

Lucille realized it, she was engaged, shown to her room and a boy despatched to the village for her trunk.

"Can it be possible, or am I only dreaming?" she murmured, sinking into a chair by the window, into the very room that had belonged to her governess. "Father, mother, do you know that I am at home? Home! Oh, what a bitter mockery! I must go away again! I can never bear it!" But she did bear it, and soon learned to love those who now called it home.

Mrs. Morton was a widow with a frank impulsive heart, that was soon won by the stranger; and the children fell promptly in love with their new governess, who never tired of strolling about the grounds with them, and telling the most wonderful stories of how another little girl had once lived in their house and done so and so.

It was a life nearer happy than any she had lived for ten years; and many, many times the truth hung to her lips when talking with Mrs. Morton. But she never spoke it.

"Such a piece of news," said that lady, coming in one day with an open letter in her hand. "My brother is coming home."

"Yes," said Lucille, with polite interest. "The one you call your favorite? Is he coming to visit you?"

"Visit me? Why, this is his house," laughed Mrs. Morton, throwing down the garden-hat. "And with such a lovely home as this, he leaves me to do as I please here, and goes roaming around the world after a girl he loved years ago. This was her home. Why, Miss Lathrop—"

"Oh, it is nothing," interrupted Lucille, ghastly pale. "Only a stitch in my side. I have them frequently, but I was interested in your story. I did not mean to interrupt you. Go on, please."

"I really don't know all the particulars, often as I have heard them," said Mrs. Morton. "But they were engaged, and, as I say, this was her home, but her father forged or something and killed himself, and the girl and her mother gave up everything and disappeared. But I forgot to say that just before that my brother had been called abroad, and was reported lost at sea, but had escaped death in the miraculous way that some people—"

But with a startled cry she interrupted herself and sprang up, just as Lucille sank from her chair to the floor in utter insensibility.

It almost seemed as though life would not return, but Mrs. Morton, together with the servants who rushed in at her frightened cry, were indefatigable, and at last they were rewarded.

"Do not speak!" Mrs. Morton exclaimed, as the gaze on her face grew rational and the white lips began to tremble. "I guess what you would say. You are Lucille Brayton. Close your eyes if I am right."

Instantly the lids fell, but as quickly lifted again.

"Say it again," the faint voice pleaded, in spite of commands of silence. "Loyd lives? my Loyd? Loyd Murray?"

"Yes, yes. But you must be quite. I will not talk to you," cried Mrs. Morton, who was in a perfect delirium of joy and excitement.

But Lucille did not want her to do so. That one deliriously joyful truth was enough to feast on for the present, and gladly she closed her eyes and lay quiet, while Mrs. Morton, calling her carriage, drove hastily to the village and sent this startling announcement to her brother, Loyd Murray:

"Come at once, Lucille Brayton is with me."

And cannot you imagine, how, after reading it, the speed of lightning seemed but snail's pace to him who, since his wonderful escape from the sea, had never ceased looking for the one who, believing him dead, and caring for naught else in the world, had so sedulously hidden herself away.

Their meeting was far too full of sacred joy to bear either witness or description.

Mrs. Morton welcomed her brother at the step, saw him go into the parlor and saw Lucille rise from her chair, looking like an angel in her white draperies and the speechless joy in her pale face.

Then she hurried away with her eyes full of happy tears for their joy, and tried to explain to the astonished children how Miss Lathrop was not Miss Lathrop and was going to be their auntie very soon.

"Did you not notice how like old times everything looked?" Mr. Murray asked Lucille, as next day they strolled about the grounds and lake shore just as they had done years before.

"Oh, yes, the moment I reached the gateway; and while, of course, I was glad to see it so, it nearly killed me with memories. I thought I could never bear to stay here," answered Lucille, who still could not realize the wonderful truth that her lover, so long mourned as dead, was beside her.

"I reached here about six or eight months' after you left, and finding the house just as you left it, still in the creditors' hands, I purchased it, and began to look for you."

"Why, my darling, it seems to me that I have ransacked the entire world in searching for you, and advertised far and wide. How could I have failed in finding you?"

"Easily, Loyd. We went so far and among such entire strangers, and never, save when I was out of work and looked at advertisements, did we see a paper. No one gave them to us, and we could not afford even the cheapest. And all that time you were keeping the old home and looking for me."

She burst into a passion of tears, purely joyful, and clung to him as if in terror that the horrible past would prove still a reality, and the present but a delirious fleeting dream.

But the clasp of his arms and the sound of his tender voice were very reassuring, and presently she was smiling through her tears as he talked of what they would do.

"And I'll whisper a little secret of Helen's, which she has perhaps not told you. She goes to a home of her own in just a little while, and we will have a double wedding, and then, my darling, the old home is once more your own—all your own—and you are all my own, after years of waiting—my own sweet, sweet wife!"

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