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## THE NEW MAGDALEN.

BY WILKIE COLLINS.

SECOND SCENE.—*Mablethorpe House.*

CHAPTER VI.—(Continued.)

She is prettily dressed in grey poplin, trimmed with grey velvet, and set off by a ribbon of deep red tied in a bow at the throat. She is nearly as tall as Lady Janet herself, and possesses a grace and beauty of figure not always seen in women who rise above the medium height. Judging by a certain innate grandeur in the carriage of her head and in the expression of her large melancholy grey eyes, believers in blood and breeding will be apt to guess that this is another noble lady. Alas! she is nothing but Lady Janet's companion and reader. Her head, crowned with its lovely light brown hair, bends with a gentle respect when Lady Janet speaks. Her fine firm hand is easily and incessantly watchful to supply Lady Janet's slightest wants. The old lady—affectionately familiar with her—speaks to her as she might speak to an adopted child. But the gratitude of the beautiful companion has always the same restraint in its acknowledgment of kindness: the smile of the beautiful companion has always the same underlying sadness when it responds to Lady Janet's hearty laugh. Is there something wrong here, under the surface? Is she suffering in mind, or suffering in body? What is the matter with her?

The matter with her is secret remorse. This delicate and beautiful creature pines under the slow torment of constant self-reproach.

To the mistress of the house, and to all who inhabit it or enter it, she is known as Grace Roseberry, the orphan relative by marriage of Lady Janet Roy. To herself alone she is known as the outcast of the London streets; the inmate of the London Refuge; the lost woman who has stolen her way back—after vainly trying to fight her way back—to home and name. There she sits in the grim shadow of her own terrible secret, disguised in another person's identity, and established in another person's place. Mercy Morrick had only to dare, and become Grace Roseberry if she pleased. She has dared, and she has been Grace Roseberry for nearly four months past.

At this moment, while Lady Janet is talking to Horace Holmcroft, something that has passed between them has set her thinking of the day when she took the first fatal step which committed her to the fraud.

How marvelously easy of accomplishment the act of personation had been! At first sight Lady Janet had yielded to the fascination of the noble and interesting face. No need to present the stolen letter; no need to repeat the ready-made story. The old lady had put the letter aside unopened, and had stopped the story at the first words.

"Your face is your introduction, my dear; your father can say nothing for you which you have not already said for yourself." There was the welcome which established her firmly in her false identity at the outset. Thanks to her own experience, and thanks to the "Journal" of events at home, questions about her life in Canada, and questions about Colonel Roseberry's illness, found her ready with answers which (even if suspicion had existed) would have disarmed suspicion on the spot. While the true Grace was slowly and painfully winning her way back to life on her bed in a German hospital, the false Grace was presented to Lady Janet's friends as the relative by marriage of the mistress of Mablethorpe House. From that time forward nothing had happened to rouse in her the faintest suspicion that Grace Roseberry was other than a dead and buried woman. So far as she now knew—so far as anyone now knew—she might live out her life in perfect security (if her conscience would let her), respected, distinguished, and beloved, in the position which she had usurped.

She rose abruptly from the table. The effort of her life was to shake herself free of the remembrances which haunted her perpetually as they were haunting her now. Her memory was her worst enemy; her one refuge from it was in change of occupation and change of scene.

"May I go into the conservatory, Lady Janet?" she asked.

"Certainly, my dear."

She bent her head to her protectress—looked for a moment, with a steady compassionate attention, at Horace Holmcroft—and, slowly crossing the room, entered the winter garden. The eyes of Horace followed her, as long as she was in view, with a curious, contradictory expression of admiration and disapproval. When she had passed out of sight, the admiration vanished, but the disapproval remained. The face of the young man contracted into a frown; he sat silent, with his fork in his hand, playing absently with the fragments on his plate.

"Take some French pie, Horace," said Lady Janet.

"No, thank you."

"Some more chicken, then?"

"No more chicken."

"Will nothing tempt you?"

