

THE LITTLE OLD SECRETARY

(CONTINUED.)

"Very well, my Lord," said the defunct Lord Melton. "But you really ought to rest now."

"You have been four and twenty hours on the strain without a moment's repose."

"I will, I will in a few minutes," replied Lord Melton, passing his hand wearily over his brow; "though I cannot rest when I think of the horrors going on amongst our people."

"As she closed the door she saw him sink back into his chair, perfectly worn out, and heard Mr. Everard saying, 'I refuse to do another stroke of business to-night; if you do not rest now you will be too ill tomorrow to move.'"

"Oh! how Kathleen longed to get to her own room alone, to examine that precious packet. It must tell something, though she could not guess from Lord Melton's manner what; only she had a sort of feeling that it could not be altogether disappointing."

"Just a few moments more you must grant me, Mr. Fitzgerald," broke in Lord Melton. "I will not be long. To you, my dear, kind friend, I can only return my warmest thanks for one of the pleasantest fortnights of my life."

"I am going to leave you my portfolio, Kathleen," said Lord Melton, turning to her the last of all. "I think that will give most pleasure to your own little self; and I shall like to think of you and Eva making studies of its contents together."

"They all crowded round him. The tact with which he managed to efface any suspicion they might have had, that he had felt neglected—the genial warmth of manner, so changed from the indifferent, slightly satirical manner of the late Mr. Everard—the unknown future of bloodshed and danger into which he was going forth—all combined to triumph over the annoyance of the discovery which for a moment had petrified everyone."

"Yes, my Lord," broke in the real Mr. Everard at last, in a friendly aggrieved tone, "you ought to say something to exonerate me from receiving so much kindness on false pretences."

"Yes, poor Everard!" said Lord Melton, laughing. "It was the most heroic act of friendship he ever showed me; and he was obliged to do it well for I threatened him with unheeded penalties if he made a mess of it."

11:50 p.m., House of Lords. "Your heart has not deceived you, my dear child. I have just received, through an officer returned from India by the fast packet, another note from Cochrane, and the enclosed miniature, which was Macdonald's. I have examined it, and the writing on the back is decisive proof."

Kathleen unrolled the paper from the small thick-feeling parcel, with such shaking hands that it seemed to her an age before the picture was reached. But at last the precious object lay open before her.

The case of the miniature was broken, a corner of the picture slightly defaced, but the countenance remained uninjured. There was the high, intellectual brow, the kind eyes, the mouth of child-like sweetness and exquisite refinement of her mother. Kathleen could not be mistaken.

"God bless my first-born; the joy of his mother's heart. Come back to us, as you go forth, loyal to your God, your parents and your duty."

This then was the picture, these the words, pasted on it in his first happy days, over which the prodigal was weeping such agonizing tears of un-availing remorse. It was a bruised heart, bleeding with a repentance which seemed all too late, that had been so cruelly exasperated by the sneering words and insulting manner of his fellow-officer.

Kathleen recollected well the occasion on which that picture was given—his parents' parting gift when Ewan, just seventeen, a devoted son and brother, full of the brightest promise, had first got his commission, and was on the point of leaving them to join the army.

"Ah! poor, poor Ewan!" she murmured, "what must have been his agony, as he gazed at that portrait of his mother, and contrasted what had been, and what was!"

Slow, hot tears fell from her eyes upon the picture as she thought of the heavy funeral pall of hopeless blight and disgrace which now enveloped that loved brother. Yet, bitter as were these tears, her burdened heart grew lighter as they fell.

The first glimpse which met Kathleen's eyes, as she unfastened the string and seals of the packet, was a small, thick parcel, wrapped up in paper; then a large, legal-looking document tied up with red tape, secured by an enormous seal, and addressed to Lord Melton; thirdly, in the supposed Mr. Everard's handwriting, dated "House of Lords, midnight;" and finally two undirected envelopes, apparently, from the hasty glance she cast upon them, containing cheques. She applied herself first to the little pencil note. It was couched in the briefest words:

"India House, 3 p.m. "News from the India House all unsatisfactory—Macdonald's watch, ring, etc., still unclaimed—no inquiries ever made by his family—name supposed to be assumed."

