

THE BLINDNESS OF DR. GRAY

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CHAPTER XXXVII

A DREAD ORDEAL

During these sad days in the opening of the New Year, Annie O'Farrell was torn asunder under the agony of conflicting feelings. She had not openly disobeyed her uncle, to whom she was so much indebted, but she knew that he strongly disapproved of her visiting Rohira, and that there was a strain in their relations towards each other that might possibly widen into an open breach. She went every day to see the lad, who was clearly under sentence of death from the dread malady, and every day, as she pulled on her gloves and left her home, she felt she was giving ground.

"But—but," said the bewildered man of science. "I cannot understand. Why should Miss O'Farrell refuse to go? You say she's an old friend?" "I'm sure she'd like to go," was the answer. "But Miss O'Farrell is a Roman Catholic, and you know they're very particular, very fastidious about the proprieties and all that." "Oh, d—d nonsense!" said the irascible doctor. "There's no question of propriety or fastidiousness with us. We have to save human life—that's all!"

"I'm afraid," said Jack, mournfully shaking his head. "And then her uncle, her guardian, is a parish priest—a great scholar and theologian and all that. But a terrible stickler for law and the right thing and so on—a kind of Catholic Paritau, you know." "Of course, I see. But is Miss O'Farrell dependent on him?" "Partly. But she's deeply attached to him. And, if she comes with me, it means war. He'll never see her again. At least, I think that's what is in her mind."

"Well! well," said the surgeon. "The thing looks blue. But I'd advise you, Wyeherly, to face the matter at once. You can't see it, and she doesn't consent, then ask someone else. But clear away from this infernal climate as soon as you can! I'll try to get you out of here. And the great trouble is, as an eye, I must throw pellets of snow against the windows, and the little streams, melting, flowed down and washed them clean. Frobly this poor, doomed lad never understood such an ordeal in his life as the one he faced that evening, when the doctors had departed and he felt that he had to settle the matter finally, or decide to remain in the hospital. In that silent, thoughtful, melancholy way in which such stricken souls move through the narrow paths of life, he crept through the corridors, hoping to meet the girl whose word his happiness now depended. He knew well he was no longer a prepossessing figure. All his masculine energy, which had created his machine beauty, had washed away and left him a withered and washed skeleton. The great brown masses of auburn hair, which had clustered and curled so proudly on his broad, white forehead, were now matted heaps that fell down but could not conceal the deep valleys in his temples. His cheeks had fallen in, leaving the cheek-bones high and prominent. His lips were blue and dry. His hands were thin and shrunken and emaciated, seemed but a skeleton on which his garments were hung. He coughed slightly, always with the dreary accompaniment of his handkerchief to his lips. He felt lonely, miserable, unhappy, dreading, yet seeking this interview with the one being, who alone could shed upon his desolate path a little hope and love."

"I expected to hear you say so," he replied gently but sadly. "It was too much to hope for. I know all the difficulties and I admit they are insurmountable. But it was my last hope. I shall die at home now." "Don't say that!" she cried, alarmed. "The doctors give you a chance for life by ordering you abroad. I know you need a nurse—a trained nurse, but any of the nurses—Miss Fortescue, Miss Langton, Miss O'Reilly—any of them will be delighted to be asked." "Perhaps so?" he replied. "But I shall not go unless you come with me!" "Now, that's foolish nonsense, Jack," she said almost impatiently. "I know it is the result of your weak condition. The moment you are on board the steamer all that will vanish and you know you can rely on any of the nurses here." "Of course," he said. "But my mind is made up. You won't come?" He coughed slightly, took out his handkerchief, drew it across his lips, and looked anxiously at her. The little action touched her and she had to look away to hide her tears.

people. But you see, Jack—you know the class of people my uncle has to deal with and how their prejudices will twist and turn the truth into an account against him. "But," he said more cheerfully, for he felt he was gaining ground, "all wise people ignore the prejudices of the lower classes. Otherwise, the world could not go on. Surely we should not be influenced by the prejudices of the ignorant."

"I suppose we ought not to be," she replied. "But my uncle is a priest and has to live amongst his people; and he must be careful in these days when people, he says, are so critical." "Perhaps! But somehow it seems to me, Annie, that the Lord Christ did not heed these things very much when He went about doing good."

