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SACKVILLE, N. B., THURSDAY, DECEMBER 26, 1878.

WHOLE NO. 450.

LITERATURE. A SHOCKING STORY.

BY WILKIE COLLINGS.

Continued.

CHAPTER V.

"You don't mean to engage that man?" said Lady Catherine, as the door closed.

"Why not?" asked my uncle, looking very much surprised.

"I have taken a dislike to him," said she, sharply.

"This short, sharp answer was so entirely out of the character of my aunt that the General took her by the hand, and said, 'I am afraid you are not well.'"

"She irritably withdrew her hand. 'I don't feel well. It doesn't make sense.'"

"It does matter, Catherine. What can I do for you?"

"Write to the man—'" She paused, and smiled contemptuously. "Imagine a groom with antipathy to cats!" she said, turning to me.

"Write," she resumed, addressing her husband, "and tell him to look for another place."

"What objection can I make to him?" the General asked helplessly.

"Good heavens! can't you make an excuse? Say that he is too young."

My uncle looked at me in expressive silence—walked slowly to the writing-table—and glanced at his wife, in the faint hope that she might change her mind. The eyes met—and she seemed to rooie. Then, with a command of her temper, the famous smile that fascinated everybody made its appearance again. She put her hand caressingly on the General's shoulder. "I remember the title," she said, "of the man to be engaged. He is a young man of mine was a command to you. Ah, I was younger then!"

The General's reception of this little advance was thoroughly characteristic of him. He first kissed Lady Catherine's hand, and then he wrote the letter. My aunt rewarded him by a look, and left the library.

"What the deuce is the matter with her?" my uncle said to me, when we were alone. "Do you dislike the man too?"

"Certainly not. So far as I can judge he appears to be just the sort of person we want."

"And knows thoroughly well how to manage horses, my dear. What can be Lady Catherine's objection to him?"

As the words passed his lips, Lady Catherine opened the library door.

"I am so ashamed of myself," said she sweetly. "At my age, I have been behaving like a spoiled child. How good you are to me, General! Let me try to make amends for my misconduct. Will you permit me?"

She took up the General's letter, without waiting for permission; tore it to pieces, smiling pleasantly all the while; and threw the fragments into the waste basket. "As if you didn't know better than I do!" she said, kissing him on the forehead. "Engage the man by all means!"

She left the room for the second time. For the second time, my uncle looked at me in blank perplexity—and I looked back at him in the same condition of mind. The sound of the luncheon-bell was equally a relief to both of us. Not a word more was spoken on the subject of the new groom. His references were verified; and he entered the General's service in three days' time.

CHAPTER VI.

Always careful on any thing that concerned my welfare, no matter how trifling it might be, my uncle did not trust me alone with the new groom when he first entered our service. Two old friends of the General accompanied me, at his special request, and reported the man to be perfectly competent and trustworthy. After that Michael rode out with me alone, my friends among young ladies seldom caring to accompany me. I abandoned the Park for the quiet country roads on the north and west of London. Was it wrong in me to talk to him on these expeditions? It would surely have been treating a man like a brute never to take the smallest notice of him—especially as his conduct was uniformly respectful towards me. Not once by word or look, did he presume on the position which my favor permitted him to occupy.

Ought I to blush when I confess (though he was only a groom) that he interested me?

In the first place, there was something romantic in the very blankness of the story of his life. He had been left in his infancy in the stables of a gentleman living in Kent, near the highroad between Gravesend and Rochester. The same day the stable-boy had met a woman running out of the yard, pursued by a dog. She was a stranger, and not well dressed. While the boy was protecting her by chaining the dog to his kennel, she was quick enough to place herself beyond the reach of pursuit. The infant's clothing proved, on examination to be of the finest linen. He was warmly wrapped in a beautiful shawl of some foreign manufacture, entirely unknown to all the persons present, including the master and mistress of the house. Among the folds of the shawl there was concealed a letter, without a date, signature or address, which it was presumed the woman must have found.

gotten. Like the shawl, the paper was of foreign manufacture. The handwriting presented a strongly marked character; and the composition plainly revealed the mistakes of a person imperfectly acquainted with the English language. The contents of the letter merely related to the means supplied for the support of the child. Instead of paying the money by instalments, the writer had committed the folly of inclosing a sum of a hundred pounds in one remittance. At the close of the letter, an appointment was made for a meeting in six months' time, on the eastward side of London Bridge. The stable-boy's description of the woman who had passed him showed that she belonged to the lower class. To such a person a hundred pounds would be a fortune. She had no doubt abandoned the child and made off with the money. No trace of her was ever found. On the day of the appointment the police watched the eastward side of London Bridge without making any discovery. Through the kindness of the gentleman in whose stables he had been found, the first ten years of the boy's life were passed under the protection of a charitable asylum. They gave him the name of one of the little inmates who had died; and they sent him out to service before he was eleven years old. He was harshly treated, and ran away; wandered to some training-stables near Newmarket; attracted the favorable notice of the head groom, was employed among the other boys and liked the occupation. Growing up to manhood, he had been in private families as a groom. Such was the record of twenty-six years of his life!