"I will take some more wine if you will allow me."

He filled his glass (for the fifth or sixth time) with claret, and emptied it sullenly at a draught. Lady Janet's bright eyes watched him with sardonic attention; Lady Janet's ready tongue spoke out as freely as usual what was passing in her mind at the time.

"The air of Kensington doesn't seem to suit you, my young friend," she said. "The longer you have been my guest, the oftener you fill your glass and empty your cigar-case. Those are bad signs in a young man. When first you came here, you arrived inviolated by a wound. In your place, I should not have exposed myself to be shot, with no other object in view than describing a battle in a newspaper. I suppose tastes differ. Are you ill? Does your wound still plague you?"

"Not in the least."

"Are you out of spirits?"

Horace Holmcroft dropped his fork, rested his elbows on the table, and answered:

"Awfully."

Even Lady Janet's large toleration had its limits. It embraced every human offence, except a breach of good manners. She snatched up the nearest weapon of correction at hand—a table spoon—and rapped her young friend smartly with it on the arm that was nearest to her.

"My table is not the club table," said the old lady. "Hold up your head. Don't look at your fork—look at me. I allow nobody to be out of spirits in my house. I consider it to be a reflection on me. If our quiet life here doesn't suit you, say so plainly, and find something else to do. There is employment to be had, I suppose—if you choose to apply for it. You needn't smile. I don't want to see your teeth—I want an answer."

Horace admitted, with all needful gravity, that there was employment to be had. The war between France and Germany he remarked, was still going on; the newspaper had offered to employ him again in the capacity of correspondent.

"Don't speak of the newspapers and the war!" cried Lady Janet, with a sudden explosion of anger, which was genuine anger this time. "I detest the newspapers to enter this house. I lay the whole blame of the blood shed between France and Germany at their door."

Horace's eyes opened wide in amazement. The old lady was evidently in earnest. "What can you possibly mean?" he asked. "Are the newspapers responsible for the war?"

"Entirely responsible," answered Lady Janet. "Why, you don't understand the age you live in! Does anybody do anything nowadays (fighting included), without wishing to see it in the newspapers? I subscribe to a charity; they art presented with a testimonial; he preaches a sermon; we suffer a grievance; you make a discovery; they go to church and get married. And I, though, he, we, you, they, all want one and the same thing—we want to see it in the papers. Are kings, soldiers, and diplomatists exceptions to the general rule of humanity? Not they! I tell you seriously, if the newspapers of Europe had one and all decided not to take the smallest notice in print of the war between France and Germany, it is my firm conviction the war would have come to an end for want of encouragement long since. Let the pen cease to advertise the sword, and I, for one, can see the result. No report—no fighting!"

"Your views have the merit of perfect novelty, ma'am," said Horace. "Would you object to see them in the newspapers?"

Lady Janet worsted her young friend with his own weapons.

"Don't I live in the latter part of the nineteenth century?" she asked. "In the newspapers, did you say? In large type, Horace, if you love me!"

Horace changed the subject.

"You blame me for being out of spirits," he said; "and you seem to think it is because I am tired of my pleasant life at Mablethorpe House. I am not in the least tired, Lady Janet." He looked towards the conservatory: the frown showed itself on his face once more. "The truth is," he resumed, "I am not satisfied with Grace Roseberry."

"What has Grace done?"

"She persists in prolonging our engagement. Nothing will persuade her to fix the day for our marriage."

