

## A LIFE FOR A LIFE.

BY MISS HULOCK.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

## HER STORY.

"Don't papa. Oh, pray don't," and then I was obliged to tell him the reason why. I had to put it very plainly before he understood; he forgets things now sometimes.

"Starving, did you say? Mrs. Cartwright, Lydia, and the child? What child?"

"Francis's."

Then he comprehended, and, oh, Max, had I been the girl I was a few months ago, I should have sunk to the earth the shame he said I ought to feel at even alluding to such things. But I would not stop to consider this, or to defend myself; the matter concerned not me, but Lydia. I asked papa if he did not remember Lydia?

She came to us, Max, when she was only fourteen, though, being well-grown and handsome, she looked older; a pleasant, willing, affectionate creature, only she had "no head," or it was half-turned by the admiration her beauty gained, not merely among her own class, but all our visitors. I remember Francis saying once—oh, how angry Penelope was about it—that Lydia was so naturally elegant she could be made a lady in no time if a man liked to take her, educate and marry her. Would he have done it? spite of all broken vows to Penelope. I think my sister herself might have forgiven him, if he had only honestly fallen in love with poor Lydia and married her.

These things I tried to recall to papa's mind, but he angrily bade me be silent. "I cannot," I said, "because, if we had taken better care of the girl, this might never have happened. When I think of her—her pleasant ways about the house—how she used to go singing over her work of mornings, poor innocent young thing, oh, papa! papa!"

"Dora," he said, eying me closely, "what change has come over you of late?"

I said I did not know, unless it was that which must come over people who have been very unhappy—the wish to save other people as much unpleasantness as they can.

"Explain yourself. I do not understand."

When he did, he said abruptly: "Stop! It was well you waited to consult with me. If your own delicacy does not teach you better, I must. My daughter—the daughter of the clergyman of the parish—cannot possibly be allowed to interfere with these profligates."

My heart sunk like lead.

"But you, papa? They are here; you, as the rector, must do something. What shall you do?"

He thought a little.

"I shall forbid them the church and the sacrament omit them from my charities, and take every lawful means to get them out of the neighborhood. This, for my family's sake and the parish's, that they may carry their corruption elsewhere."

"But they may not be wholly corrupt. And the child—the innocent, unfortunate child?"

"Silence, Dora. It is written, The seed of evil-doers shall never be removed. The sinless must suffer with the guilty; there is no hope for either."

"Oh, papa," I cried in agony, "Christ did not say so. He said, Go, and sin no more."

Was I wrong? If I was, I suffered for it. What followed was hard to bear.

Max, if ever I am yours, altogether in your power, I wonder will you ever give me those sort of bitter, cruel words? Words which people, living under the same roof, think nothing of using, mean nothing by them; yet they cut sharp like swords. The flesh closes up after them, but oh, they bleed; they bleed! Dear Max, reprove me as you will, however much, but let it be in love, not in anger or sarcasm. Sometimes people drop carelessly, by quiet firesides, and with a good-night kiss following, as papa gave to me, words which leave a scar for years to come.

Next day I was just about to write and ask you to find some other plan for helping the Cartwrights, since we neither of us would choose to persist in one duty at the expense of another, when papa called me to take a walk with him.

Is it not strange the way in which good angels seem to take up the thread of our dropped hopes and endeavors and wind them up for us, we see not now, till it is all done? Never was I more surprised than when papa, stopping to lean on my arm and catch the warm, pleasant wind that came over the moors, said suddenly:

"Dora, what could possess you to talk to me as you did last night? And why, if you had any definite scheme in your head, did you relinquish it so easily?"

"Papa, you forbade it."

"So, even when differing from your father, you consider it right to obey him?"

"Yes, except—"

"Say it out, child."

"Except in case of any duty which I felt to be not less sacred than the one I owe to my father."

He made no reply.

Walking on, we passed Mrs. Cartwright's cottage. It was quiet and silent, the door open, but the window-shutters half-closed, and there was no smoke from the chimney. I saw papa turn round and look. At last he said:

"What did you mean by telling me they were starving?"

