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REMORSE and REPENTANCE.

For Daisie's Sake

CHAPTER XXX.
REMORSE AND REPENTANCE.

It is quite safe to say that Annette's clumbers after the ball were not very peaceful. The startling events of the evening banished repose.

For one thing, she had instantly recognized in Mr. Sherwood's companion, Reed Raymond, her old lover, Ray Dering.

She was at a loss to know why he had entered the house on that footing, and she leaped to the angry conclusion that in his mad jealousy of her he had done so to spy upon her actions.

Anger and resentment filled her outraged heart, and she determined to seek an interview with him on the morrow, and threaten to denounce him to his victim unless he took leave.

Then, too, the reappearance of Dallas Bain upon the scene filled her with anxiety.

The startling discovery of the mysterious plot to separate Dallas and Daisie filled her with dismay when she contemplated what effect it would produce if it became known to the latter.

That the young girl was already most unhappy, she knew. She doubted not the knowledge of the truth would drive her to despair.

She was certain that it would cause an unalienable rupture between Daisie and Mrs. Fleming, and what part in it Royall Sherwood must play she could not conjecture. That it could only result in added unhappiness to the wedded pair she knew.

So she had done what she believed the wisest thing in persuading Lord Werter to suffer his wrongs in silence for his old lover's sake.

But the failure of her effort to get him to leave New York filled her with alarm.

While he remained there and chose to seek the society of the girl he loved, and of whom he had been so cruelly cheated, she could not tell what would happen.

But Lord Werter was obdurate in his refusal to go, and she could not force his obedience.

"Oh, what a muddle it all is! I do not know where to turn for comfort!" sobbed the poor girl; and her pillow was wet with tears when she sank into troubled sleep, so that her eyes were heavy and her cheek pale when she entered the breakfast room next morning.

She found Daisie and Mr. Sherwood,

with his new companion, already waiting; but as the latter was entertaining them with some witty narration of an event of foreign travel, they did not seem impatient.

She bowed a subdued good morning to all, and was very quiet when they took their places at the table with Reed Raymond for her vis-a-vis.

She did not speak to him, did not notice him, and he comprehended with trouble that he was recognized.

"What does she mean to do? That icy demeanor is ominous and threatening. Oh, if I had guessed she was here I should never have presented myself under this roof," he thought, with alarm, and just then Royall Sherwood exclaimed banteringly:

"Why so penitence this morning, Annette?"

She colored deeply, and Daisie smiled and exclaimed:

"Doubtless she is thinking of the grand conquest she made last night—the new social lion, Lord Werter."

Royall gave a start of surprise, and looked at his companion, saying:

"Lord Werter! Is not that the name of the gentleman you were with abroad?"

"Yes, for nearly five months, and we returned together but a few days ago."

Annette had another surprise, so great that she almost fell out of her chair. Ray Dering, the companion for five months of Dallas Bain, whom in his jealousy he had sworn to kill! What could it mean?

In her surprise she could not help flashing him one swift look of wonder, and caught, in return, through the young man's glasses, a look of such sorrowful deprecation that she was more and more mystified.

Royall's spirits seemed brighter than usual this morning, perhaps owing to the cheerful influence of his new friend, and as he trifled with the dainty viands on his plate, he kept up the conversation with Annette, plying her with questions about her conquest.

"Is he handsome, Annette?"

"Oh, yes—in a dark and stately style," she replied.

"And you think you have made an impression on his heart?"

Annette blushed again, and Daisie, who seemed quite gay this morning, interposed:

"If you had been there you would have thought so. They were together an hour or more in the conservatory, and Lottie and all the other women were madly jealous."

"Lord Werter is a prize worth winning," Reed Raymond remarked, joining in the conversation. "For himself alone any woman might love him, for his nature is most noble and winning, and his standard of honor the highest. His rent roll is twenty thousand a year, and his accession to the earldom when his father dies will make him one of the wealthiest peers in the realm."

Daisie listened with even more astonishment than Annette.

Could these statements be true? Then surely she had made a mistake in suspecting that the handsome nobleman was Dallas Bain himself, masquerading under a spurious title.

Yes, she had made a grave mistake, and acted almost rudely toward Lord Werter, under the angry assumption that he was her old lover, the unworthy Dallas Bain.

She crimsoned with mortification at the remembrance of her icy hauteur to the unconscious young man, and resolved to make amends by real cordiality when he came to call on Annette.

