

Sweet Norine

CHAPTER VIII. "Have you any what, Mrs. Barrison wants of me?" asked Carlisle, throwing off his sealskin coat, impatiently. "That is what I hear every hour in the day, it seems to me."

Miss Austin laughed a sweet little musical laugh. "I should not wonder if it was to show you her new backgammon set that arrived an hour since. I may as well tell you a little tiny secret—the dear old lady is intensely fond of the game. In playing backgammon she never realizes the flight of time. She would play from now until midnight, ceaselessly, even forgetting that there is such a thing as meal time for herself or any one else."

heart. I will ring for you if I want you. But stay, pour me out another glass of wine ere you leave me; my head throbs strangely, as—as does my heart." Esther did as she was bidden; poured out the wine, but the moment her mistress put it to her lips she set it down quickly again, muttering: "This does not taste bitter like the last. I knew there was something the matter with that last glass of wine, and I told Florio so, Esther," she added, sharply, "I have taken something that does not go with me. Give me an antidote, quickly."

Esther hastened to obey. Her prompt action saved her mistress. She called no one to her aid, though Mrs. Barrison grew strangely ill during the next few minutes, but in half an hour's time she was so relieved that she was her old self again. "Leave me now, Esther," she commanded again. "I—I want to think, as you pass Miss Austin's door, and that of my nephew, tell them that I have retired for the night and do not wish to be disturbed."

Esther never knew what prompted her to pause on the threshold and look back at her mistress; and as she saw her then, she remembered her all the after years of her life. Mrs. Barrison had seated herself in an armchair by the fire, and was leaning her head dejectedly on her hands, gazing abstractedly into the glowing sea of coals. (To be continued.)

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