

ANNABEL OR THE TEMPTATION.

CHAPTER IX. THE MYSTERY UNVEILED. "Seymour?" she repeated. "That was my mother's name."

"Yes, your mother's name. Can you not guess now who the old gentleman is?" "Is he—one of my mother's relations?" faltered Annabel turning very pale.

"He is—now think what the relationship was to her—what it is to you." "At the time of my mother's death, I heard her speak of but one near living relative—a brother; and, oh, heaven, he was named William. Mr. Langton," she added, starting wildly up, in answer to her own rushing suspicion, and the merchant's significant look, "tell me—is it he—?"

"My dear young lady, yes; he was your mother's brother—he is your uncle." "That cruel brother who cast her off—who refused to help or befriend her—who left her to pine in poverty and die in obscurity, under hard toil? Philip, oh, take me from hence—take me from under his roof. I should never have come hither."

She sprang towards the youth and caught his arm with appealing excitement. Philip could only stand in dull petrification, gazing alternately at her and at Mr. Langton. "Stay, I beseech you," cried the latter. "Do not—pray, do not—yield to this natural, yet unfortunate impulse. It is not wonderful that anger, that indignation, should be the first feeling to rise in your bosom. But for the sake of mercy and pity—for the sake of all that is good and noble in your nature—do not give way to it. Your uncle is dying—his life is ebbing away so fast that in a few hours at most he will be no more; and the inexpressible yearning of his soul is to see you—to receive your forgiveness. Oh, Miss Leighton—Annabel—far so I venture to call you—he is very penitent—his soul is filled with regret and remorse. He realizes in all its magnitude the sin he committed to his sister—his cruelty towards her. It is planting his dying pillow with thorns, and your hand alone can pluck them out, and bid him die in peace. Will you refuse to put forth your hand to perform such a holy, Christian act? 'Twas you who unconsciously roused the deep sorrow and bitter remorse in his mind—you when in his pain and weakness who proved to him a ministering angel and taught him to know that gentleness and kindness are alone worthy of love and honor. No sooner had he returned to full consciousness after he was removed by you and Mr. Weston to Mrs. Dobson's than the sound of your name and the likeness you bear to your mother led him to discover that you were his sister's child. Nay, he remembers now that when first he beheld your face as you bent over him in the lane he was strangely moved and drawn towards you. A few cautious questions put to Mrs. Dobson confirmed the truth. Without betraying himself, he learned your history as far as the landlady could give it, and got to know the particulars concerning the affection between you and Mr. Weston, and the obstacle which was preventing your union. Now you have the explanation of what has appeared so perplexing in his conduct. He strove to discover his relationship, lest you should renounce and forsake him, for by this time his love was drawn forth towards you, and he yearned for pardon and reconciliation—he longed with an insupportable yearning of spirit to atone in some degree for the great wrong he did your mother. Hence the efforts he made to conceal his name, and the reason for his abrupt departure. But he was waiting only to devise means for a reconciliation with you, to have you beside him, that you might be to each other all that your dear relationship dictated. But anxiety, agitation and the shock he had received by the attack of the garter have all combined to bring his days to a speedy close, and it was necessary to send for you to-day, if the opportunity was to be had, for you to bestow and for him to receive your forgiveness. Now, my dear girl, I have no more to tell. Your poor, suffering, penitent uncle awaits your reception of my communication with indescribable anxiety. His sole wish—intensely cherished all day—has been to live till your arrival, to bless you and to die. I would urge you to be merciful and compassionate, but I rather leave your own gentle heart to plead for him."

Annabel had clung to Philip in breathless silence, listening to Mr. Langton's words, and, as he proceeded, her indignation, which was at first so strong and bitter, gradually lessened as the knowledge of her uncle's deep and sincere penitence was revealed. At first she thought only of her dear patient mother's hapless fate, made so by the cruelty, the pride, and the calousness of him who now sought her pardon, and at the remembrance of those years of poverty, neglect and suffering, she steered her soul against the unnatural cause of it, and felt as if to forgive him would be sacrilege to her mother's memory. But her mother's image rose also in her mind, and she could obtain no sanction for her resentment from thence. She remembered how few had been that mother's words of bitterness against that brother who had dealt so hardly by her. She had cherished no anger or resentment, and in her last moments Annabel had heard her breathe forgiveness for the injuries she had received from "poor, neglected William." Then the thought came rushing in that if her mother was alive at that moment, how readily she would pour the balm of healing into that brother's penitent soul, or if she could speak to her now from the grave it would be to tell her to do it in her name! Still more, when Annabel thought of her uncle as she had known him in Mrs. Dobson's—meek, grateful, generous—of what he had done for Philip, and of his present dying condition, her heart was melted to tenderness and overflowing pity.

Philip said nothing, but he watched her keenly, and waited confidently for the result. He well understood the working of her mind, the direction in which her thoughts and feelings were going, and the result to which they would reach—carefully refraining from saying or doing anything, so that the generous, the Christian part she would adopt might be entirely from herself, that her own noble woman's nature might assert itself unprompted.

The mental changes and emotions through which she passed were as rapid in their evolutions as was Mr. Langton's utterance, and scarcely had she spoken when she turned towards him, her eyes swimming in tears. "I will go to him," she whispered, with a sob. "Thank Heaven," said the merchant, in a tone of profound satisfaction.

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