Taking him, apart from his story, there was something in the man himself which attracted attention, and made one think of him in his own way. For example, there was a spirit of resistance to his destiny in him, which is very rarely found in serving-men of his order. I might never have known this if the General had not asked me to accompany him in one of his periodical visits of inspection to the stables. He was so well satisfied that he proposed extending his investigations to the groom's own room. "If you don't object, Michael," he said, "I will accompany you to see your quarters."

Michael's color rose a little; he looked at me. "I am afraid the young lady will not find my room quite as tidy as it ought to be," he said, as he opened the door for us.

The disorder in the groom's room was produced, to our surprise, by the groom's books and papers. Cheap editions of the English poets, translations of Latin and Greek classics, French novels, French and German writers, carefully written "exercises" in both languages, manuals in shorthand, with more "exercises" in that art, were scattered over the table round the central object of a reading lamp, which spoke plainly of studies by night. "Why what is all this?" cried the General. "Are you going to leave me, Michael, and set up a school?" Michael answered in a subdued tone, "I try to improve myself, sir—though I sometimes lose heart and hope." "Hope of what?" asked my uncle. "Are you not content to be a servant?" Must you rise in the world, as the saying is? The groom shrunk at the question, and he entered the General's service in three days' time.

CHAPTER VII.

After taking off my riding-habit, and cooling my face with eau-de-cologne and water, I went down to the room which we called the drawing room. The piano there was my favorite instrument, and I had the idea of trying what music would do towards helping me to compose myself. As I sat down before the piano, I heard the opening of the door of the breakfast room, (separated from me by a curtain and archway), and the voice of Lady Catherine asking if Michael had returned to the stables. On the servant's reply in the affirmative, she desired that he might be sent to her immediately. No doubt, I ought either to have left the room or to have let my aunt know that I was there. I did neither the one nor the other. The inveterate dislike she had taken to Michael, had to all appearances subsided. She had once or twice actually taken opportunities of speaking to him kindly. He believed this was due to the caprice of the moment. The tone of her voice too suggested, on this occasion, that she had some spiteful object in view in sending for him. I deliberated a while, and then I went to see what she wanted. Lady Catherine began, "You were out riding to-day with Miss Min?"

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CHAPTER VIII.

That night, lying awake thinking, I made my first discovery of a great change that had come over me. I can only describe my sensations in the true phrase—I felt like a new woman.

Never yet had my life been so enjoyable to me as it was now. I was conscious of a delicious gladness of heart. The simplest things pleased me; I was ready to be kind to everybody and to admire everything. Even the familiar scenery of my ride in the Park developed beauties which I had never noticed before. The enchantments of music moved me to tears. I was absolutely in love with my birds and my dogs—and as for my aunt I bewitched the girl with presents and gave her holidays almost before she could ask for them. In a bodily sense, I felt an extraordinary accession of strength and activity. I romped with the dear old General, and actually kissed Lady Catherine one morning, instead of letting her kiss me as usual. My friends noticed my new outburst of gaiety and spirit and wondered what had produced it. Is there any limit to the deception of which a human being is capable? I can honestly say that I wondered too. Only on that wretched night which followed our visit to Michael's room, did I feel myself on the way to a clear understanding of the truth. The next morning completed the process of enlightenment. I went out riding as usual. The instant when Michael put his hand under my foot so as to sprang into the saddle, his touch flew all over me like a flame. I knew who had made a new woman of me from that moment.

As to describing the first sense of confusion that overcame me, even if I were a practiced writer, I should be incapable of doing it. I pulled down my veil, and rode on in a sort of trance. Fortunately for me, our house looked on the park, and I had only to cross the road. On the road, I saw Michael's horse, and I saw Michael. The groom I had met with some accident among the passing vehicles. To this day, I don't know where I rode. The horse went his own way quietly and the groom followed me. The groom! There, I suppose, no civilized human creature could be so stupid as to be so stupid. I rode from the hotel and anti-Christian pride of rank as the woman who loves with all her heart. I only tell the truth (in however unfavorable a light it may place me) when I declare that my confusion was entirely due to the discovery that I was in love with Michael. I had given my heart to the man. What did the accident of his position matter? Put money into his pocket and a title before his name—by answer accident. In speech, manner and attitude, he would be a gentleman worthy of his wealth and worthy of the rank. Even the natural dread of what my relations and friends might say if they discovered my secret, seemed, in the entirely pure and entirely exalted state of my feelings, to be a sensation so unworthy of me and of him, that I looked around and called to him to speak to me, and asked him questions about horses which kept him riding nearly side by side with me. Ah, how I enjoyed the gentle deference and respect of his manner as he answered me!

He was hardly bold enough to raise his eyes to mine when I looked at him. Absorbed in the Paradise of my own making, I rode on slowly, and was only aware that my friends had passed by and recognized me by seeing him touch his hat. I looked round, and discovered the women smiling ironically as they rode by. That one circumstance roused me rudely from my dream. I let Michael fall back again to his proper place, and then I quickened my horse's pace; angry with myself, angry with the world in general—then suddenly changing, and being full enough and child enough to feel ready to cry. How long these varying moods lasted I don't know. On returning, I slipped off my horse without waiting for Michael to help me, and ran into the house without even wishing him a "Good day."

