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CHAPTER XVII.

Again came the day of trial, and the sun shone as brightly as it had done on that same day a week ago, but interest and expectation were more violent, and feminine hearts palpitated quicker with hope and desire that the prisoner, through his counsel might defeat the law.

Mrs. Delmar and Louise, both in the very brightest of summer attire, wore early in their places; the elder lady in an agony lest the pearl powder, with which she had plentifully overlaid her complexion in order to give a pale, interesting look to her features, should lose its effect in the crowded courtroom, was vigorously fanning herself. The younger, paler than she was her wont to be, though not by artificial means, was absorbed in thoughts of the visits she had made to the prison during the week.

She had gone daily, always accompanied by her mother, and Hubert had not submitted to the infliction with his former graciousness. He had not, it is true, openly wounded their sensitiveness; he had not rebuked them for their unkindness to Margaret, but it was only for Eugene's sake he had refrained—simple, frank, generous Eugene, who made daily visits also, and each time showed a friendship so deep, so sincere, that more than once Hubert caught the young fellow's hand, and murmured:

"What have I done to merit this?"

Between the young men, the subject of Margaret's treatment by Mrs. Delmar and her daughter was silently but mutually tabooed. Eugene shrank from making excuses for it, the falsity of which apologies he knew would be so apparent, and Hubert forebore to speak of that which he knew to be beyond Eugene's control, or influence.

But though he restrained the scathing rebuke which rose hotly to his lips when Mrs. Delmar paraded her affectionate interest in him, he was cynical and sarcastic in his conversation to her and Louise; he talked of the young lady, not to her any more, and when they prolonged their interview he became taciturn, and almost morose.

"It is anxiety about his trial that makes him so unlike himself," said Mrs. Delmar, "but once that terror is past we shall have him more charming in his manner than ever."

Perhaps her daughter's heart did not credit that prophecy, for love is attended by so many fears that hope itself is often dashed—and alas! for the happiness, for the peace of Louise Delmar's future life, her mother's lessons had been but too well learned. She loved Hubert Bernot with all the uncontrollable passion of her warped and shallow nature. His cynicism, his sarcasm, the very observations he launched at her from summits so far above her mental grasp, were but as chains binding her to the heights on which he stood, but chains that would never draw her from her own level—she would only hold her in a hopeless, weary, broken hearted bondage.

Yet, with that strange passion, there came to her, perhaps for the first time in her life, desires for a different life from the one she was living—softened, chastened feelings that made her turn impatiently from the constant parade of her mother's vanity, and which might, if properly guided, have made her a better, truer woman for the

future. She even felt kindly to Margaret Calvert. There was no jealousy of her, for she supposed, in common with the fashionable world, that Margaret was betrothed to Plowden, and was she not deterred by a certain awe of her mother, she would have proffered, even at that late day, her sympathy to Hubert's cousin.

Margaret sat alone, and a little apart from a group of severe-looking ladies, whose comments were sometimes so loud as to violate the laws of good-breeding. They were often distinctly audible to the motionless girl, but if their petty malice called painful blushes to her cheeks, or caused her bosom to heave with throes of wounded feeling, the thick veil screened the one, and the large loose folds of the friendly cloak, concealed the other.

"She is so forward," said a modern-looking Diana, knitting her brows, and darting a glance of scornful indignation at Margaret.

"It is certainly very bold and unfeeling in her to sit there so calm when her cousin's life is perhaps in imminent danger," said another elegant fair one, to whom Margaret, because of Mr. Plowden's attentions, had long been an object of sore envy.

"That is true," replied a third with a fashionable lip, "and it proves how just was dear Mrs. Delmar's decision regarding Miss Calvert's remission into our society. How glad I am that she caused us to decide then not to admit her under any circumstances; now, of course, she has forfeited all right."

"Certainly," responded the modern-looking Diana, "but we should have remembered in the first place, her obscure condition—that she has no fortune in her own right—absolutely nothing but what her aunt and cousin choose to give her."

