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THE MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.

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(Concluded from p. 250.)

It was the first time a thought of his own guilt crossed his mind—he had been so absorbed in angry and revengeful feelings against his wife, that he had forgotten to question himself—"In how far might this thing have been prevented?"

Leora Everard lived—she was feeble, and her strength came slowly, but not her cheerfulness; the dark eyes were heavy and languid, and very rarely was the beautiful mouth parted with smiles that of old played so sweetly upon it, for it is hard for the young and hoping to yield submissively to the first heavy stroke of destiny. There was one night, after she had nearly recovered, having slept much through the day, she sat in her large easy chair later than usual; her father had said good night, and retired to his chamber; Mrs. Castlemore, who was with her, rose at last to go, yet, ere she did so, looked forth from the open window, it was a night of rare beauty after a day of excessive heat, long shadows of moonlight lay upon the green trees and thick shrubbery that stretched far and wide in the garden beneath.

"Leora, love," she said, smilingly, "the beauty of the evening tempts me strongly to seek the open air. Those long afternoon siestas disincite one to sleep at the usual hour: I will return to your chamber ere I seek my own." So saying, she left, and Leora sat silent and musing, her thoughts far away upon another time, when the voice she loved so well to hear, had whispered blessed words of love and happiness.

The night was indeed one of glorious brilliancy. Mrs. Castlemore lingered in the doorway, gazing with rapt and wondering attention, upon "the thousand, and ten thousand" stars that gleamed forth from the heaven before her. She was startled by a slight noise near her, a row of waving shrubbery was parted, and some one sprang forward and stood by her side. Mrs. Castlemore recoiled, as she exclaimed in a low, breathless tone, "Frederic Clare!—what do you here?"

"Has not she been in danger—ay, dying? yet you ask me what I do here—oh, mockery!—tell me of Leora?" His tones of bitter anguish went to the heart of one who loved Leora well herself; and she saw his face by the clear moonlight, it was ashy pale, and his frame trembled either from exhaustion or strong emotion. Gently and kindly she spoke to him, and she afforded him relief inexpressible by her assurance of Leora's entire recovery. A sad smile played over his countenance for a moment, as he said:

"Power is a dangerous thing to entrust to us poor and passion-tost mortals—mark ye, how Luis Everard exercises that where-with he is clothed? He has brought his child to the verge of the grave, and why? Why does he reject me? What are his objections?" and his voice deepened, and his eye kindled as he spoke: "Am I not his equal in birth—his superior in wealth—his inferior in nothing. Yet, am I scorned and spurned, because I am my father's son."

"Be calm, be calm, I entreat you, for Leora's sake," said Mrs. Castlemore, troubled and alarmed at his emotion.

"For Leora's sake! Oh, I have borne much and will bear more for love like hers; but she was dying, all hope was over, and I dared not cross the threshold of her door—not on my own account," he said fiercely, "did I refrain, but I would not that act of mine should give her pain. I have watched night and day, skulking like a thief, in the night time, pouring gold into the hands of those who would bring me tidings, information came in many and torturing forms, contradictory and alarming, tell me now the whole history of this fearful illness."

Truly and circumstantially Mrs. Castlemore gave the account; she entered much into detail, for she saw how eagerly he listened, and at last, in proof of Leora's being nearly well, she mentioned the fact of her being even then sitting up awaiting her return.

"Sitting up!" exclaimed Clare, "the house is quiet; where is her father? Oh! cannot I see her for one moment, only one moment, Mrs. Castlemore!" In vain she combated the wish he so strongly urged; she could not deny Everard's being in his own chamber, and he would scarce listen to words of refusal. Mrs. Castlemore condemned her brother's conduct at heart, and she had at one time looked forward with pleasure, to a union between Leora and Clare, as her feelings of interest in the latter amounted to attachment. She yielded, at length, a reluctant consent, upon condition that he left Florence the next morning, and exacted no promise of any kind from Leora.