I answered the direct, entire truth. I was bold, for it was your mind as well as my own I was speaking out, and I knew it was right. I pleaded, chiefly for the child—it was easier to think of it, the little creature I had seen laughing and crowing in the garden at Kensington. It seemed such a dreadful thing for that helpless baby to die of want, or live to turn out a reprobate.

"Think, papa," I cried, "if that poor little soul had been our own flesh and blood—if you were Francis's father, and this had been your grandchild!"

To my sorrow, I had forgotten for the time a part of poor Harry's story—the beginning of it; you shall know it some day—it is all past now. But papa remembered it. He faltered as he walked—at last he sat down on a tree by the roadside and said, "he must go home."

Yet still, either by accident or design, he took the way by the lane where is Mrs. Cartwright's cottage. At the gate of it a little ragged urchin was poking a rosy face through the bars; and, seeing papa, this small fellow gave a shout of delight, tottered out and caught hold of his coat, calling him "Daddy." He started—I thought he would have fallen, he trembled so: my poor old father.

When I lifted the little thing out of his way, I, too, started. It is strange always to see a face you know revived in a child's face; in this instance it was shocking—pitiful. My first thought was, we must never let Penelope come past this way. I was carrying the boy off—I well knew where, when Papa called me.

"Stop. Not alone—not without your father."

It was but a few steps, and we stood on the dooress of Mrs. Cartwright's cottage. The old woman snatched up the child, and I heard her whisper something about "Run—Lyddy—run away."

But Lydia, if that white, thin creature huddled up in the corner were she, never attempted to move.

Papa walked up to her.

"Young woman, are you Lydia Cartwright, and is this your child?"

"Have you been meddling with him? You'd better not! I say, Franky, what have they been doing to mother's Franky?"

She caught at him, and hugged him close, as mothers do. And when the boy, evidently both attracted and puzzled by papa's height and gentlemanly clothes, tried to get back to him, and again called him "Daddy," she said angrily, "No, no, 'tis not your daddy. They're no friends of yours. I wish they were out of the place, Franky, boy."

"You wish us away. No wonder. Are you not ashamed to look us in the face—my daughter and me?"

But papa might have said ever so much more, without her heeding. The child having settled himself on her lap, playing with the ragged counterpane that wrapped her instead of a shawl, Lydia seemed to care for nothing. She lay back with her eyes shut, still, and white. We may be sure of one thing—she has preferred to starve.

"Dunnot be too hard upon her, sir," begged the old woman. "Dunnot, please, Miss Dora. She bea't a lady like you, and he were such a fine coxing young gentleman. It's he that's most to blame."

My father said sternly, "Has she left him, or been deserted by him—I mean Mr. Francis Charteris?"

"Mother," screamed Lydia, "what's that? What have they come for? Do they know anything about him?"

She did not then.

"Be quiet, my lass," said the mother, soothingly, but it was of no use.

"Miss Dora," cried the girl, creeping to me, and speaking in the same sort of childish, pitiful tone in which she used to come and beg Lisabel and me to intercede for her when she had annoyed Penelope, "do, Miss Dora, tell me. I don't want to see him, I only want to hear. I've heard nothing since he sent me a letter from prison, saying I was to take my things and the baby's and go. I don't know what's become of him, no more than the dead. And, miss, he's that boy's father—miss—please—"

She tried to go down on her knees, but fell prone on the floor.

Max, who would have thought, the day before, that this day, I should have been sitting with Lydia Cartwright's head on my lap, trying to bring her back to this miserable life of hers; that papa would have stood by and seen me do it without a word of blame!

"It's the hunger," cried the mother. "You see, she isn't used to it now; he always kept her like a lady."

Papa turned and walked out of the cottage. I afterward found out that he had bought the loaf at the baker's shop down the village, and got the bottle of wine from his private cupboard in the vestry. He returned with both—one in each pocket—then, sitting down on the chair, cut the bread and poured out the wine, and fed these three himself, with his own hands. My dear father!

Nor did he draw back when, as she recovered, the first word that came to the wretched girl's lips was "Francis."

"Francis, beg them to tell me about him. I'll do him no harm, indeed I won't, neither him nor them. Is he married? Or, with a sudden gasp, "Is he dead? I've thought sometimes he must be, or he never would have left the child and me. He was always kind of us."