There were hotter blushes on the veiled face, and a quicker beating of the sad heart under the friendly cloak.

It was true that Margaret had only what her aunt and cousin choose to give her, but owing to Madame Bernot's tender, affectionate care she had been spared the feeling of dependence which usually accompanies such bounty.

Now, however, strangers, or rather unfamiliar acquaintances, flaunted it in her hearing, and she sickeningly realized that it was her poverty and dependence which made her a criminal in the eyes of fashionable society—which made the latter refuse to tender to her the sympathy that would have been lavishly given to a wealthy sister similarly placed.

"But do you think it possible," said the lady to whom Margaret was an object of such envy, "that Mr. Plowden will really marry her after all that has happened and that may still happen?"

"Oh, certainly," was the reply, "for, as Mrs. Delmar says, persons of her stamp being so directly the opposite of the distinguished Mr. Plowden, have many artificial ways by which to entrap gentlemen like him."

Goaded to the quick, Margaret Calvert involuntarily raised her veil; per chance the magnetism of her gaze compelled each of the fair slanderers to look directly at her. The interchange of looks lasted but an instant, for she dropped her veil as suddenly as she had raised it, but the libelous remarks ceased—something in her face had awed the affrontery of even these women of fashion.

Mrs. Delmar, whose name had occurred so frequently in their comments, was smiling, and bowing to them from an opposite part of the house; she had been careful not to obtain seats too near that "odious Margaret Calvert," as she now invariably termed Hubert's cousin, and they returned the salutations with smiles and smiles, which they supposed to be graceful and becoming.

Margaret's eyes mechanically followed the direction of their glances, till they too rested on the interestingly pale features of Mrs. Delmar, who was still wielding her jewel-encrusted fan.

She smiled faintly, as, for a moment, she remembered that lady's former treatment—the almost motherly affection with which she was wont to receive her—and now to learn that this same estimable matron had been urging her friends to close the portals of society to the defenceless girl.

"For what?" Margaret asked herself, for, with all her sorrow and anxiety for Hubert, with all her dislike of the fashionable world, this coldness and uncharitableness stabbed her to the quick.

The prisoner appeared, and immediately Margaret's thoughts and emotions became centered in him.

He was paler and more attenuated looking than he had been even on the previous trial-day, but his mien and gait were as firm, as free from awkwardness, or embarrassment, as they had been on the former occasion. His eyes rested on Margaret, only turning from her as if to study Plowden's face.

He seemed quite regardless of the multitude of stares bent upon him—the buzz of whispered remarks which his appearance caused.

If the ordeal through which Bertoni had passed during the previous week had produced any strange, or untoward effect on the great lawyer, that effect was successfully concealed. He was the same grand eloquent counsel, sweeping obstacles before him with one stroke of his mastery precision, and bringing to the surface substances, that another and less able pleader could not have distinguished from the shadows lying on the stream.

Grand and triumphant, he made even less effort to conceal his triumph than he had done on the former occasion. If on that former occasion he

had seemed to breathe certainty of success with every word he uttered, there was now a strange defiance in his very manner—a peculiar concentration on self, that told more than the magnificent sentences he uttered, how he knew and felt the power which was within him—how he defied even "Roquelare."

And Plowden's brow darkened, and Plowden's hand which he had thrust into his breast, clinched till the nails sunk through the flesh; for the Plowden knew that, though Bertoni was now an expelled member of "Roquelare," yet that body, in order that no stain might be cast upon itself, would afford every assistance to the counsel for the success of the prosecution.

Perhaps that which exerted on uninitiated spectators an effect as peculiar as Bertoni's thrilling words, was the strange manner with which the latter gesticulated with his left arm—slow, methodical motions, as if each one had been carefully studied and had a deep and important a meaning attached to it, as the very sentences he declaimed. Frequently a certain gesture disclosed the red bandage about his wrist, and Plowden, giving to those motions a closer attention even than he paid to the eloquent speech, grew ghastly when the crimson bandage came in sight.