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Do you know your business as a lady's groom?"

"I have had seven years' experience, my lady."

"Your business is to ride at a certain distance behind your mistress. Has not your experience taught you that?"

"Yes, my lady."

"You were not riding behind Miss Min—your horse was almost side by side with hers. Do you deny what I say?"

"No, my lady."

"Leave the room. No come back. Have you any excuse to make?"

"None, my lady."

"Your insolence is intolerable. I shall speak to the General."

The sound of the closing door followed. I knew now what the smiles meant on the false faces of those women friends of mine who had met me in the Park. No trace of honesty in Michael's place would have mentioned my own encouragement of him as a sufficient excuse. He, with the inherited delicacy and refinement of a gentleman, had taken all the blame on himself. Indignant and ashamed, I advanced to the breakfast room, bent on instantly justifying him. Drawing aside the curtain, I was startled by a sound as of a person sobbing. I cautiously looked in. Lady Catherine was prostrate on the sofa, hiding her face in her hands, in a passion of tears.

I withdrew, completely bewildered. The extraordinary contradictions in my aunt's conduct were not at an end yet. Later in the day I went to my usual room, resolved to see Michael right in his estimation, and to leave him to speak to Lady Catherine. The General was in the lowest spirits; he shook his head ominously when I mentioned the groom's name. "I dare say the man meant no harm, but the thing has been observed. I can't have you made the subject of scandal, Min. Lady Catherine makes a point of it—Michael must go."

"You don't mean to say that my aunt has insisted on your sending Michael away?"

"Before he could answer me, a footman appeared with a message. 'My lady wishes to see you, sir.'"

The General rose directly. My curiosity had got, by this time, beyond all restraint. I was actually indignant enough to ask if I might go with him! He started at me, as well he might. I persisted. I said I particularly wished to see Lady Catherine. My aunt's petulant good breeding still resisted me. "Your aunt may wish to speak to me in private," he said. "Wait a moment, please, and I will send for you."

My obtuseness was something superhuman; the bare idea that Michael might lose his place through my fault made me desperate, I suppose. "I won't trouble you to send for me," I persisted. "I will go with you, and I will wait outside the door. The footman was still present, holding the door open; the General gave me a look as if he would speak to me, and asked him questions about horses which kept him riding nearly side by side with me. Ah, how I enjoyed the gentle deference and respect of his manner as he answered me!

He was hardly bold enough to raise his eyes to mine when I looked at him. Absorbed in the Paradise of my own making, I rode on slowly, and was only aware that my friends had passed by and recognized me by seeing him touch his hat. I looked round, and discovered the women smiling ironically as they rode by. That one circumstance roused me rudely from my dream. I let Michael fall back again to his proper place, and then I quickened my horse's pace; angry with myself, angry with the world in general—then suddenly changing, and being full enough and child enough to feel ready to cry. How long these varying moods lasted I don't know. On returning, I slipped off my horse without waiting for Michael to help me, and ran into the house without even wishing him a "Good day."

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Business Cards.
DR. W. W. JOHNSON, DENTIST,
PROPOSES to visit Sackville about the 30th of this month, and will remain a part of the winter if his services are required. Has notice and location of office will be given on arrival.
LANDRY & TRUENAM,
Attorneys-at-Law, &c.
DORCHESTER, N. B.
P. A. LANDRY. W. A. TRUENAM.
HANINGTON & WELLS,
Attorneys-at-Law, Solicitors, Notaries Public, &c.
DORCHESTER, N. B.
D. HANINGTON. W. W. WELLS.
HICKMAN & EMERSON,
Attorneys-at-Law, &c.
DORCHESTER, N. B.
A. J. HICKMAN. H. R. EMERSON.

A. E. OULTON,
BARRISTER-AT-LAW, SOLICITOR,
Notary Public, Conveyancer, &c.
Office: A. L. Palmer's Building,
Dorchester, N. B.
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Barrister and Attorney-at-Law,
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W. F. COLEMAN, M.D., M.C.E.S. ENG.
Oculist and Otorhinologist to St. John General Public Hospital.
Practice limited to diseases of the Eye and Ear.
Office: 39 GERMAIN STREET, corner North Market Street,
SAINT JOHN, N. B.
Hours: 11 to 1, and 2 to 5.
W. H. OLIVE,
I.C.R. TICKET AGENT,
Forwarding Agent and Custom House Broker,
67 Prince Wm. St.
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Prices twenty per cent. lower than any other Establishment in the Province. All Stock guaranteed.

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MACHINE SHOP,
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AMHERST, - - - NOVA SCOTIA.

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Both practical men whose judgment and advice can be relied on.
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Great Improvements in our Saw Mills, PORTLAND CEMENT, and other goods. Address: WATSON & SONS, 25, 27, 29, Broad Street, Sackville, N. B.
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