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CHAPTER XXXIII

At Last.

"More than content," she responded, in as low a voice. "No one need know but our selves, Clive; but—but I am glad to know."

The other marriage took place a month later, when Clive and Mina had returned from a honeymoon which had been one of such perfect happiness that in the after years they stole away together to repeat it. Tibby made a charming and fairylike bride, and Quilton, in his wedding finery, looked so absurdly young that after all she had married an infant!

Clive had retired from office and from Parliament; and he and Mina spent a considerable time in somewhat extensive traveling. His strength came back to him, and Mina blossomed not only into a lovely woman, but into so strong a one that she was able to take her share in Clive's outdoor sports; she learned to ride, to fish, to walk long distances; in fact, she became that precious gift to a husband—a companion.

They might have continued their wanderings for a still longer period but for an approaching event and some sudden news which made their immediate return to England imperative. Clive brought the news to her as she was sitting in a Florentine garden. He had an open letter in his hand, and, seeing by his face that he had received bad tidings, she rose quickly and went to him. He put his arm round her and said in a low voice:

"Mina, my brother Bertie is dead. He died in California—was thrown from his horse. We must go back at once."

She did not attempt to console him with words; but her arm stole round his neck and she drew his head down to her. They went into the villa, and Clive gave her the letter to read.

"It has been delayed, following us about," he said, looking at the post-office stamps on the envelope. She took it mechanically and read the address; and as she did so she started and uttered a faint cry, for the envelope was addressed to the Right Honorable, the Earl of Rarborough.

He smiled at her sadly. "Yes, dearest, you see, I succeeded to the title, to Rarborough, by poor Bertie's death." They were silent for a moment or two, then he added in a whisper: "You have come into your own, Mina; Fate has, in a measure, restored that of which she robbed you. There have been times when my conscience has cried out against the selfishness which you have made so willingly, so nobly: I have felt sometimes a poignant remorse that I had no right to let you keep the secret of your birth."

"No, no, Clive!" she urged quickly. "The decision rested with me. Nothing would have induced me to have put forward a claim that I might never have been able to prove. Mr. Quilton told me so. I was quite content to know that you and he—and, perhaps, Lord Chesterleigh—knew it. And now, dearest, you need never be uneasy again. We will always keep the secret. And you are an earl, Clive! And I am a countess!" She spoke with a certain cadence rather than elation, and Clive, who was

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swift to interpret her every look and tone, drew her closer and kissed her. "You are thinking of the future, Mina?"

She raised her eyes, frank as a child's, and smiled; but still a little wistfully.

"Yes, Clive; but I am not afraid of the future, not afraid of the big world while you are by my side." The big world of which Mina had spoken, both political and social, had by no means ceased to take an interest in Clive Harvey. Of course all sorts of rumors had flown around purporting to account for his sudden disappearance not only from political life, but from social ken. It was generally known that he had almost secretly married a girl from the ranks of the people, the class for which he had done so much; but no one could give any accurate information about his bride, the cause of his withdrawal from the parliamentary arena, or even his whereabouts; and when he returned to Rarborough as its master, the interest in him and his bride became intense, and society was looking forward with an eager curiosity to their appearance in its midst.

And presently they appeared; the house in Eaton Square had for the first time for a lengthy period, been

Won by Devotion OR The Rightful Heir

CHAPTER I.

Shaddeck Light.

"Ah! you know. Yes, Mr. Carlton is my stepfather; and, by the way, as is the soul of hospitality, I think I may tender you an invitation in his name. You must find time hang rather heavily, § should say, at St. Ann's."

Yes, Mr. Dane admitted, with a gentle sigh. To find time hang heavily was, he regretted to say, one of the fixed conditions of his existence. It was the penalty, he supposed, life exacted from perfectly idle men. Very many thanks for Captain Dick's friendly offer, which at some future day he hoped to avail himself of. Then he lifted his hat and turned toward St. Ann's, while Captain Dick, whistling as he went, got over the ground with long strides in a directly opposite course.

The sun was setting. The sea lay smooth and sparkling below, the sky spread yellow, fleecy, rose-flushed above.

Mr. Ernest Dane turned and watched his late companion out of sight, a stalwart, strong figure clearly outlined against the western red light, with something unmistakably military in the square shoulders and upright poise of the head, something bright and breezy in air and eye and frankly ringing voice, something resolute and decided in the vechy edge of the firm, quick foot-steps. Mr. Dane's face darkened, as he watched, and his handsome, bored, blond countenance settled for a moment into as darkly earnest an expression as though he were a man with a purpose in life which that other man had crossed. It was but a moment. He turned away with a slight, contemptuous shrug, just as the tall captain wheeled round a bend in the white road and disappeared.

CHAPTER II.

Charlton Place.

She was a handsome girl, and yet at first sight there were people who did not think so. It was the sort of face that owned nothing to bright coloring of hair or complexion. The hair was pale brown, absolutely with out a tinge of warmer tint, either gold or russet; the complexion, clear and healthful, was colorless; the eyes like a fawn's, soft, thoughtful, peculiarly gentle; the mouth at once firm and sweet; the profile nearly perfect. Above middle height, with a figure well rounded and flexible, hands long, tapering, beautiful; dressed in black silk by no means new, but well-fitting, a touch of the lace, and a coral pin at the throat—that was Eleanor Carlton.