The spectators were the first witnesses examined—not lengthy, minute examinations such as they had anticipated, and for which they fancied they were prepared—but a few, subtle questions that brought out the evidence in a clear, unmistakable manner. Their preparatory caution was not proof against the lawyer's cunning—their very zeal to serve Hubert's cause was but a foil to his wary attacks. He puzzled them with his adroit turns; he worked on their honest consciences, till, in sheer desperation, they said more damaging things than, in their simplicity, they would have dreamed it possible to have spoken, and not all Plowden's careful cross examination, conducted at first solely to calm the agitation, could restore their self-possession.

Perhaps the most self-possessed was Hannah Moore; she stepped up when her name was called with an assumption of fearlessness which was far from feeling, and which would have been ludicrous had not her genuine woman's heart shone so plainly through it all. She stood before the prosecuting counsel with a manner that indicated as plainly as if she had spoken:

"You'll get nothing out of me."

But alas! for even Hannah Moore's staunch determination; the able lawyer shook even that; however, though he compelled her to fully corroborate the testimony already given by her fellow servants, he did not draw from her what Margaret had told her of Hubert's crime, nor her knowledge of Hubert's presence in his own home on the night of the murder.

Perchance her straightforward, brusque manner disarmed the counsel of an aspersion which honest Mr. Namee's somewhat confused evidence had roused, or that he deemed her corroboration of the preceding testimony all that was necessary, for the chief stress of his examination seemed to be applied to that particular point.

When on the close of her examination, she stepped from the witness-stand, her broad, full face as red as a peony, and her hands holding her shawl in a most awkward and uncomfortable fashion, she was too confused and too agitated to remember correctly all that she had said, and though, having a dim idea that she had not disclosed certain facts which would have done much to criminate more deeply her young master, she was still disquieted and provoked with herself at being so "flustered," as she afterward expressed it; and under the influence of these same feelings, when "Samuel Lewis" was called, she pulled back the little man to whisper excitedly in tones audible to every one in the vicinity.

"Mind now, and don't be a fool—have your wits about you."

But the little man's wits played him a very shabby and malicious trick. They would settle to nothing, but flew off in a most ungallant fashion, leaving his mind in a condition neither to understand a question, nor to answer it properly when he did duly comprehend its import. He went off into the most ludicrous explanations of his intimacy with Liverspin, as if he was there and then begging pardon of Margaret; he whined out doleful apologies for what he had told the comedian, and he burst into involuntary eruptions on the goodness of Mr. Bernot and Miss Calvert, but to obtain a straightforward answer to any of his questions, Bertoni utterly failed.

Plowden, for the first time that morning, smiled as he saw the growing ire of the prosecuting counsel—the great pleader baffled by a man who had scarcely the common modicum of mind. At length, yielding to his impatience and annoyance, Bertoni thundered out a last question to the witness; but the poor little under-waiter, terrified by the tone and mien of the counsel, broke down into a childish blubber of tears.

There was a general titter, for poor little Sam's self-indignation was ludicrous, and Plowden smiled again, and he permitted the little man to retire with out cross-examining him, for he knew that evidence at least had not helped the prosecution.

Order was restored, and heads were again thrust forward, and ears were once more strained to catch every word of the next testimony.

Bertoni seemed to have recovered

from his annoyance, and his eyes met Plowden's with an expression of triumph as "Mrs. Murburd," was summoned to the stand.

Plowden started—an unequivocal, and plainly uncontrollable start that attracted the surprised attention of those in his immediate vicinity—and he bent forward with an excited eagerness which he made no attempt to conceal. Margaret Calvert also looked about her heart. Well indeed must "Roquelare" have worked to ferret out this witness.

The prisoner did not start, but he smiled as if in triumph. He had felt that "Roquelare," so powerful, so vigilant, would not fail to discover this witness so important, and alas! so fatal to him; but he had not spoken of his impression even to Margaret.

