

"Her speaking. I sha'n't mind it. I think I know the worst."

Again he was silent, as if his courage would not carry him further.

"What do you know?" he said at length. "Tell me."

"She told me, before you saw her in the library on the day of her arrival, that—that you had been sweethearts at the Abbey." She paused.

"Go on."

"And it seemed to me, dear, that perhaps your connection was more serious than that, and consequently she felt that you ought to marry her when your wife's death made you free to do so. Of course she knows how—"

"Gertie," said he, interrupting her, as though he had not heard her last words, "you've loved enough in that heart of yours to have faith in me?"

"Could I love you if I had not?"

"Perhaps," he replied, after a pause.

"Yes, I believe your love would outlive your faith. If I were criminal in the eye of the law and of all the world, you would yet love me, wouldn't you?"

"The opinion of all the world wouldn't shake my faith in your love for me, and that is all I want."

He changed his position, and was silent again for a space.

"That's not exactly what I mean, Gertie—but it's near enough."

He got up and went to the window, and, leaning on the sill, hummed tunelessly.

Gertie was disappointed by this abrupt termination of the conversation. He had seemed on the point of revealing something to her, something that would require the firmest faith in his love to forgive perhaps; and in her mind she had accepted the trust joyfully, confident that with a little struggle she could overcome her jealousy, and that thenceforward there would be no secret, and the future would be clear and cloudless. But now he shrank from the subject, she thought, possibly disgusted with the vulgarity and unpleasantness of it, and seemed to think that, if she had faith in him, that was all that was required, and that things might be permitted to take their natural course.

"The sky is growing light over Vauxhall," he said, when he turned from the window; "the dawn's at hand."

He closed the *persiennes*, kissed his wife, and spoke a few kind words, drew the curtains of her bed, and left her.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE CAT AND THE SPARROW.

Gertie went down to luncheon on the following morning, fully expecting to be punished by Miss Drummond for her folly. It is such an easy thing to inflict pain on those who are conscious of having acted unwisely; and here was such an admirable opportunity for showing Gilbert how unfitted she was for the grade of society in which he had placed her. She might assume a lofty tone of pity, or she might cough her venomous sarcasms in the form of banter—no matter how, she would certainly employ all her powers to mortify him and make her ridiculous before Gilbert.

Gertie was undaunted; Gilbert had given her new courage, and she would show him how much love for him and what faith in his love she had by going unflinchingly through any ordeal to which she was subjected. She would keep her temper—she would not forget that she was Gilbert's wife and a lady; she would bear herself with dignity and as much composure as it was possible for her to command. What harm was there in all Miss Drummond's sneers and taunts if Gilbert loved her all the while? Surely he would love her the more for meeting persecution bravely! And she would keep saying to herself, whenever she felt the need of support, "There's love enough in that heart of yours to have faith in me." These were his words.

But, as not infrequently happens in this world of surprises, that which was

expected did not occur. Miss Drummond was absolutely silent with regard to the event in the fir wood, not a single innuendo or unpleasant insinuation escaped her. But, seeming to see that an apology was necessary for her lack of spirits, she said, posing her thumb and third finger on her delicately-pencilled eyebrows—

"I have an awful headache this morning, Baby—positively awful. Not a word to throw at a dog. You will understand my silence, I am sure."

That was exactly what Gertie could not at first. Miss Drummond was not unfrequently afflicted with headache in the morning; but it was usually marked by an increased acidity of temper and a free expression of it.

"Would you like any remedy fetched from Fontainebleau? May I send for a doctor?" asked Gertie.

"No, thanks. I have to go over to Fontainebleau on business, and the drive will do me good. I will have the dog-cart if you are not going to use it, Baby."

Marvel on marvel! This was the first time she had ever consulted any one's convenience but her own in ordering what she wanted.

"Only too happy to place it at your disposition in any circumstances," replied Gertie; and the brightness of her eyes testified to the truth of her assertion. "Pierce will take your orders."