But when the heart of me knew, I felt, Mr. Charteris was living, but what had become of him we could none of us guess. We never saw him now.

Here, looking wistfully at me, Lydia seemed suddenly to remember old times, to become conscious of what she used to be, and what she was now. Also, in a vague sort of way, of how guilty she had been toward her mistress and our family. How long, or how deep the feeling was, I cannot judge, but she certainly did feel. She hung her head, and tried to draw herself away from my arm.

"I'd rather not trouble you, Miss Dora, thank you," I said it was no trouble, she had better lie still till she felt stronger.

"You don't mean that. Not such as me."

I told her she must know she had done me very wrong, but if she was sorry for it, I was sorry for her, and we would help her if we could to an honest livelihood.

"What, and the child, too?"

I looked toward papa; he answered distinctly, but sternly: "Principally for the sake of the child."

Lydia began to sob. She attempted no exclamation—expressed no penitence—just lay and sobbed like a child. She is hardly more, even yet—only nineteen I believe. So we sat—papa as silent as we, resting on his stick, with his eyes fixed on the cottage floor, till Lydia turned to me with a sort of fright.

"What would Miss Johnston say if she knew?"

I wondered, indeed, what my sister would say.

And here, Max—you will hardly credit it, nobody would, if it were an incident in a book—something occurred, which, even now, seems hardly possible—as if I must have dreamed it all.

Through the open cottage door a lady walked right in, looked at us all, including the child, who stopped in its munching of bread to stare at her with wide-open blue eyes—Francis's eyes; and that lady was my sister Penelope.

She walked in and walked out again, before we had our wits about us sufficiently to speak to her, and when I rose and ran after her, she had slipped away somehow, so that I could not find her. How she came to take this notion into her head, after being for weeks shut up indoors; whether she discovered that the Cartwrights had returned and came here in anger, or else, prompted by some restless instinct, to have another look at Francis's child—none of us can guess; nor have we ever dared to enquire.

When we got home, she was lying in her usual place on the sofa, as if she wanted us not to notice that she had been out at all. Still, by papa's desire I spoke to her frankly—told her the circumstances of our visit to the two women—the destitution in which we found them; and how they should be got away from the village as soon as possible.

She made no answer whatever, but lay absorbed, as it were—hardly moving, except an occasional nervous twitch, all afternoon and evening, until I called her in to prayers, which were shorter than usual—papa being very tired. He only read the collect, and repeated the Lord's Prayer, in which, in the voices that followed his, I distinguished, with surprise, Penelope's. It had a steadiness and sweetness such as I never heard before.

And when—the servants being gone—she went up to papa, and kissed him, the change in her manner was something almost startling.

"Father, when shall you want me in the district again?" said she.

"My dear girl!"

"Because I am quite ready to go. I have been ill, and it has made me un-mindful of many things; but I am better now, papa. I will try to be a good daughter to you. I have nobody but you."

She spoke quietly and softly, bending her head upon his grey hairs. He kissed and blessed her. She kissed me, too, as she passed, and then went away to bed without any more explanation.

But from that time—and it is now three days ago—Penelope has resumed her usual place in the household—taken up all her old duties, and even her old pleasures, for I saw her in the greenhouse this morning. When she called me, in something of the firmer, quick, imperative voice, to look at an air plant that was just coming into flower I could not see it for tears.

Nevertheless, there is in her a difference. Not her serious, almost elderly-looking face, nor her manner, which has lost its sharpness, and is so gentle sometimes that when she gives her orders the servants actually stare—but the marvellous composure which is evident in her whole demeanor; the bearing of a person who, having gone through what

sharp, which either kills or cures, is henceforth settled in mind and circumstances, to feel no more any strong emotion, but go through life placidly and patiently, without much further change, to the end. The sort of woman that suits are made of—or *Sœurs de la Charité*; or Protestant lay-sisters, of whom every village has some; and almost every family owns at least one. She will, to all appearance, be our one—our elder sister, to be regarded with reverence and respect, and be made as happy as we possibly can. Max, I am learning to think with hope and without pain, of the future of my sister Penelope.

One word more, and this long letter ends.