The witness—with his difficulty that she could be induced, or forced to the stand, and people turned, and rose in their seats at the commotion made by her resistance. At length, she yielded to some one who seemed rather a grim guard than a kindly protector, and there appeared at last in full sight of the curious crowd, an old, excited, and apparently very much frightened lady. Her bonnet had become awry; her rich, old-fashioned brocade shawl had lost its fastening and hung awkwardly suspended from one shoulder, while her shriveled hands, kept nervously opening and closing on a little leather bag.

That she was a gentlewoman of no mean pretensions to refinement and even wealth, was evident, despite the awkwardness rising from her strange position and the disarrangement of her dress, and that she possessed the natural modesty and kindly feeling which mark the true woman, was evident from the expression of her face, now covered with a blush as bright as if she had been sixteen instead of sixty.

She seemed to be very much frightened, and a feeling of pity mingled with the involuntary respect for her which surged up in even some of the callous hearts of the jurors.

Bertoni at first framed his questions more with a desire to calm her agitation and to soothe her into forgetfulness of her strange position, than to bring out her direct testimony, and he succeeded so far that when he returned to his usual mode of examination she was able to give with tolerable unembarrassment the evidence that made Plowden grow ghastlier than he had done at the sight of Bertoni's bandaged wrist; that made Margaret Calvert groan faint, but which had no other effect upon the prisoner than to bring into his face a more animated almost a joyous look, for that evidence was a gigantic stride toward the justice he coveted.

"My name is Murburd," "Amelia Murburd," she said with a painful tremulousness, and speaking hastily as if her evidence had been prepared beforehand, but having been banished from her mind by subsequent agitation, was only now returning.

"I am a widow and reside in C—, on the Hudson; I have one son, Hugh Murburd; my son and Mr. Bernot were at college together—" her voice suddenly sank, and her nervous hands spasmodically closed on the little leather bag, as if by that gesture she was quelling some emotion.

"Go on," said Bertoni in a significant tone, and as if she were impelled by some fear, she resumed, her voice trembling more painfully than before.

"When their time at college expired they arranged to travel together, and Mr. Bernot came to my house on the third of September, twenty three months ago; my son was from home, and I was attending on a dying friend, but I looked for his return every day, and Mr. Bernot remained with me; but Hugh was detained longer than he had expected and when Mr. Bernot had been in my house a week I received a despatch from a lawyer in this city requiring the immediate presence of my son or myself, or some trustworthy person, to arrange about some property which was mine by right of law. I disliked to summon Hugh from his friend, of whom he had written on that same day that he could not last but a few hours; I was too unwell to obey the summons myself. Mr. Bernot, on hearing the circumstances, kindly offered his services, and I accepted."

"He went on the afternoon of the tenth of September. He returned early on the morning of the twelfth, bearing some papers that the lawyer had given him for me. He had transacted my business on that same evening of the day he had left me and he brought me such good news about my property that it put me in very good spirits and I thanked him warmly. I was a little surprised at the way he replied to my thanks; he seized my hands and asked me if my son did something very, very wrong, and looked into my face afterwards and received my blessing as if he were still innocent, would I forgive him—would I love him as I did before, if ever I should come to know of what he did? And I answered of course I would, if he was sorry; and then I asked him if such was his case, but he shook his head and laughed in his gay way, and replied that he had only been playing on my mother's fears; that we mothers were all alike, and he was just then thinking of the parting words of his own mother."

"Hugh had not yet returned, and all that day I could not refrain from watching Mr. Bernot; I was afraid he had got into some trouble as young men sometimes do, and knowing that his mother was a confirmed invalid, I was anxious if I could to help him, but every time I approached the subject he

turned it with some bit of pleasantry. Hugh came back the next day, and insisted, as so much time had been lost, that they should start that evening."