"The appeal was so unexpected that she could not reply." "I know," he went on, "that a deeply religious girl as you are, Annie, must be shocked at my mentioning such a name at all. Of course, I have no more religion than a cow but the little I have learned has taught me that. And, do you know, Annie, it is not altogether for my own comfort I am begging you to go. But I know I am doing you a great wrong when I ask you to go. I know I am doing you a great wrong when I ask you to go. I know I am doing you a great wrong when I ask you to go."

"Yes, for an alien in race and religion, you are abandoning me in my helplessness. The man who took you into his house when you were a helpless orphan, and who has watched over you with fatherly interest all your life. He has not only taken you into his house, but he has also taken you into his heart. He has not only taken you into his house, but he has also taken you into his heart. He has not only taken you into his house, but he has also taken you into his heart."

"I had better not say that," she said. "You must go to South Africa and I must go with you. It is Destiny!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII NATURE AND LAW She did not make light of the ordeal before her. She had calculated every-thing, and she knew that the ordeal would be a trial that she had never realized its magnitude.

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face the worst part of her trial in explaining her intention to her uncle, her mind no longer wavered. She should go! "The two, nurse and patient, travelled together to their respective homes in the same railway carriage. His father's brougham was waiting for him and he drove Annie to her uncle's house. There, as they parted and shook hands, she said: "I have consulted my friends, Jack, and I'm going with you. The sooner our preparations are made, the better for us both."

"He put her hand to his lips and said: "God bless you! Give me one bare week. This day-week we start together."

"It was a sad week for the devoted girl, and yet her decision, now with her strong character unalterable, made the situation more tolerable. During the week her uncle did not relax the severity of his manner towards her. Cold and impassive and reserved, he received her redoubled attentions with a frigid politeness that was less tolerable than bursts of anger. And what made it worse, the infirmity of almost total blindness had reduced the old man to a condition of helplessness and weakness that was very touching. Watched and tended by his nurse, he sat along the edges of tables or the bookcase; seeing him silently brooding over the fire these dread winter days without the solace of books or other amusements, she felt that she was curate to recite the Divine Office with him; and thinking of his utter loneliness and abandonment when she, whom he expected to be the prop of his declining years, had turned her back upon him forever; and her heart smote her with compassion and remorse and her consciousness murmured:

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you say, is already doomed, with the scandal you will give to every member of my flock? How can I face the people again? How can I stand at God's altar, where I have denounced vice and every occasion of vice until I had rooted out every possibility of sin in my parish? Will not the people have a perfect right to turn round and say: 'Physician, heal thyself! You, who have never spared the feelings of others, when sin was in question, now let us hear what you have to say of your niece? She has eloped, run away with that Protestant gentleman!'

"Uncle! uncle!" cried the girl, her face crimson with indignation and shame, "for shame! I never thought I should hear such cruel, unjust, and uncharitable things from your mouth. You know perfectly well it is not an elopement—that there's not a single feature of anything so base in it—that I am acting through a pure sense of Christian charity and my duty as a hospital-nurse. Nor do I believe that there is even one in the entire parish that would look at it as you—as you—"

"And here her womanly pride broke down and she sobbed out: 'I am not a man to be touched by such a scene; and, even if I were, he felt so keenly that so great a principle and such a stake that he would be equally relentless.'"

"You are gravely mistaken," he said in a serious tone not meant to be severe. "There is not one in this parish that will either condemn or condone what you purpose doing. The guilt or innocence of the matter concerns yourself. The scandal to my parishioners concerns me. But there is no use in wasting words on such a subject. You have made your decision. And this is mine."

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most a few months. Mr. Wyeherly cannot live long and I shall be at liberty in any case to return home when I see him firmly and safely established in Africa."

"If you mean by returning home, that you shall be at liberty to come under my roof again, I say most emphatically, Never!"

And he brought down his clenched hand savagely on the table. "I, who have ostracized and banished from this parish for twenty-five years everyone that offended against public decency, I say that you shall never darken my door again, or give occasion to the impious to blaspheme God."

She rose up and went to the door. His voice arrested her. "Mind," he said, "there is no passion or resentment in what I have said. But Law is Law and I, its representative. Let us not part in anger, Annie! Come hither!"

She approached the table again and he pushed the pile of notes toward her. "Take these," he said. "They are not to me and they were intended for you. You will need them."

"I am in no need of money," she replied. "But I dread a long voyage without your forgiveness. Uncle, can you relent and forgive? Surely our Lord would not approve?"