Miss Drummond issued her commands languidly, and, protesting that she could not eat anything, unfolded her *serviette* and arranged the glasses before her.

Now indeed Gertie shone as a hostess, and, with only such help as she got from Gilbert, who was not very talkative this morning, she contrived to keep up the flow of conversation and gossip which sparkled now and then with happy flashes of womanly wit and was pleasant to listen to all through. Miss Drummond scarcely opened her lips to speak during luncheon, not even to complain; but she managed to eat a little of everything upon the table, and left very little at the bottom of her bottle of champagne. Now and then she raised her narrow eyes to glance furtively from Gilbert to Gertrude, and returned them without change of expression to her plate.

"If it is all the same to you, I will take coffee in my own room, Baby," she said, rising from the table when she had finished dessert.

It was not at all the same to Gertie; but she hid her satisfaction as well as she could and replied with propriety; then, as Miss Drummond swept from the room, she heaved a sigh of satisfaction and smiled at her husband.

They went on to the terrace, and had coffee served under the verandah. Gilbert lit his pipe, and Gertie, with her hands in her lap and a happy curve in her lips, leaned back in her chair and mused.

"What is it, Gertie?" asked Gilbert, leaning forward, his arms resting on his knees.

She recovered herself and turned to him with a little laugh—Miss Drummond's room happily was at the other end of the house; she did not fear the consequences of laughing.

"What were you thinking about?" he asked.

"Nothing at all of any importance. It's odd how things sometimes come into one's mind which are quite out of keeping with the subject one has at heart! Do you know, I was thinking of a show that used to stand near Kennington Church every Saturday night."

"What sort of show?"

"Oh, a most melancholy exhibition of all sorts of animals put together in one large cage! A happy family, the man used to call them, poor things! But the creature that is most conspicuous in my memory was an old, old cat with a poor miserable tail and two green eyes which used to crouch in a corner, with her ears laid back, and divide her attention between a sparrow hopping about within

the cage and a most brutal-looking man on the outside, who pointed out the marvels of his collection with a long, thin, sharp-pointed iron skewer."

"Doesn't need a conjurer to interpret that vision, Gertie. You're the sparrow, Miss Drummond is the cat with the green eyes, and I'm the brute with the skewer."

Gertie was astonished. After all, it might have been Miss Drummond's unnatural mildness, something of stolidity and latent cruelty in her eyes when they were at their most quiescent state, which had brought this memory into existence. But certainly nothing in Gilbert's appearance had brought that horrid man before her. Why had he compared himself to him?

Gilbert smiled tranquilly, watching with pleasure the expression on his wife's pretty face as she mentally unravelled the skein that he had set before her.

"Isn't it a headache?" she asked suddenly, guessing the truth.

Gilbert shook his head.

"What have you done?"

"Had it out with her. Made her understand that she should torture you and me no more. Bade her go away and do her worst, or stay here and do her best. She has shown by her behaviour at luncheon which she prefers to do. And she's wise. She could have made us exceedingly unhappy—only for a time, I believe; but the consequences would have been still more unpleasant for herself."

"You don't wish to tell me what those consequences for us would be?"

"No, Gertie. I would rather have this hand of mine cut off, and rather this were my last pipe, than let you know. And now put some sugar in my coffee, sweetheart, and let us settle how we're to spend this day happily."

They spent the afternoon in a punt under the shadow of rustling leaves, Gilbert fishing, Gertie pretending to fish. The fish were not voracious that afternoon, but Gilbert was content to smoke and drop his line in likely places, while Gertie was supremely happy, with her float amongst the reeds and her hook securely fastened in the weeds under the surface, to be alone and near her beloved husband, and to dream of the future.

They dined alone, a telegram from Miss Drummond informing them that she might be detained at Fontainebleau until late. Gertie was not at all curious to know what the business was; but she hoped it might not be hurried through.

At ten o'clock Miss Drummond was still absent.

"Better go to bed now, Gertie," said Gilbert. "I will receive Miss Drummond when she arrives."

"She will not think me wanting in courtesy, dear?" suggested Gertie.