"I had intended to mention my suspicions regarding Mr. Bernot, to my son, but in the bustle of such hurried preparations I had no opportunity. While they were partaking of a hasty repast I was tying some parcels for the same apartment, I asked Hugh for a knife to cut a cord, and Mr. Bernot offered his, showing me how to open it by a spring in the handle. It was different from any knife I had ever seen before, having such peculiar shaped blades, and I continued to look at it after I had used it, till Mr. Bernot took it hastily and I thought somewhat rudely, from my grasp, at which my son said, laughingly:

"Why, you aren't to be so chary of letting others see that wonderful knife—that is the matter with it now? Have you been committing a murder with it?"

"My son had bent his head to his plate again, but I was looking at Mr. Bernot, and I saw him grow so pale that I thought he was going to faint. I was too much surprised to speak, and before I could recover myself he was tendering me the knife again, with an apology for his rudeness; and he added that there was an interesting memory about it which made it a very valuable object in his eyes. My son looked up and asked:

"Since when? You did not speak of any memory being connected with it when we college fellows used to admire its construction?"

"Mr. Bernot made some laughing reply—I can't distinctly remember what; and having finished their repast both started up to hasten preparations for their departure. I remember distinctly events just as they happened at that particular time because my mind was uneasy about Mr. Bernot. I kept thinking about his poor, helpless mother, and worrying about what I ought to do, for her sake, for the young man if he was in trouble."

"I wanted to speak to my son more than ever, but there was not a single opportunity, and the two seemed so happy and so full of spirits that I thought perhaps it was as well to have no chance of dampening Hugh with my suspicions."

"They were gone eight months, and Hugh's letters always said that they were both enjoying everything to the utmost."

"I knew nothing of this murder, for in my quiet home, when my son is not there, very little of the outside world ever enters. And when Hugh came home and told me of the pleasant time he had, and how much good the tour had seemed to do Mr. Bernot, and how gay Mr. Bernot had been, I was glad that I had not spoken to my son."

"One day, in looking over Hugh's things I found some old newspapers carefully stored away—it was not his habit to save anything of the kind, and I wondered what important news they could contain, especially as they were the city papers dated about eight months before. I opened them and found accounts of the investigation of Cecil Clare's murder. I had never seen Miss Calvert, but I had heard Mr. Bernot frequently speak of her as his cousin, and when I read about her visit to the morgue, her identification of the murdered man as one who had been known to the family, her trial, and when I saw Mr. Bernot's name, my heart seemed to stand still; and Mr. Bernot's paleness when Hugh remarked about the knife, and Mr. Bernot's own strange observation to me when he returned from the city after executing my commission, all rushed to my mind. I tried to think but I could not, I was so numb with horror; and then my son hoarding those papers, it seemed to me that he must know if his friend was guilty."

"I put the papers back, and that night I told Hugh how I had read them, and I told him then for the first time, all my former suspicions and anxiety regarding the young man."

"But Hugh became angry. He said it was unlike me to have suspicions of any one, and least of all, of one of my friends; that he could vouch for Hubert Bernot being an honorable, noble, young fellow, and little likely to get into any such trouble as I feared; that his mysterious connection with the murder case arose from the fact that in former years the murdered man had been intimately known to the Bernot family, and that he (Hugh) had simply preserved the papers, because the whole was such a peculiar and uncommon affair."

"And when I asked my son if Mr. Bernot had not been very much annoyed at having his name brought in such a way before the public; and concerned that his cousin should have been subjected to such a painful ordeal as that legal examination, he answered 'yes,' and 'no,' and 'I don't know,' all in the same breath, and in such a queer, hurried manner, that I was very much perplexed and troubled."

"Hugh saw that, and he asked me for his sake to banish the whole matter from my mind—that in any event it was no business of mine. But though I did not speak of it again I could not help thinking about it."

"When Hugh was home about two months, it became necessary for us to go abroad, in order to have a final decision about my property, and we were gone a little over eight months. Shortly after our return—"

"She stopped abruptly, as if that part of her well-earned lesson had suddenly escaped her memory."

"Well, after your return," said Bertoni, soothingly, and as if his voice