"None other than the continuance of her love—she may repeat

the old promise," said Clare, as he yielded to Mrs. Castlemore's conditions. She left him for a moment to apprise Leora of his visit: she returned very soon, and motioned him to follow: "I give you half an hour," she said; "no longer. I will await your return in this passage." She pointed to the door of her niece's room, and he entered.

"Leora, do I indeed look upon you once more? Oh, dearest, in my despair I thought you were lost to me forever." He covered with kisses the small hand he had taken, and sat down on the low stool at her feet, "You are changed, Leora, and oh, that such change should have come from a sorrow I might not share."

Leora would have spoken; she strove to smile but tears gushed forth, and they dropped fast and warm upon the hand that held her own, while she murmured, "Do not chide me, that I meet you with tears; I am feeble, and have suffered much, Frederic."

"Chide you, dearest," he said, tenderly—"oh, that I could give you comfort and dry your tears, now and forever. But, Leora, think you it is right to suffer your father to exercise more than a parent's proper authority, and destroy the happiness of both? Should there not be a limit to his power, and your forbearance?"

"Hush, Frederic, hush," said the maiden earnestly, as the color spread over her face; "you will not say again what you have now said, and you will bear for a season, patiently; there may come a change for the better. Never hope to lead a daughter from the path of duty, and find her faithful as a wife—if she read asunder the ties that bind a child to her parent, light matter will she deem it to break through the obligations that bind her to a husband. Urge me no more, then, to disobedience—my father has had many sorrows, and oft-times he has named me his sole earthly comfort—his blessing may yet rest upon our love—will you wait cheerfully, for my sake?" He looked up into her face as she ceased speaking, and he thought the earth held not a fairer or lovelier.

"For your sake—much, very much I would do for your sake," he said, fondly; "but, Leora, if I wait in patience and silence—afar off, debarred from all communication with you, what shall be my solace?"

"My promise to be true," she answered. "I now repeat it. My father shall never wed me to another. If your trust is like unto mine, Frederic, you will ask no more."

"Let it be as you have said, and time will prove whose trust has been the strongest. Thou art to me as good as thou art lovely; and this it is that gives me patience to wait your own time, to strive to be more worthy of you."

There was a slight rap at the door, and Frederic rose. "It is Mrs. Castlemore—we part now, Leora, in confidence and hope, is it not so, beloved?" But Leora was very pale, and she trembled, although she strove to be calm; her heart was full of grief, and tears would have way.

He leaned forward, and kissed the white forehead of the maiden, and with another blessing and farewell, he left her.

Leora made but one inquiry of Mrs. Castlemore—"Where had he gone?" "To the village of—, some few miles distant," was the reply. "I have consented to write once, to inform him of your entire restoration to health; after that, all communication ceases between us, without my brother's consent." Leora bowed her head in assent, and the subject was not renewed again by either.

The effect of Frederic's visit upon Leora, was very gratifying to Mrs. Castlemore, who, loving her as a daughter, had long mourned her prostration of cheerfulness. A calm and gentle happiness seemed to have found a resting place in her heart, and its sweet expression was upon her beautiful face. Everard was satisfied, her peace of mind was restored, and his determination was strengthened never to consent to her union with Clare.

One night they had sat up later than usual, Leora with them, they had received letters from England, and were occupied, unconscious of time, in their perusal. At length they separated for the night, and all was hushed throughout the mansion. It was two hours past midnight, when a cry went out upon the still night air, of—fire. It was Everard's house, and before efficient aid could be obtained, the whole right wing of the mansion was wrapped in flames, the fire had originated there, and it raged with fierce and terrible intensity. In making his escape, Everard had been struck by the falling of a piece of burning woodwork, he lost consciousness, and owed his escape to the exertions of his sister, and an old English servant. They were both without the walls, when remembrance of Leora flashed across the mind of Mrs. Castlemore—excessive terror and her brother's fearful danger had almost deprived her of the power of thought, yet she never doubted of her escape, as she occupied apartments in the left wing of the mansion, where there was but little danger at first. A fearful an-