"No, no. Go."

It was after eleven when Gertie heard the sound of wheels and voices. It sounded almost as if some one were singing—but that couldn't be. A little later she heard voices below—her husband's speaking in a low firm authoritative tone, Pierce's in short incisive phrases, and Miss Drummond's trailing languorously with occasional bursts of incoherent monomania; then there were sounds upon the marble floor of the vestibule, as if some weighty thing were being drawn or pushed forward, which after a time ended, and only the discontented murmuring of Miss Drummond was audible. Then came a few sharp decisive words from Gilbert, and a renewal of the slipping and shuffling of feet upon the floor of the vestibule, and the sharp opening of a door—the library door it seemed: then the sounds went from the vestibule, and simply the hum of voices from a distant room reached Gertie's perplexed ear.

Some one tapped at the door.

"Come in!" cried Gertie, sitting up.

Pierce entered, with a pillow upon her arm.

"Sir Gilbert desired me to inform your ladyship that Miss Drummond is unwell, but that there is no necessity for madam to descend," she said.

Later on, when Gilbert came up, Gertie asked for information. He said evasively—

"Nothing serious—an attack of the nerves, or something in that way. She had a headache before starting, you know. She's lying on the couch in the library; Pierce will stay by her. If she's not better in the morning, we will send for a doctor. But I don't think there will be any necessity for that."

Then he talked of other matters; and Gertie, seeing that he wished to dismiss the subject, refrained from irritating him with useless questions.

The library was in its ordinary state when Gertie went down the next morning, Miss Drummond being in her room. Pierce reported that she was better, though still suffering severely from headache, and that she desired to keep her room.

Gertie suggested sending Lucas, the groom who had accompanied Miss Drummond on the preceding day, to Fontainebleau for the doctor.

"No," said Gilbert. "If she needs a doctor, she will let us know, you may be sure; there's no false modesty about her. As for Lucas, I have sent him away."

"Lucas!"

"Yes—dismissed him summarily. The rascal couldn't stand on his legs, he was so tipsy."

"And Miss Drummond ill! Why, there might have been an accident!"

"There might," responded Gilbert dryly, in a tone importing that he would have felt very little regret if an accident had occurred.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Miss Hill in London.

The remarkable work which is being done by Miss Octavia Hill and under her direction among the slums of that part of London bordering on Marylebone parish has attracted attention on this side of the water. In early life Miss Hill—she is now just well into the forties—was a worker with Rev. Frederic Denison Maurice, whose theological writings have made so strong a mark on the times, and to whom she was in some way related by marriage. At the age of 25 she took in hand the dwellings of the poor, having Mr. Ruskin among her earliest supporters. Mr. Ruskin it was who, in 1844-5, provided the £3,000 to purchase the first two neglected courts, known by the curiously satiric names of Paradise and Freshwater; and it was he who, assuring her that if the money were sunk he would never regret the giving, impressed upon her nevertheless, with wise foresight, that a workingman ought to be able to pay for his own home, and that if her plan could be proved to pay it would surely spread. It has paid, it has spread, and now Miss Hill can have all the money and all the houses she wants; the extension of her work is only limited by the number of trained workers. Miss Hill's scheme included the idea of working from as many center points as possible, instead of expending the same labor in one locality, on the principle that if the germ theory of disease is true the germ theory of cure is also true. She established cleanliness, order, and frugality in two or three houses in a neighborhood, and then went to another. Purchasing with the aid of her friends—for she is not and was never rich—a house or two where the stairways were checked with dirt and every corner reeking with refuse, where the windows were broken and the plastering broken away, she went on to purify this one spot into a decent and healthy home, or into several homes, making herself by no means what some would call "an angel," but a hard-working, prosaic woman, exacting rent as scrupulously as any landlord, and allowing nobody to peep and whine into helplessness. Often obliged to go about at a noon-day pace and among feral-looking women in the night, her courage was equal to it.

If the bowls are loose lie down; eat nothing until you are well.