

THE TROMBONE.

CHAPTER I.

It was on the pier at Silvesea one August night that they first saw each other. She was only a little child, and he a trombone-player in the regimental band temporarily stationed at Silvesea.

Nothing very romantic about either case, apparently. Yet the story of two lives dated from that night; and that big unromantic instrument was the cause of it.

Silvesea is a watering place on the south coast of England—not a very fashionable one, or a very gay one; but with a quaint, picturesque beauty of its own, and with a short "season" that filled the bow-windowed terrace houses with visitors, and made the little pier into a promenade for pretty girls, and stout matrons, and elderly gentlemen, and beating "mashers," who rejoiced in the loudest of striped blazers, the whitest of flannels, and the most knowing thing in nautical caps and hats.

There was a concert room on the pier, a sort of pavilion with glass windows all round and a couple of hundred seats. If the audience outnumbered the seats they had to stand. It is only fair to say that, as a rule, the seats outnumbered the audience very considerably.

It was the opening night of the "season" of Silvesea; warm, windless and brilliant with stars, set like a jeweled frame around the young crescent moon. A concert was going on in the Pier pavilion. The band, "by kind permission of the Colonel," etc., was discoursing a medley of operatic airs called by courtesy "a selection."

The selection was distinguished by a solo for the trombone. The player's name stood on the programme as Angus Fraser. He stepped forward a little in advance of his compere, and commenced one of the two hackneyed, yet pathetic airs from the Trovatore. No one expected anything very remarkable, and no one was listening very attentively, only a little child in the front row pushed back the "granny" bonnet from her golden curls, and fixed her great serious eyes on the pale handsome face of the player.

Before he had played many bars a great many other eyes were following her example. Long ere that solo was concluded, the audience were listening in wonder to the skill of the player, and the amount of the expression introduced into the melody that the big, unwieldy instrument was giving forth.

The child never took her eyes off him, and he noticed it. When he ceased playing, and bowed to the applauding audience, he half smiled at the beautiful, excited little face that still turned to him so persistently. He was a singularly handsome man, and a man who looked as if fate, or misfortune, had placed him in his present position, so unvisited in bearing and appearance was the man to his surroundings.

When in repose, his face wore an expression of the most intense sadness—a sadness which, at times, bordered on despair. Leading the ordinary life of a private soldier, bound to its discipline, or humiliations, or privations, he yet stood aloof and apart from all that was vulgar, low and vicious in that life, and had won respect and liking from comrades and officers alike. Yet none knew his history or had his confidence. The boldest man in the regiment would have shrunk from questioning him as to his antecedents, or the reason of his present position.

When the first part of the programme was over there was an interval of fifteen minutes, and most of the audience strolled out through the glass doors. The band also were dismissed and in groups of twos and threes they lounged about the pier, the handsome uniforms making a bright spot of color among the black coats and serge costumes which prevailed.

The trombone player walked to the furthest end of the pier and, leaning his arms on the wooden rails, stood gazing over the quiet sea, to where the rippling silver of the young moon's tender light left one narrow track of brightness in the dark. How far away were his thoughts one might have guessed who saw those strained, sad eyes filled with a yearning too intense for words, a regret too deep for tears. Suddenly, a little soft touch fell on his arm, and he started and looked down. The child he had seen in the concert room was standing beside him—her face a little pale, but her eyes calm and serious, as of one who had a purpose in view and meant to accomplish it.

"If you please," she said, "would you mind telling me your name?"

"My name?" he repeated in astonishment, "why do you want to know it?"

"Because," she said, "I have seen your face—somewhere, I do not quite remember where—or, was it a photograph? Only, you were younger then, and I asked my mother who it was, and she would not tell me. I know it was you. I knew it directly I saw you to-night, and I watched you come here, and then I thought I would speak to you, so I slipped away from Potts, that is my maid. Mother is not here to-night; and that is all."

The quaint little pause, the old-fashioned, serious manner were charming. He looked down from his tall height on the upturned face, framed in by that loose cloud of golden curls, and wondered why so strange and haunting a memory seemed to lurk in it, and look back at him as if through mists of years, from the big, solemn eyes.

"My name," he said, somewhat unsteadily, "is Angus Fraser. I am sure you are mistaking me for—some one else. It is not possible that any one you know should have a picture of me."

She shook her head as if unconvinced.

"I am sure," she said, "it was you. I could not think there were many faces like yours."

He felt the blood come into it at that innocent flattery. It was no new thing to hear from feminine lips; and yet how he hated to hear it.

"Indeed, my child," he said sadly, "you are mistaken. To the best of my recollection only one person in the world ever had a picture of me, and she—she is dead—long ago."

His voice broke. He turned and looked again over the quiet sea, but the mist in his own eyes shut out that shining track of silver now.

"Were you very sorry?" asked the child, in a low hushed voice.

"Very, very sorry," he answered with a sigh, whose echo haunted her for longer than he could possibly imagine. "But it was all long ago," he added with a sudden effort.

"And I am sure she is happy now. She ought to be, she was so good."

"Good people always die, do they not?" said the child dreamily. "I suppose it is quite right. God would like to have them with him."