Yesterday, Papa and I, walking in the moor, met Mrs. Cartwright, and learned full particulars of Lydia. From your direction her mother found her out, in a sort of fever, brought on by want. Of course, everything had been taken from the Kensington cottage for Francis's debts. She was turned out with only the clothes she wore. But you know all this already through Mrs. Ansell.

Mrs. Cartwright is sure it was you who sent Mrs. Ansell to them, and that the money they received week by week in their worst distress came from you. She said so to papa while we stood talking.

"For it was just like our doctor, sir—as is kind to poor and rich—I'm sure he used to look at you, sir, as if he'd do anything in the world for you—as many of the time I've seen him a-sitting by your bedside when you was ill. If there ever was a man living as did good to every poor soul as came in his way, it be Dr. Urquhart."

Papa said nothing.

After the old woman had gone, he asked if I had any plans about Lydia Cartwright.

I had one, which we must consult about when she is better—whether she might not, with her good education, be made one of the schoolmistresses that you say go from coll to coll instructing female prisoners in these model jails. But I hesitated to start this project to papa, so I told him I must think the matter over.

"You are growing quite a thinking woman, Dora; who taught you—who put it into your mind to act as you do? you who were such a thoughtless girl. Speak out, I want to know?"

I told him, naming the name of my dear Max, the first time it has ever passed my lips in my father's hearing since that day. It was received in silence.

Some time after, stopping suddenly, papa said to me, "Dora, some day, I know you will go and marry Dr. Urquhart."

What could I say? Deny it—deny Max—my love and my husband? or tell my father what was not true? Either was impossible.

So we walked on, avoiding conversation until we came to our own churchyard, where we went in and sat in the porch, sheltered from the noon heat, which papa feels more than he used to do. When he took my arm to walk home, his anger had vanished; he spoke even with a sort of melancholy.

"I don't know how it is, my dear, but the world is altering fast. People preach strange doctrines, and act in strange ways, such as were never thought of when I was young. It may be for good or for evil—I shall find out by-and-by. I was dreaming of your mother last night; you are growing very like her, child." Then suddenly, "Only wait till I am dead, and you will be free, Theodora."

My heart felt bursting; oh, Max, you do not mind me telling you these things? What should I do if I could not thus open my heart to you?

Yet it is not altogether with grief or without hope that I have thought over what then passed between papa and me. He knows you—knows, too, that neither you nor I have ever deceived him in anything. He was fond of you once; I think sometimes he misses you still, in little things wherein you used to pay him attention, less like a friend than a son.

Now, Max, do not think I am grieving—do not imagine I have cause to grieve. They are as kind to me as ever they can be. My home is as happy as any home could be made, except one, which, whether we shall ever find or not, God knows. In quiet evenings such as this, when, after a rainy day, it has just cleared up in time for the sun to go down, and he is going down, peacefully in amber glory, with the trees standing up so purple and still, and the moorlands lying bright, and the hills distinct even to their very last faint rim—in such evenings as this, Max, when I want you and cannot find you, but have to learn to sit still by myself, as now, I learn to think also of the meeting which has no farewell, of the rest that comes to all in time, of the eternal home. We shall reach that some day.

Your faithful, THEODORA.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

HER STORY.

Treherne Court, Sunday night.

My dear Theodora—The answer to my telegram has just arrived, and I find it is your sister whom we are to expect here in a few days. I shall meet her myself by the

night train: Treherne being quite incapable; indeed, he will hardly stir from the corner that leads to his wife's room.

You will have heard already that the heir so ardently looked for has only lived a few hours. Lady Augusta's letters, which she gave me to address and I took care to post myself, would have assured you of your sister's safety, though it was long doubtful. It will comfort you to know that she is in excellent care, both her medical attendants being known to me personally, and Lady Augusta being a real mother to her in tenderness and anxiety.

You will wonder how I came here. It was by accident—taking a Saturday holiday which is advisable now and then; and Treherne's mother detained me as being the only person who had any control over her son. Poor fellow! he was almost out of his mind. He never had any trouble before, and he knows not how to bear it. He trembled in terror thus coming face to face with that messenger of God who puts an end to all merely mortal joys—was paralyzed at the fear of losing his blessings, which, numerous as they are, are all of this world. My love, whom I thought to have seen to-night, but shall not see—how long!—things are more equally balanced than we suppose.

