

that in a moment of blind, ungovernable passion, had dealt such a swift, pitiless blow.

"Mr. Lyndoch," she said, her voice very low, "I am come to beg your pardon—to ask you to forgive me."

Her touch had been so light that he had heeded it no more than the play of the breeze about him, yet at sound of her voice, he started and turned, flushing red as the sunset, to the roots of his wavy brown hair. Then recovering his self-control, he answered with his accustomed coldness:

"I crossed your will this morning, it was I who should have asked pardon: I have nothing to forgive."

Mollie clasped her hands, and looked at him, as though he had dealt her some wound.

"But I struck you," she said, and then as her glance rested on the deep scar, her head drooped, and she stood silently before him.

A strange, undefinable smile crossed his lips.

"You think because your blow has left a mark, that I must suffer more," he said, his deep, firm tones breaking the stillness. "Have you never understood how a heart may bleed under a wound which is stung continually to fresh pain?"

Mollie pressed her hands closer together, then, with an effort, she raised her head and met his steadfast gaze.

"I know I have behaved badly to you," she acknowledged, her great eyes shining with a misty light. "But if my words have ever given you pain, I am willing to take that pain upon myself. Be as merciless to me as I have been to you—only make me suffer in thousand-fold measure what, all these weeks, you have borne from me."

He gazed at her for a moment in silence, then pacing once across the room, he returned to where she stood by the window; but he did not look again into the sweet, white face, turned towards him. His arms were folded across his breast, and he glanced out over the purpling hills, as he framed the words for which Mollie had waited:

"I shall make no effort to disclaim the truth," he said, after a pause. "From the first hour of my arrival, you have set your will to make my position here an irksome and a difficult one—a position, not assumed of my own choice, but forced on me by social circumstances. That is passed: you wish to atone; and I appeal to you, if not for conscience, then for worldly honour, to no longer hinder me in the discharge of my duties; to no longer meet me on every side with the contempt which, if I do not resent as a master, I cannot but feel as a man."

His voice so calm at first, rose passionately with the last words, and his deep gaze, fixed on Mollie, seemed to hold her with a strange, speechless power.

In the gathering twilight she stood, pale and calm as a statue—stood for one full minute after he had ceased speaking, then proudly lifting her head, she turned to go.

He gazed after her, his impassioned eyes filled with an expression she could not have understood.

Ah, Mollie—wayward, beautiful Mollie, this caprice was, perhaps, the cruellest of all.

Half-way across the room her step faltered, and covering her face with her hands, she burst into a passion of tears.

Lyndoch was startled, and went to her side, and tried to draw her hands from her face.

"Miss Denavon—Miriam!" he exclaimed, his own voice grown suddenly tremulous. "I have been too severe. Forget what I have said: hate me—treat me with all the contempt you will; but do not let me think I have caused these tears."

Her hands quivered in his grasp, but she did not withdraw them from his hold; and there was a pleading, piteous look in her eyes as she raised them with tears to his face, that face disfigured by the scar her violence had left there.

"I have never hated you," she said, still looking up into his face. "To-day has been the worst of all my life. I have suffered more from that blow than you can have felt in your bitterest moments. My rebellion has been not because I hated and despised you, but because I could feel for you neither dislike nor contempt."

His grasp tightened on her hands, and his gaze seemed to search through her eyes into her very soul.

"Miriam!"

This time her name broke from his lips in so strange a tone that it brought a rush of colour to Mollie's pale face, and her eyes grew wide and startled; then in the same moment, he suddenly loosed his grasp, drew back a pace, and there was a pause.

"Let the past belong to the past," he said, at length, his calm voice deep and mellow. "Our lives need never clash again; it is best there should be peace between us."

He uttered no other word. Mollie's face had drooped lower and lower, the flush which had glowed in her cheeks a few seconds since replaced by a deathly pallor.

When she looked up again he was gone, and with a great light in her eyes, Mollie bent her head and laid her lips against the hand he had touched.

"Best there should be peace between us," she murmured, repeating his words as though they had found their way deep down in her heart.

"Peace that shall atone for all the past."

CHAPTER V. AGAINST THE FLOOD.

During the next few days everything went on calmly at White Towers. Miss Wilmott was well enough to take her charges again under her control, and Lionel Lyndoch was relieved of much responsibility.

(To be Continued.)

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