

She drew nearer to him.

"I love you as no one else ever will—as no woman has ever loved you—partly because I could not help loving you, and partly because I have helped to awaken the better nature within you. You may live many years, happy, flattered, but no love like mine will ever reach you; the wife you are sending from you is the dearest and truest friend you have."

He looked terribly distressed.

"Why did you not tell me this before, Hildred?" he asked

"I tell you? How little you know me! Was it my place to go to the husband who neglected me and plead for his caresses, for his love? I would have died a thousand deaths first. How little you know me! I should not tell you all this now, but that I know in this world we shall never perhaps meet again. I am speaking to you across a grave. I stretch out my hands to you over a grave—the grave where my love lies—slain!"

And as she said the words she fell upon her knees, weeping, sobbing with bitter cries, as though a grave lay there, and she had fallen upon it.

He was touched. He could not tolerate what he believed to be her crime, but she was young, beautiful, and loving. Her crime had been committed through love of him. He raised her from the ground.

"I am very sorry, Hildred," he said; "it is very sad for both of us. Now we must talk of something else. You must go at once."

She raised her weeping eyes to him.

"Must you sound me away?" she asked gently. "It was wrong. I was mad with jealous anger, but I did not think I was. Could you not overlook it?"

"You speak lightly," he replied sternly. "No, you can never re-enter my house. I have arranged it all. I did so when I took poor Lady Hamilton back to the Castle. I told our guests that you had been suddenly sent for by your father, that I had driven you to the station—and it is to your father's house you must go."

"Very well," she said, drearily.

"You do not seem to understand," he remarked sharply, "do you not know the danger, the peril that hangs over you?"

She did not, but of what use was it to say so?

"Try to collect yourself and understand," he continued, "time presses. I cannot keep them away much longer. You must depart at once without being seen. No one must know at what hour you went. You must go to your father's house and wait there. If it should be needful to send you abroad, I will arrange it."

"Have I done so very wrong?" she murmured. The earl cried out passionately—

"Heaven give me patience! You must be mad to ask me such a question. One would think you did not know what wrong meant."

Hildred stood quite still, looking almost helplessly at him.

"You do not seem to realize or to know what you have done," he said hastily.

"I do—I do!" she moaned; "and there will be no pardon. I wish that I might fling myself into that lake. I would, but that there is a life to come."

"Hildred," said the earl sternly, "listen to me. I have told you that you must never re-enter my doors; but you bear my name, and for my name's sake I will shield you. The Countess of Caraven may have done wrong, but the world must not know it. I must save you from the consequences of your mad folly. See—I went quietly to your rooms and have brought you these." He gave her a cloak and a bonnet with a thick veil. "I found them in your wardrobe. Have you any money?"

"No," she replied vacantly, "none."

He took out his purse and gave it to her.

"I would accompany you," he said, "but that it would draw down suspicion on you. I must be here to ward it off. Wrap yourself in this cloak. Hide all that amber satin."

With cold trembling hands she obeyed him. Suddenly she remembered the rubies. She unclasped the necklace and bracelets.

"Take these," she said; and the earl took them—it was better, he thought, to humor her.

"Now you quite understand, Hildred? You must not go near Court Raven—you are known there. You must walk to Worseley; that is a larger station; no one will know you. Take a ticket for London. When you reach there, hail a cab and go straight to your father's house. Are you quite sure that you understand?"

"Yes; what must I say to my father?" she asked.

"You had better tell him the truth. He is a quick, keen man of the world; he will know far better than I do what should be done. Tell him all."

"Yes," she replied mechanically.

"Now hasten away from here, Hildred," he said. "I am in mortal fear. You understand all. You know the road to Worseley—it is direct—you take the high road without turning. Good-by."

She raised her dark sad eyes to his face; all the love, the passion, the regret that she could not put into words, was revealed in them.

"Good-by," she repeated.

He did not hold out his hand to her. Had he been speaking to the merest stranger, his voice could not have been colder or more stern. Then he turned quickly away, and Lady Caraven walked across the coppice and through a lane into the high-road. She walked quite mechanically. She had to go to Worseley, to take a ticket to London, and then go to her father's house. She repeated the words over and over again to herself, like a child who dreads forgetting a lesson. Her face was deadly pale; her limbs trembled with cold. The golden stars shone down upon her; the night winds whispered round her. She walked on, unconscious of it all.

(To be continued.)

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