Royall Sherwood also chimed in: "I am so interested in this wonderful Lord Werter that I intend to be present when he calls on Annette, so that I may cultivate his acquaintance."

Annette's fluttering heart sank to the heels of her little French slippers as she thought:

"Heaven forbid the acquaintance! For he could scarcely help from recognizing his old rival. And what then?"

Poor Annette's thoughts were nothing but a jumble of what thens; for all her recently acquired knowledge made her heart very heavy.

"Perhaps Reed Raymond also felt rather alarmed at the prospect of Lord Werter's call, but he made no sign. He could only trust to the discretion of Dallas Bain, and he did not believe it would fail him in his hour of need.

As was usual in the household, Daisie spent the hour after breakfast alone with her husband in a pleasant morning room, giving him an account of her evening's pleasures, so Annette braced herself to "have it out," as she phrased it, at once with the offending companion.

When breakfast was over she assumed a sassy air to mislead her companions, and exclaimed:

"Mr. Raymond, I wonder if you are

a good accompanist. I want to try some new songs this morning; but Mr. Sherwood will monopolize his wife for several hours, so I must beg you to become her substitute."

"I am at your service, Miss Janowitz," he replied, with a slight tremor in his rich voice, and followed her to the music room.

Royall smiled at his wife, and said: "She will soon have him in her toils, the little siren!"

Then the valet came to wheel him into the morning room for the precious hour with Daisie; and while she tells him of last night's pleasures, and asks him if he spent a comfortable night, and if he is not greatly pleased with Mr. Raymond, we will follow the other couple to their interview in the music room.

Annette kept up the pretense of her request at first, and soon Daisie and Royall heard their voices chiming very sweetly together in one of the latest songs of the day—not a sentimental one, though, for at first she could not trust herself to that.

It made her heart ache to hear their voices mingling together so sweetly, as in old days when they had been true lovers, ere his jealous madness parted them forever, and she wondered how he felt over this strange meeting—this singing, that was just a farce to lead up to something serious.

Yet it was perilously sweet to her heart, although she told herself she hated him for that little crimson scar on her white breast, the witness of his attempted crime. It was not his fault that she was alive this moment, instead of lying in a grassy little grave with "Annette, set at 18," carved on the marble above her dreamless head.

With that thought, Annette stole her heart, that had been softening in spite of her anger, and suddenly exclaimed:

"I know you, Ray Dering, and my asking you to accompany me in my songs was just a pretext to secure an interview with you. Now that we have fooled the others, we can talk a while."

His white hands fell with a crash from the piano keys, and he was about to spring up; but she added:

"Sit still; it will look more natural thus if any one comes in. I can stand here and say what I wish."

His handsome face whitened and his glance sought hers, full of remorse and pain as he cried:

"Annette, there is but one word I can say to you all my life long hereafter, and that is, 'Forgive! forgive!'"

"And you would say it in vain!" she breathed stormily. "Do you think I can forgive you that you tried to kill me? Or, if I could forgive that, since I was fortunate enough to escape your murderous fury, could I forgive you for the blighting of Royall Sherwood's life?"

He shrank before the lightnings of her glance, and muttered:

"How dare you accuse me?"

But she answered undauntedly: "Do you think I did not guess the truth—that you made a mistake, and wreaked your fury on Royall Sherwood instead of Dallas Bain, of whom you were mistakenly jealous? Remember, you had threatened me you would kill him."

He made no answer, and the sorrowful droop of his dark head attested his remorse and repentance.

She continued bitterly: "What I wish to ask you is, why did you thrust yourself into this home, whose inmates would shrink from you in loathing did they guess the fatal truth? Was it to spy upon my actions? How dare you, when you are nothing to me—nothing but an abhorred memory I would fain banish!"

"I did not know you were here, Annette, or I should never have presumed to enter the house, believe me," he murmured, low and deprecatingly, his very soul reeling before her wrath and scorn.

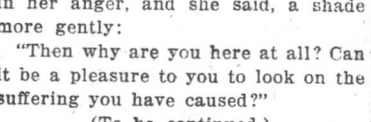
Had she ever dreamed of seeing that dark head, once so proud and erect, bowed so low with shame and sorrow and repentance? It touched her even in her anger, and she said, a shade more gently:

"Then why are you here at all? Can it be a pleasure to you to look on the suffering you have caused?"

(To be continued.)

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