

She was silent for some minutes, and the crimson leaves of the clove-carnation fell one by one to the ground.

"I do not like speaking of it," she began. "You must see, Raoul, as well as I do—you must understand. How could any one help despising and disliking a man who lives for himself, who cares for nothing but his own pleasure, and leaves every duty neglected? How can I love a man who married me only for my money, despising me the while—who has not since marriage shown me the ordinary civility that a gentleman never fails to show to a lady? He is selfish, indolent—oh, Raoul, I do not like saying this, but if you saw his cruel neglect, his cruel oppression, if you know how carelessly he leaves everything to John Blantyre, how heedless he is as to the claims of justice, you would be sorry for me!"

"I see," he replied quietly. "Now tell me, Hildred—I know you will speak quite frankly—do you see one redeeming quality amid all your husband's faults?"

She thought long before she answered him, and then she looked into his face.

"I am afraid not—I do not remember one. Yes, there is one. I have never heard him speak falsely."

Sir Raoul's face cleared.

"Ulric was a truthful boy," he said. "Do you know of anything else in his favor?"

She thought again.

"I think," she replied, even more slowly, "that he is tender-hearted. He is not cruel; he does not not like to see people suffer; he is cruel only to me."

"True in word and tender of heart—these are two good qualities; we know that he has a handsome face, an easy grace of manner, a musical voice. You see I am trying to discover his good qualities. I will tell you something else. He is a spendthrift—I do not deny it. He may oppress the poor on his estate—that I am sure is done unwittingly; but he has never yet refused to help a comrade in distress. Years ago, when I was a hard-working soldier, with nothing to rely on but my pay, if I would have borrowed, he would have lent me half his fortune. He is open handed."

"Yes," she replied. Sir Raoul smiled.

"Listen again, Hildred. He has done all kinds of foolish, mad, senseless actions; but no one ever told of him that he had done a mean one."

"It was mean to demand rent from the poor widow whose husband was killed in his service."

"I am perfectly certain that John Blantyre has misled him," was the reply.

"It was mean to marry me for my money," she said with a flushing face.

"Ah! there I must yield! It was mean—it was, in one sense, the worst action of his life," said Sir Raoul. "Let us make a *résumé*, Hildred. He is true in word, tender of heart; he was never cruel; he is open-handed; he has committed but one mean action; he is handsome and accomplished, well fitted to win the heart of any woman. Tell me—do you think it quite impossible to love such a character?"

"I can hardly tell," she replied slowly.

"I think that Ulric Caraven has in him the elements of a noble character, Hildred. Give to a sculptor a block of shapeless marble, and what does he fashion from it?"

"A beautiful statue," she replied.

"True. Given a shapeless mass of qualities, good and bad intermixed, I say that a good woman from them can mold a beautiful character. Listen—I will tell you how."

He had drawn nearer to her, and the leaves of the crimson carnation fell at his feet; the western wind seemed to pause and listen—it fell with a faint subdued sigh.

"Listen," he repeated; and there was a grave sweet music in his voice that overawed her. "Our lives, Hildred, are very much what we ourselves make them; your case is, I grant, an exceptional one—your fate has in some measure been decided for you, but your ultimate destiny lies in your own hands."

She murmured faintly that she knew it, and that she was unhappy in the knowledge. He went on.

"Your life lies before you now, divided in two paths. Granted that you have been victimized, that you have been married for your money, that you have been sold, as it were, for a title, that your girlish romance and your womanly tenderness have been alike outraged, that you have been deceived, persuaded that you could live happily without love, and that you find it all a mistake."

"Yes," she repeated, "all a mistake."

"Some girls in your place," he continued, "would revenge themselves. Having no home happiness to fall back on, having no home love, they would rush into excess of gayety and flirtation. There are some who would do even worse than that—who would seek abroad the love they did not find at home—I speak quite frankly to you—but you are too good, too pure, too true, to think or dream of such a thing."

She made him no answer; but Sir Raoul did not seem to heed that. He went on:

"You have borne your fate bravely as yet, but now you have tired of it; your courage and patience have failed—you have told me so, and I can plainly see that in your own mind you are seeking some means of escape. Is it not so?"

"Yes," she answered, "I must go away."

(To be continued.)

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