She stood at the open window and looked out; a wonderful light of pleased admiration in the hazel eyes. Honeysuckle and sweet-smelling roses clustered all about the casement, and filled the sweet summer warmth with perfume. A sea of fluttering green leaves and brilliant flowers spread out just beneath, and far beyond with the hot, yellow blaze of the July sun upon it, another sea, all asparkle as if sown with tears.

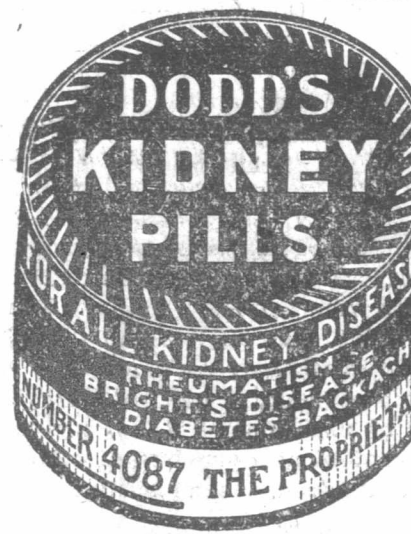
"How pretty, how pretty!" she said, a smile of pleasure drawing on her lips; "how pretty it all is! How happy one might be—could be—in such a home as this!"

The smile died away, and a faint sigh came inces. For all the home Miss Charlton knew, had known for the past eight years, was the hopeless home of a city boarding house.

A breeze came up from Shaddeck Bay and fluttered the honeysuckle bells, and swung the pink clusters of the roses. A bee staggered heavily by, drunk with sweets, booming. Little, white-sailed boats glided over the shifting water, a door shut somewhere in the sleepy afternoon stillness of the house. Then there was a tap, and before Miss Charlton had time to say come in, the tapper came in and proved to be Miss Charlton's mamma, a lady of the fat-and-fifty order, with a hooked nose, cold eye, a false front, false teeth, a good deal of gold jewelry on hand and bosom—the well-preserved remains of a "fine woman."

"Eleanor," she said abruptly, and turning the key in the door. "Yes, mother." Miss Charlton's voice was as gentle as her eyes, as sweet as her smile. Mrs. Charlton's, on the contrary, was of a rasping and astringent quality, that left an impression as bitters in the mouth.

(To be Continued.)



put into thorough repair, redeccorated and refurnished; and on a certain evening, early in the season, Clive introduced his wife to society to a large reception at Lady Dalrymple's. To say that society was startled by the contrast which Mina in all her liveliness and youthful grace presented to the mental picture which society had drawn—I believe she was quite a common person, my dear; a factory-girl, or one of those singing persons—is but to describe the sensation inadequately.

She was at once received, not only into favor, but with a fever of admiration which, as Clive laughingly declared, was calculated to increase the size of the beautiful little head he loved so well. It need scarcely be said, however, that Mina bore the flood of her social success with her native modesty, and it need scarcely be added that this same modesty added fuel to the fervor of her admirers. (To be Continued.)

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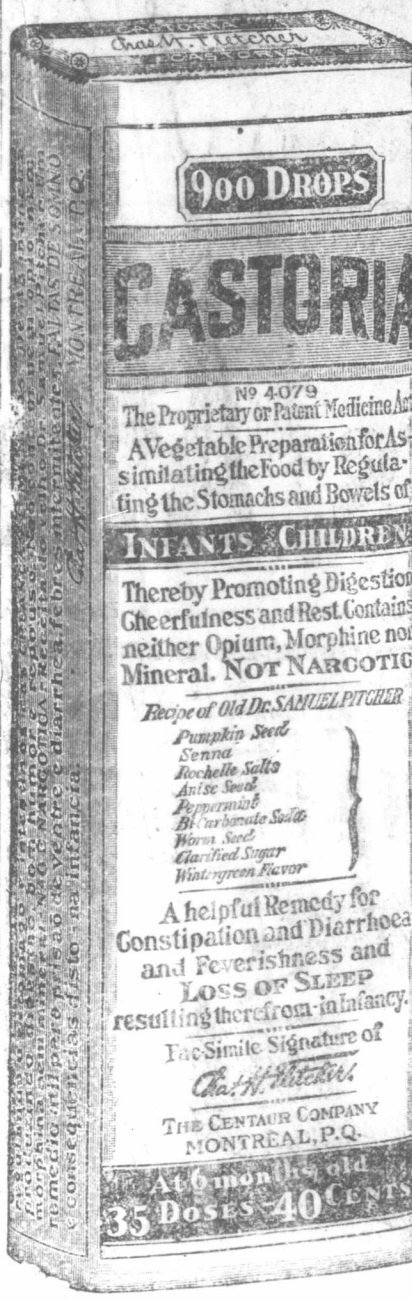
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