He did not answer her. His thoughts were far away, and in memory he was living over again the saddest scene in all the history of his life.

"It is in a frame with a door," the child went on, seeing he did not speak. "Your picture, I mean. And the door is always locked. Only just that once the key was in it, and I opened and looked at it. Directly I saw you to-night I knew it was you."

Her persistence rather surprised him. Yet still he thought she must be mistaken. That folded leaf of the past had been so long folded, that black time of error and its punishment so resolutely pushed aside, that he could not allow himself even the luxury of hope that her words offered.

"As I have told me yours," he said, "will you not tell me yours?"

"Oh, yes," she said, glibly. "It is Barbara Monteith. And mother's name."

She stopped abruptly, frightened at the low, hoarse cry, the gray, ashen face, the sudden terror her words seemed to have awakened in the great, strong man by her side.

"Barbara!" he muttered, stupidly. "Her name. Oh, my God!"

"How strange you look! What is the matter?" asked the child.

"Nothing," he said. "At least, your name recalled some memory I—I had almost forgotten."

"Was it the name of the person you said was—dead?" she asked, in a faint, awe-struck voice. "Because, of course, my mother is not dead."

"And are you her only child?" he asked, his voice hoarse and shaken, as if by some strong emotion.

"Yes," she said simply.

"And how—how old are you?"

"I am just 9 years old," was the answer. Again his gaze changed; the pain and the passion in it would have frightened one older and more experienced. But the child only slipped her little hand into his big, strong palm, and stood quietly by his side, waiting.

"I—I must go now," he said presently; "I have to play again; and a soldier's discipline is a strict one."

He looked down at the innocent, childish face with those sad, tired eyes of his.

"Just as long as—your life," he said.

CHAPTER II.

The lodging-houses at Silvesea were very much like other lodging-houses. They stood in terraces, bow-windowed and balconied; and were let out as drawing-room floor, and dining-room floor, respectively.

The last house of the terrace was the house where Barbara and her mother lived, and the one to which the child was walking with slow and thoughtful steps beside the faithful Potts, after leaving the pier.

That face still haunted her; that inter-volver figure, the sad, grave eyes, were associated in her mind with some fixed memory; and, young as she was, there was a resolute-ness of character in that small, childish face that, before now, her elders had been obliged to recognize.

Her mother was sitting in a low arm-chair by the open window when Barbara entered the room. She turned her head as the little figure came in so quickly—came straight to the open arms and the loving welcome of most loving lips. How dear those two were to one another any one might have guessed. How much they were to one another they alone knew.

"How is your headache, mother," asked the child gently.

"Better, my darling," she answered as she took off the big bonnet and began to arrange the tumbled golden curls. "And how did my pet enjoy herself, and what did she see on the pier?"

"There were a great many people," the child said with a thoughtful gravity of face and voice that was the outcome of constant association with those older than herself. "And the band of the regiment played. One of them was so handsome, and I spoke to him."

"My dear little Barbara," said her mother reproachfully.

"Was there any harm?" the child asked, innocently. "His face was so sad and so kind. Do you know what it was like, mother? The face of that man in your room; the one in the locked frame. I wish you would tell me who that man was."

The face of Barbara Monteith turned very pale—so pale that it almost frightened the little child, whose anxious eyes were watching it so intently.

"Oh hush, dear—hush," she said, brokenly. "You know I can not bear to speak of it."

"Is he—dead?" asked the child mournfully. "Because my soldier also knew some one like you, mother; and she—she died long ago—so he told me."

"Barbara, what are you saying?"

She had sunk back in the chair; her hand went to her heart. Her eyes, wild and staring, looked back at the little quiet face so near her own, and strangely like it.

"He told me so," the child repeated. "Perhaps my face reminded him of her. You say I am so like you, mother; and other people have so often said it—"

"Like me in the 'long ago,' yes, Barbara. When I was young, and free, and happy. When no one had brought shame and sorrow to my life and trouble to my heart—"

A heavy sob broke the words. She covered her face with her hands, as if to shut out even the sympathy and tenderness of those loving eyes.

"Every one I meet seems only to have been happy 'long ago,'" said the child at last. "I begin to think that life must be a very sad thing, mother."

"It is sad because of its mistakes: sad because of its dependence; sad because it can not stand alone, and act out for itself its little drama of happiness. Oh, Barbara! Oh, my little child! To have back my youth—my lost mistaken youth."

The child stood there silent. The passion and despair of that cry frightened her by their intensity, and held her dumb because of incomprehensiveness.

They were so dear to each other, these two; and in some vague way she seemed to touch hands with that heavy hidden sorrow, the shadow of which had been always about her mother's life. Of its nature she was ignorant, and yet its strength and intensity she had recognized often, even as she recognized it now.

She stood there quite silent, waiting till those heavy sobs should cease. Only her

small, soft hand strayed gently over the golden hair that was scarcely darker than her own; and her breath came quicker and nervously as she tried to think of some word or speech that might be consoling, and not too childish. As nothing occurred to her, she just remained standing there, her eyes turning from that beautiful bent head to the sea rippling and shining under the clear, pale light of moon and stars.