It was true! Mercy had been mad enough to listen to him, and to love him. But Mercy was not vile enough to marry him under her false character, and in her false name. Between three and four months had elapsed since Horace had been sent home from the war, wounded, and had found the beautiful Englishwoman, whom he had befriended in France, established at Mablethorpe House. Invited to become Lady Janet's guest (he had passed his holidays as a schoolboy under Lady Janet's roof)—free to spend the idle time of his convalescence from morning to night in Mercy's society—the impression originally produced on him in the French cottage soon strengthened into love. Before the month was out, Horace had declared himself, and

had discovered that he spoke to willing ears. From that moment it was only a question of persisting long enough in the resolution to gain his point. The marriage engagement was ratified—most reluctantly on the lady's side—and there the further progress of Horace Holmcroft's suit came to an end. Try as he might, he failed to persuade his betrothed wife to fix the day for the marriage. There were no obstacles in her way. She had no near relations of her own to consult. As a connection of Lady Janet's by marriage, Horace's mother and sisters were ready to receive her with all the honours due to a new member of the family. No pecuniary considerations made it necessary, in this case, to wait for a favourable time. Horace was an only son; and he had succeeded to his father's estate with an ample income to support it. On both sides alike, there was absolutely nothing to prevent the two young people from being married as soon as the settlements could be drawn. And yet, to all appearance, here was a long engagement in prospect, with no better reason than the lady's incomprehensible perversity to explain the delay.

"Can you account for Grace's conduct?" asked Lady Janet. Her manner changed as she put the question. She looked and spoke like a person who was perplexed and annoyed. "I hardly like to own it," Horace answered, "but I am afraid she has some motive for deferring our marriage, which she cannot confide either to you or to me."

Lady Janet started.

"What makes you think that?" she asked. "I have once or twice caught her in tears. Every now and then—sometimes when she is talking quite gaily—she suddenly changes colour, and becomes silent and depressed. Just now, when she left the table (didn't you notice it?), she looked at me in the strangest way—almost as if she was sorry for me. What do these things mean?"

Horace's reply, instead of increasing Lady Janet's anxiety, seemed to relieve it. He had observed nothing which she had not noticed herself. "You foolish boy!" she said, "the meaning is plain enough. Grace has been out of health for some time past. The doctor recommends change of air. I shall take her away with me."

"It would be more to the purpose," Horace rejoined, "if I took her away with me. She might consent, if you would only use your influence. Is it asking too much to ask you to persuade her? My mother and my sisters have written to her, and have produced no effect. Do me the greatest of all kindnesses—speak to her to-day." He paused; and, possessing himself of Lady Janet's hand, pressed it entreatingly. "You have always been so good to me," he said softly, and pressed it again.

The old lady looked at him. It was impossible to dispute that there were attractions in Horace Holmcroft's face which made it well worth looking at. Many a woman might have envied him his clear complexion, his bright blue eyes, and the warm amber tint in his light Saxon hair. Men—especially men skilled in observing physiognomy—might have noticed in the shape of his forehead, and in the line of his upper lip, the signs indicative of a moral nature deficient in largeness and breadth—of a mind easily accessible to strong prejudices, and obstinate in maintaining those prejudices in the face of conviction itself. To the observation of women, these remote defects were too far below the surface to be visible. He charmed the sex in general by his rare personal advantages, and by the graceful deference of his manner. To Lady Janet he was endeared, not by his own merits only, but by old associations that were connected with him. His father had been one of her many admirers in her young days. Circumstances had parted them. Her marriage to another man had been a childless marriage. In past times, when the boy Horace had come to her from school, she had cherished a secret fancy (too absurd to be communicated to any living creature) that he ought to have been her son, and might have been her son, if she had married his father! She smiled charmingly, old as she was—she yielded as his mother might have yielded—when the young man took her hand, and entreated her to interest herself in his marriage. "Must I really speak to Grace?" she asked, with a gentleness of tone and manner far from characteristic, on ordinary occasions, of the lady of Mablethorpe House. Horace saw that he had gained his point. He sprang to his feet; his eyes turned eagerly in the direction of the conservatory; his handsome face was radiant with hope. Lady Janet (with her mind full of his father) stole a last look at him—sighed as she thought of the vanished days—and recovered herself.

"Go to the smoking-room," she said, giving him a push towards the door. "Away with you, and cultivate the favourite vice of the nineteenth century." Horace attempted to express his gratitude. "Go and smoke!" was all she said, pushing him on. "Go and smoke!"

Left by herself, Lady Janet took a turn in the room, and considered a little.