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She hesitated, but he caught at the word. "He would never approve of your conduct and your action. Go of your own volition!"

She went weeping to her room, where she passed a sleepless and sorrowful night. And it was only the loud chiming of the clock at midnight on his mantelpiece in the dining-room that woke up the old man from his reverie. He turned down the lamp, lighted his candle, and groped his way towards his bedroom. He never closed his eyes in sleep until the gray dawn was breaking, and, therefore, he could not have heard a light footfall stopping outside his door in the early morning, or the sound of sobbing, as the girl knelt and put her lips to the panels of the door.

Outside in the cold, icy atmosphere of a January morning the brougham was waiting and the coachman had already hoisted her luggage on the top. Jack Wyeherly, looking wan and pinched and miserable, even though he was wrapped in the fur, put out one boy hand and clasped the soft fingers of his nurse, as he drew her into the carriage. She turned away her face after the first greeting, but he saw that she had been weeping.

"Annie," he said, "I know what a sacrifice you are making. But God will reward you." In an hour they were in the train, speeding fast toward the South.

TO BE CONTINUED

A WAITRESS OF QUALITY

By Joseph Eves Lawrence Shields and Richards had been bounding over the macadam highways in the former's motor-car since early in the morning. Richards protested so loudly that it was altogether too far past noon-time and luncheon-time to proceed without a halt for refreshment.

"Very nice, I'm sure," commented Shields. "But please don't forget, madam, that my friend is in the final throes of starvation." "Oh, very well, I'll be glad," laughed Richards. "Stay here and back in the radiance of her ultra-refined smiles, if you want to, old man. I am about to go on my way to Long Island to mingle with people of my own class."

you will serve us everything your house affords for luncheon, right here in this bower, as quickly as you can. Expense is not to be considered."

"It is past luncheon-time," said the girl, looking the two men over critically. "I will be glad to serve you, but I need some bouillon and broil a chicken for you. We do not serve meals out of hours, as a rule."

"You will see nothing by showing us extra vittles on them," said Shields. "And you may bring us a couple of cocktails—Martini."

"We have no bar or wine-cellar," said the waitress simply. "Never mind," cried Richards, as his friend was about to protest at such an unusual omission. "It's just as well. I'd rather have a good pot of tea than anything else in the world."

"Oh, I will make you some tea at once," said the waitress, hurrying away. "Good!" called Shields after her. "Make it yourself, my dear, with your own fair hands, and my sentimental friend will double the price of it."

"Shut up, you brute!" said Richards, kicking high heels and snuffing the table. "You ought to have your head punched. Can't you see the girl has a most sensitive and refined nature?"

"She could grace a Paris gown as well as she does her apron. Note how well modulated her voice is, and how reserved and well bred she appears. I already count myself her inferior."

"These country girls are very apt. They show remarkable cleverness in picking up the ways of their city customers. Now, if you could see your fair charmer walk out with her 'steadfast' company of a Sunday evening, you would be disillusioned, my boy. This little social veneer is very neatly assumed, but you should wait until these Arcadian shades are over and revert to type. They can't help it, you know."

place on Long Island, spare his friend's the blame upon an extra what he termed the of a gentleman for

Not wishing to quarrel with the field his tongue stood for the mere tire company. Some inclined to treat the score of Shields the whole situation comfortable for his

The next day members of the over the estate, riding until the morning on two motoring, swell the number of prompts muscular members of the room. Richards had kept the day, and shielded alone on one of the middle of the afternoon.

"I've hunted for you," he said. "I'm yours here. Came to guess I haven't seen you. Richards, was she particularly."

"Well, you will see it's your precious of the most little of yesterday with those easy she's probably a day I'm going to tell me her."

"You'll do no more Richards fiercely. I'll bring any way; but I'll show you nothing to embarrass just show what an self. I warned you college girl or son."

"She's moved to said Shields. "I'll her."

A moment later sent to hand to Miss Faulkner, grew very red a barely found void greetings. "Now what do Shields to Richards. "Look at the on. Does that look case in your mind find out about this find out about this. "You dare to say said Richards. "I'll case. She was in honor of that girl investigating that whenever her glances the two men, pale and red. A singing a song as managed to hand to her. "My dear Mr. kindly. 'We all things happen in we can hardly find difference of envy we met yesterday. I am very sorry should be glad planned, and I'd planation, and I'd any secret you are an hardy old man. incidence to no on sure you that m silence."