

"You are an impertinent fellow!" cried the earl. "Out of my way, or I will ride over you!"

"Pray—pray listen to him, Lord Caraven," cried Hildred.

But the earl turned angrily to her.

"You do not understand these matters; you must not interfere," he said—"a set of idle rogues."

"Stop, my lord," cried the man, his face paling—"stop. Be satisfied with taking my health and my strength—leave my character alone. I am no rogue, I am an honest, hard-working man."

"Honest indeed!" cried the earl. "There is not one honest man among you."

The evil look deepened on the man's pale face.

"I will not answer, my lord," he said, with quiet dignity. "I am asking a favor; it is life to me. I have no money to leave the house; if I remain in it as it is it will be certain death to me. My lord, it is but a few pounds—very few—do not refuse them!"

But Lord Caraven's face grew crimson with anger.

"I shall do nothing of the kind. And let me tell you that I consider it a great impertinence for you to stop me in this fashion; I have an agent to manage my affairs—go to him. Out of my road, and take care you do not stop me again."

The man went away and the earl rode on. Was he generous? Only a few pounds, and for that a life must be sacrificed.

"Mind, Hildred," he said, sharply, "you are not from any mistaken notion of generosity to interfere; if you do I shall have to repair every house on the estate."

And she wondered to herself whose idea of generosity was mistaken—his or hers.

#### CHAPTER XIV.

Hildred's heart sank lower and lower—every day brought her some fresh revelation of her husband's character which was utterly unendurable to her. The worst trait of all was that he seemed to her, as it were, to lounge through life. He literally did nothing—no useful occupation ever seemed to attract him. He never read, he never wrote. If any letter of importance required an answer he passed it to her or threw it aside. If the agent brought the accounts he said in his indolent manner, "Lay the books down—I will see to them soon;" but he never looked at them. He had but one idea, and that was amusement. No idea of work ever seemed to occur to him—self-indulgence and indolence were all that he cared for.

Hildred's heart sank in dismay. She looked at him sometimes as he lay listlessly stretched on a couch, and wondered why nature had given so fair an exterior to one with so little soul. The handsome face seemed to have no purpose in it. If he spoke it was always about some plan or other for his own especial amusement—it was either of billiards or of one of the games in which he took such infinite delight. He never advanced any scheme for the benefit of others; in fact, other people, except so far as they ministered to his pleasures and his will, did not exist for him. His was a hopeless character—far more hopeless than that of a man of graver faults. His young wife looked at him sometimes, wondering if anything would ever interest him, would ever rouse him, would ever stimulate him to action.

"It is a terrible thing," she said, "to live so entirely for one's self—a terrible thing!"

She thought to herself once that she would sketch his day. He never rose until after ten; he sat for some time over his breakfast, reading his letters and newspapers. The former were thrown aside, and seldom if ever answered; even those of importance were ignored like the rest. There was generally a muttered word over the bills, if any came. Then he took a gallop on his horse wherever his wild fancy led. That was followed by luncheon, when his lordship did not spare his wine; after that came billiards or cards, if any one worth playing with was in the house. Dinner was followed by wine and billiards until the early hours of the morning. It was not a noble life, it was not even a dignified life—it had no end, no object except self-indulgence, and the young wife looked on in sorrowful dismay.

Would he never change? Would he remain selfish, self-indulgent, indolent, to his life's end? The contrast between what he did and what he should have done appalled her—she hardly dared to think of it. The estate was neglected and uncared for; the tenants were oppressed; appeals for mercy and for justice were made to him in vain. The farmers were all dissatisfied; the only person who really seemed to approve of matters as they stood was Jonu Blantyre, the steward, the man whom Lady Caraven instinctively disliked. He was always smiling, bland, and suave; he had a habit, while talking to Lord Caraven, of rubbing his hands—a habit that used to annoy and to irritate the young countess exceedingly. He was quite pleased if threats were made by the servants and the laborers that they would appeal to the earl. He had a fashion of saying, "You can try it—you will see what the earl says;" for the earl had but one answer to everything—complaint, excuse, or prayer—and it was, "Go to Blantyre!"—indeed the order had become quite a by-word on the estate, "Go to Blantyre" being considered as equivalent to something far more dreadful.

The young countess looked around her. On every side she saw the same evil—nothing was attended to, nothing done—the indolent ease of the earl seemed to extend to every one with whom he came into contact. The servants were continually being changed; nothing went right, as nothing does when the master of the house takes no interest in anything that passes in it. Another thing distressed her. She saw that his old love of gambling was returning in force. There were times when his face grew very dark over his betting-book; and he would leave home on all the great race days, remaining away for some time, and returning more indolent, more selfish than ever.

(To be continued.)

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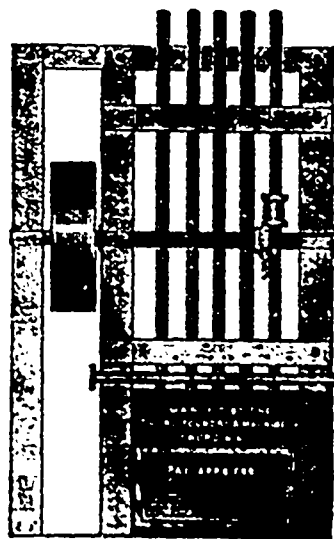
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