Horace's discontent was not unreasonable. There was really no excuse for the delay of which he complained. Whether the young

lady had a special motive for hanging back, or whether she was merely fretting because she did not know her own mind, it was, in either case, necessary to come to a distinct understanding, sooner or later, on the serious question of the marriage. "The difficulty was, how to approach the subject without giving offence. 'I don't understand the young women of the present generation,' thought Lady Janet. 'In my time, when we were fond of a man, we were ready to marry him at a moment's notice. And this is an age of progress! They ought to be readier still.'"

Arriving, by her own process of induction, at this inevitable conclusion, she decided to try what her influence could accomplish, and to trust to the inspiration of the moment for exerting it in the right way. "Grace!" she called out, approaching the conservatory door.

The tall lithe figure in its grey dress glided into view, and stood relieved against the green background of the winter-garden.

"Did your ladyship call me?"

"Yes; I want to speak to you. Come and sit down by me."

With those words, Lady Janet led the way to a sofa, and placed her companion by her side.

## CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN IS COMING.

"You look very pale this morning, my child."

Mercy sighed wearily. "I am not well," she answered. "The slightest noises startle me. I feel tired if I only walk across the room."

Lady Janet patted her kindly on the shoulder. "We must try what a change will do for you. Which shall it be? the Continent, or the seaside?"

"Your ladyship is too kind to me."

"It is impossible to be too kind to you."

Mercy started. The colour flowed charmingly over her pale face. "Oh!" she exclaimed impulsively, "say that again!"

"Say it again?" repeated Lady Janet, with a look of surprise.

"Yes! Don't think me presuming; only think me vain. I don't hear you say to often that you have learnt to like me. Is it really a pleasure to you to have me in the house? Have I always behaved well since I have been with you?"

(The one excuse for the act of personation—if excuse there could be—lay in the affirmative answer to these questions. It would be something, surely, to say of the false Grace, that the true Grace could not have been worthier of her welcome, if the true Grace had been received at Mablethorpe House.)

Lady Janet was partly amused, partly amused by the extraordinary earnestness of the appeal that had been made to her.

"Have you behaved well?" she repeated. "My dear, you talk as if you were a child!" She laid her hand caressingly on Mercy's arm, and continued, in a graver tone: "It is hardly too much to say, Grace, that I bless the day when you first came to me. I do believe I could be hardly fonder of you if you were my own daughter."

Mercy suddenly turned her head aside, so as to hide her face. Lady Janet, still touching her arm, felt it tremble. "What is the matter with you?" she asked, in her abrupt, downright manner.

"I am only very grateful to your ladyship—that is all."

The words were spoken faintly, in broken tones. The face was still averted from Lady Janet's view. "What have I said to provoke this?" wondered the old lady. "Is she in the melting mood to-day. If she is, now is the time to say a word for Horace!" Keeping that excellent object in view, Lady Janet approached the delicate topic with all needful caution at starting.

"We have got on so well together," she resumed, "that it will not be easy for either of us to feel reconciled to a change in our lives. At my age, it will fall hardest on me. What shall I do, Grace, when the day comes for parting with my adopted daughter?"

Mercy started, and showed her face again. The traces of tears were in her eyes. "Why should I leave you?" she asked, in a tone of alarm.

"Surely you know!" exclaimed Lady Janet.

"Indeed I don't. Tell me why."

"Ask Horace to tell you."

The last allusion was too plain to be misunderstood. Mercy's head drooped. She began to tremble again. Lady Janet looked at her in blank amazement.

"Is there anything wrong between Horace and you?" she asked.

"No."

"You know your own heart, my dear child? You have surely not encouraged Horace, without loving him?"

"Oh, no!"

"And yet—"

(To be continued.)

## MARRIAGE.

At the Wesleyan Methodist Church, on the 29th instant, by the Rev. A. B. Chambers, William Henderson, Esq., to Jessie Weir, eldest daughter of John Cloghorn, Esq., both of Montreal.