it ceases to flow until about 4.30 in the afternoon when it again resumes operations, filling the tub to overflowing with an abundant stream.

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Jones asked his wife, "Why is a husband like dough?" He expected she would give it up, and then he was going to tell her it is "because his wife needs him" but she said it is "because he is hard to get off her hands." A slight coolness followed.

No You Don't.

"I think it would be a good plan to send Willie up into the country for a month," suggested Willie's father. "He's never been on a farm and it would be rather a novel experience for him."

"No you don't," interrupted Willie. "I have heard all about the country, and I'm not not going anywhere where they have thrashing machines. It's bad enough when it's done by hand."

Cook's Fonerating Plaster.

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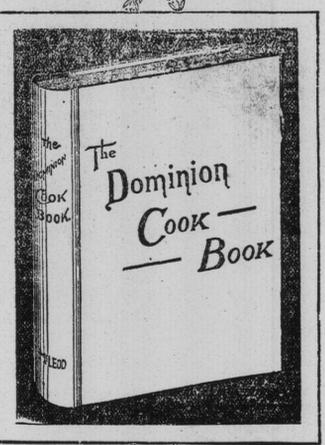
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