You will be sorry about the little one. Treherne seems indifferent, his whole thought being naturally his wife; but Sir William is grievously disappointed. A son, too—and he had planned bonfires and bell-rings, and rejoicings all over the estate. When he stood looking at the little white lump of clay, which is the only occupant of the grand nursery prepared for the heir of the Treherne Court, I heard the old man sigh as if for a great misfortune.

You will think it none, since your sister lives. Be quite content about her—which is easy for me to say, when I know how long and anxious the days will seem at Rockmount. It might have been better for some things if you, rather than Miss Johnston, had come to take charge of your sister during her recovery, but maybe all is well as it is. Tomorrow I shall leave this great house with its many happinesses, which have run so near a chance of being overthrown, and go back to my own solitary life, in which nothing of personal interest ever visits me but Theodora's letters.

There were two things I intended to tell you in my Sunday letter; shall I say them still? for the more things you have to think about the better, and one of them was my reason for suggesting your presence here rather than your eldest sister's. (Do not imagine, though, your coming was urged by me wholly for other people's sakes. The sight of you just for a few hours—one hour—People talk of water in the desert—the thought of a green field to those who have been months at sea—well, that is what a glimpse of your little face would be to me. But I cannot get it, and I must not moan.)

What was I writing about? Oh, to bid you tell Mrs. Cartwright from me that her daughter is well in health, and doing well. After her two months' probation here, the governor, to whom alone I communicated her history (names omitted), pronounced her quite fitted for the situation, and she will be appointed there. This is a great satisfaction to me, as she was selected solely on my recommendation, backed by Mrs. Ansell's letter. Say also to the old woman that I trust she receives regularly the money her daughter sends her through me, which indeed is the only time I ever see Lydia alone. But I meet her often in the wards, as she goes from cell to cell teaching the female prisoners; and it is good to see her sweet, grave looks, her decent dress and mien, and her inexpressible humility and tenderness toward everybody. She puts me in mind of words you know, which in another sense other hearts than poor Lydia's might often feel—that those love most to whom most has been forgiven. Hinting this, though not in reference to her, in a conversation with the governor, he observed rather coldly, "He heard it said Dr. Urquhart held peculiar opinions upon crime and punishment—that, in fact, he was a little too charitable."

I sighed, thinking that, of all men, Dr. Urquhart was the one who had the most reason to be most charitable, and the governor fixed his eyes upon me somewhat unpleasantly. Any one running counter, as I do, to several popular prejudices, is sure not to be without enemies. I should be sorry, though, to have displeased so honest a man, and one who, widely as we differ in some things, is always safe to deal with, from his possessing that rare quality, justice.

You see, I go on writing to you of my matters just as I should talk to you if you sat by my side now, with your hand in mine and your head here. (So you found two gray hairs in those long locks of yours last week. Never mind, love. To me you will always be young.)

I write as I hope to talk to you one day. I never was among those who believe that a man should keep all his cares secret from his wife. If she is a true wife, she will soon read them on his face, or the effect of them he had better tell them out, and have them over. I have learned many things since I found

my Theodora; among the rest is, that when a man marries, or loves with the hope of marrying, let him have been ever so reserved, his whole nature opens out—he becomes another creature, in degree toward everybody, but most of all to her he has chosen. How altered I am you would smile to see, were my little lady to compare these long letters with the brief, business-like productions which have hitherto borne the signature "Max Urquhart."

I prize my name a little. It has been honorable for a number of years. My father was proud of it, and Dallas. Do you like it? Will you like it when—No, let me trust in Heaven, and say when you hear it?

Those papers of mine which you saw in the Times—I am glad Mr. Johnston read them; or, at least, you suppose he did. I believe they are doing good, and that my name is becoming pretty well known in connection with them, especially in this town. A provincial reputation has its advantages; it is more undoubted—more complete. In London a man may shrink and hide; his nearest acquaintance can scarcely know him thoroughly; but in the provinces it is different. There, if he has a flaw in him, either to his antecedents, his character, or conduct, he sure scandal will find it out, for he has every opportunity. All so public opinion is at once stricter and more narrow-minded in a place like this than in a great metropolis. I am glad to be earning a good name here, in this honest, hard-working, commercial district, where my fortunes are apparently cast, and where, having been a "rolling-stone" all my life, I mean to settle and "gather moss" if I can—moss to make a little nest soft and warm for—my love knows who.