"The miniature young Macdonald was looking at ought to be amongst his things. I will send to enquire. I forgot it when at the India House."

"My messenger has returned. No such miniature has ever come into their possession. I must write to Cochrane, if he knows what became of it, and he shall send it to you."

Melton has been! In the midst of all the hurry and excitement of a terrible public calamity, he has remembered everything, done everything. He has even thought of sparing me a night's prolonged suspense, by giving me the papers when he could not see me alone."

"How little I have deserved such generous, disinterested friendship," she murmured to herself, as she recalled her feelings of impatient doubt, and the temptation to which she had almost given way, of taking everything into her own hands, and appealing straight to the man whom she believed to be the man of power.

Only the two undirected envelopes remained to be examined. One contained a note of hand of Lord Melton's, acknowledging the receipt of £500 from Captain Cochrane, to be made over to the family of McDonald as soon as they could be found. The other held a cheque made out to Mrs. MacDermot for £510, signed Melton. A note accompanied the cheque, to the effect that the additional ten pounds was the six months' interest from the bankers, with whom Captain Cochrane had deposited the money.

"Then after all the mistakes and misconceptions, I shall be the dove with the olive branch," exclaimed Kathleen joyously, drawing a long breath of intense relief as she laid down the papers. "This will be poor Ewan's reparation; the undoing, so far as may be, of the ruin he wrought. Oh! how wonderful, how wonderful! I, thinking only of that foolish idea of an inheritance, and Divine Providence working all this out by seeming chances. So much better, so much more lasting than anything I dreamt of. Oh! how sweet it is to be cradled in this nest!"

And Kathleen, in an ecstasy of wondering thankfulness, forgot all her troubles in the sleep of a tired child, "cradled in the nest of Divine Providence."

The next morning before she would let even Rose into her room, she sewed the precious documents and the beloved picture into a bag, which she fastened with strong strings round her waist; and in spite of all the good-byes and other hindrances, in spite of Dora's clinging arms, who declared, weeping, that "she loved her dear K. more than any one, and would go with her," she was seated in the carriage with all her goods and chattels duly addressed, waiting for Lord Melton, at the exact moment he had appointed.

He came out of the house, evidently overwhelmed with business, his hands full of unopened letters. Mr. Everard's head was in at one window of the carriage, and M. Olivier's at the other, receiving final instructions, while the coachman mounted his box. With a desperate effort, M. Fitzgerald contrived to get a final shake of the hand as the carriage door closed.

"You will come and see us again, my Lord, when you return to England," he said. "I shall never return," replied Lord Melton sadly. "I am an old man now, and it will be work to the end. But Eva must come and see you, and you will welcome her in my stead."

The cousins were all grouped at the open bow-window, waving their adieux. In their midst stood little Dora, looking very sorrowful and considerably mystified. They had been trying, though rather ineffectually, to make her understand "who was who," and the last Kathleen saw of the poor little tiny had, as though seeking despairingly through space: "Then, little E with the inky fingers, where?"

"Then he has obtained the Royal Pardon," exclaimed Kathleen in an excited whisper, clasping her hands rapturously. "My dear, dear brother, you are safe! Oh! how kind Lord

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Vol. 16 CHA "When I hear Some one pa I shall know Heard and w So each day He may com Every sunset He must con When t Lord Melto more fro ters to re give an Kathleen, "You have "They a securely r replied, a deepest gr the happi her eyes. Lord M val. "I w put the velling be are apt to marked; ters he re pidly, m further c reached t were seat riage, hov discreetly these corr partment disposed to amuse panion. into two he mark cil, he c urely in the seat "Well, began, s were mo body las have ha customer friend a he went into a la Edgar E insignifi into irr of laugh quired honor o "Ruling v The bou How hear bin how m at his spouting effect, intuitive "It is up tha last. "ing any sea wa with a guided only lo not kn one-titide "You that," culiar "The l much can ex My m iest p my po home times vided such a you th to ha poor havin prom Lot grave ment abso "K last, to fo deliv Divi those seem pred tastr thei awa very that