swer met her demand, Leora had not come forth. The blood curdled in her veins, and her heart grew cold as death; already the flames, accompanied by dense masses of smoke, were forcing their way through the hall door, and that was the only mode of communication with the suite of apartments on the left. Mrs. Castlemore shrieked in her anguish, as she offered untold gold to him who would venture in. Men looked on, and turned shudderingly from the fiery grave that seemed yawning to receive the first intruder. Then she called upon the father to save his child, but he lay senseless before her, was there no one? Yes, there was one—right and left the crowd parted, clearing a path for one who, with fearless and firm step came forward, and who was she? who, but the mother? Other hands than her own had rolled a wet blanket around her, as some protection—she thought not of herself, but with a bound that made men close their eyes and tremble as they did so, she plunged into the hall. On she went, and on, though the flames bisser in her ears, and her brain grew mad with intolerable pain, but she pressed onward, she gained the library door, was beyond it, and alive! "Blessed be God," she uttered, as she tore the burning dress from her limbs, and extinguished the flames, then she sprang up the staircase, and along the private passage Everard had before led her, to the chamber of her child. The door was open, and she hurried in—Leora lay senseless upon the floor: Aline unfastened the window, and threw it wide open—"Ladders!" she cried, "or the flames will reach us," and the crowd, who had poured into the garden, hastened to obey her orders. The night air, as it rushed in, revived Leora; still feeble from long illness, she had, as her mother supposed, flinched from excessive terror, on discovering her situation.

"Leora—my child, my child! Heaven has been merciful to me, this night, you will live, Leora, to pardon me, to cease to hate me," and the mother wept in her passionate joy, as she folded her daughter to her heart.

"Is it you, then?—Oh, mother!" and Leora knelt before her. "Pardon me, mother, great is my guilt; I have hated and scorned you, and you have risked your life for mine."

"Let the blessing and the pardon be mutual," and Aline, as she spoke, and threw around herself and child whatever covering chanced to be near, she saw the ladders were fixed, and men were mounting, and she felt it was well, for her pain of body was beginning to affect her mind. They were borne down in safety, and to Aline's house both were taken. Mrs. Castlemore accompanied them, nor did she offer any objection to Leora's remaining with her mother. Aline's wounds were dressed, she was frightfully burned, but uttered no complaint through all that fierce torture; she seemed rather to triumph in the thought, that a life so utterly worthless had saved that of one so precious. She called the physician, and demanded his true opinion: "Can I live? It is my earnest wish to know the truth—do not think I fear death. Oh no, to me it comes as the last earthly trial." She was told the truth, that she could not live three days. "It is well," she said, calmly, "and now, Mrs. Castlemore, will you ask of Luis Everard his consent to Leora's remaining with me, till I am at rest?"

Mrs. Castlemore acquiesced, and sought her brother, at the temporary home to which he had been conveyed; he had quite recovered, and was only suffering from an injury his arm had received, which was not of serious consequence. He knew that all were saved, but particulars had not been communicated to him: great was his agitation at Mrs. Castlemore's recital. His daughter's danger was the prominent thought—it absorbed for a time every other feeling, and so, much was his stern nature softened; that when, in conclusion, his sister told him of Aline's certain death, and her wish to keep Leora with her till all was over, he said abruptly,

So let it be—Heaven knows she has dearly earned the right to claim her. But you also must be with her, sister, I require no attention. Leora is very unfit, with the weakened nerves consequent upon a long and severe illness, to go through such a scene alone. You will remain with her?"

Consent was easily obtained, and Mrs. Castlemore returned to Aline and Leora. Oh to her, the mother, what a sense of blessedness did the presence of her gentle child impart; it seemed as though it was assurance of pardon from One mighty to forgive, and most merciful; the pure and good were around her, and they did not scorn her, although shame and sin had been her portion, but sin repented of, how long and bitterly.

Leora knelt by the side of her mother, and her eyes rested sadly and tenderly upon the wasted and shrunken features, ever as she looked the tears gathered in large drops, and fell silently upon her cheek.

"Do not weep for me, love," said Aline, as fondly she returned