Writing this about the impossibility of keeping anything secret in a town like this reminds me of something which I was in doubt about telling you or not; finally I have decided that I will tell you. Your sister being absent will make things easier for you. You will not have need to use any of those concealments which must be so painful in a home. Nevertheless, I do think Miss Johnston ought to be kept ignorant of the fact that I believe—nay, am almost certain—Mr. Francis Charteris is at the present time living in Liverpool.

No wonder that all my enquiries in London failed. He has just been discharged from this very jail. It is more than likely he was arrested for liabilities long owing, or contracted after his last fruitless visit to his uncle, Sir William. I could easily find out, but hardly consider it delicate to make inquiries, as I did not, you know, after the doctor—whom a turnkey here reported to have said he knew me. Debtors are not criminals by law—their ward is justly held private. I never visit any of them unless they come into hospital.

Therefore my meeting with Mr. Charteris was purely accidental. Nor do I believe he recognized me—I had stepped aside into the warder's room. The two other discharged doctors passed through the entrance-gate, and quitted the jail immediately, but he lingered, desiring a car to be sent for, and inquiring where one could get handsome and comfortable lodgings in this horrid Liverpool. He hated a commercial town.

You will ask, woman-like, how he looked? Ill and worn, with something of the shabby, "poor gentleman" aspect, with which we here are only too familiar. I overheard the turnkey joking with the carman about taking him to "handsome rooms." Also, there was about him an ominous air of what we in Scotland call the "down-draught," a term the full meaning of which you probably do not understand—I trust you never may.

You will see by its date how many days ago the first part of this letter was written. I kept it back till the cruel suspense of your sister's sudden relapse was ended—thinking it a pity your mind should be burdened with an additional care. You have had, in the meantime, the daily bulletin from Treherne Court—the daily line from me.

How are you, my child? for you have forgotten to say. Any roses out on your cheeks? Look in the glass and tell me, I must know, or I must come and see. Remember your life is part of mine, now.

Mrs. Treherne is convalescent—as you know. I saw her on Monday for the first time. She is changed, certainly; it will be long before she is anything like the Lisabel Johnston of my recollection, full of health and physical enjoyment. But do not grieve. Sometimes, to have gone near the gates of death, and returned, hallow the whole future life. I thought, as I left her, lying contentedly on her sofa, with her hand in her husband's, who sits watching as if truly she were given back to him from the grave, that it may be good for those two to have been so nearly parted. It may teach them, according to a line you once repeated to me (you see, though I am not poetical, I remember all your bits of poetry), to

When see that t' great com' in the ap' Very fr' are to b' imported ext'ns an' this eleg' Stuffs cabage the stalk with min' seasoning one hour. Rich ounces of butter, a as will m' of paste. cakes, an' Apples pies, four sugar, a butter, a the apple d'ients, fl' slightly a sauce. Bessie fine, an' the latest die that mas' pears dur' nutritive ed with t' BLACK But one then tak' pound of melted, an' inch dry; and small die Soda V carbonate put it in tumbler- ing the o' half a dr' crystals, and it wi' and it wi' Dairy for butte must be t prevent t meat is basin, an' off the gr' next day will mak' The lat one day t penitenti: seats of g head to respect; which th "What a one. "I am replied t kneed t church w the head-me, and l Similar prisoners bored by of guilt line of pr a ragged, he besko "Of c false char "Not plied the as far as from a tr "Stole Czar, wit the gove assumed for nothi I cannot longer i pervert a My bel portunity whole reberland. to say ty system of largely pend v how you and organ country. have no d shall win we fight ment h influence tions of v while we of our pr must be t gone. W dy, my fr to do the are but leading a Liberal p There a more tha Let them do let them ing publ win. I men to w future da time will tools and the t-run The nell decl ity is den sension gerated. It is i woman t sence of mouth al her little squirl till she goes hury. But that mo it is a after all.