Presently her mother recovered, and looked up and drew the little patient figure into her arms. Then they sat there together, both quite silent, for the woman's thoughts were far away in the past, and the child could not follow them; and, for all the love and sympathy, and companionship that had made these two so much to one another, there was one secret unshared—one dark page returned in the history that the woman's lips had whispered from time to time in the child's young ears.

Soon she dismissed her to bed, and then drew her own chair up to the window, and sat there for a long, long time quite motionless, looking out at the quiet night and the quiet sea, asking herself—as she had so often asked in the black and awful time of sorrow—whether it would not be better to seek rest, peace, forgetfulness in the last sleep which we call death—in that endless and unbreakable peace which only looks back from the sealed lips and closed eyes of those for whom life is an ended tale.

"If I had only courage!" she told herself. "If I had done it then—when it seemed so easy—before ever this other life had claimed my care!"

Following that sad train of sorrowful thought, she lost herself in mournful retrospection. She saw the lights extinguished on the pier and in the houses; she felt the dreamy peace of the quiet night steal softly over her tired and aching senses. Her eyes closed; she leaned back in her chair. She and sleep had so long been strangers that she thankfully accepted even its passing presence, and yielded herself to its influence without a struggle.

Suddenly she started and looked up. It seemed to her as if hours had passed; but in reality, only a few moments had lent her that brief unconsciousness.

The room was in darkness, and she herself sat in the shadow of the window curtains. It was only separated by folding doors from the adjoining chamber, which was her bed room.

The noise that had roused and startled her into sudden alertness was a noise of some one moving in that adjoining room. Breathless, she sat there and listened with strained ears. Everyone in the house was in bed, she knew, for the child's return had been the signal for general shutting and bolting of doors.

The noise had ceased; now there was only silence—a silence in which her heart-beat sounded with loud and painful distinctness. It was broken at last by the sound of a match striking softly on its box. Then she saw a gleam of light through the crack of the folding doors—a little bright quivering thread that set her pulses leaping with sudden terror.

Who was there? What intruder had found entrance at this hour? She had left her purse and watch on the dressing table. Was this some robber—some midnight thief who had effected an entrance? And was she alone and helpless now at his mercy?

With nerves strung to highest tension, with that strange calmness and boldness that sometimes mark the sense of danger braved in very desperation, she rose and softly and noiselessly approached the doors. They were not so closely shut but that she could see through, and, in the gleam of a small lantern left on the table, she saw a tall figure, wrapped in a dark cloak, standing with back toward her, and with head bent down over something that it held in its hand.

Her heart seemed to stand still; but she did not move or seek to raise any alarm. What it held—only a little square frame, with closed doors, which now a strong hand wrenched violently open.

Silence—for a second's space; then, quick as thought, she flung back the doors and stood before the intruder, whose white face matched the pallor of her own as it was lit to answer the challenge of her words!

CHAPTER III.

The pictured face in that frame was the face of the man who looked back at her, and he quietly laid it on the table, before he answered her indignant question.

"You—and here!" she said. "How dared you come?"

"I had no right, I know," he said, hoarsely, "and I have no excuse. Only something I heard to-night made me do it. For all these years, Barbara, we have been strangers—dead to one another. It was your wish and your act. But you might have told me I had a father's rights to forego, as well as a husband's. If—if I had known—"

"It is too late to speak of that now," she said, coldly. "With your own hand you cut yourself adrift from me. I married you a girl, young, innocent, trusting. You know if you deserved either the love or the trust; at least I have learned how you rewarded them."

"For heaven's sake do not reproach me," he said, brokenly. "Do you think I have not suffered? Love, home, position and fortune—all sacrificed in a moment's drunken madness. Look here!" he threw back the cloak, and stood there in the uniform of the regimental band—"my livery—my badge of slavery," he went on bitterly. "I could scarce have fallen lower, could I? And yet when I came to my senses, to learn that you had left me—forever, as your letter said—I cared little enough for any further humiliation."

"Then it was you to whom the child spoke to-night?" she said. "But how does that explain your presence?"

"She was so like you," he said. "And the name—your name, Barbara. And she told me of the picture that stood here, always locked in its frame. I wondered if it was mine—if if you ever cared for me enough still to remember. And she talked on so innocently of where you lived; and when I stood there, looking over those low railings, and saw the steps and the balcony and the open window, the desperate thought came into my mind to satisfy myself at any cost. I saw the room was empty; I came in. There, on the table, stood the frame with the locked doors. You know the rest."

She was silent. Her face had grown very hard and stern; all the grace, and the beauty, and the youth of it seemed to have died out in that first shock of terror and recognition.

"I thought you were dead long ago," she said, at last.

"You mean you wished it." "Can you blame me if I did? wedded to a gambler, a drunkard, a man who had only sought my fortune, while another woman had his heart, and all that he called—love!"

"As there is a heaven above us, Barbara, you wrong me. I told you the truth of that old fatal tie; of the woman who held me bound and trapped, and whose memory I loathe as I loathe no other thing on earth. I did you a great wrong. I acknowledge that; but I did love you, Barbara, and it was your coldness and disbelief in me that drove me to that last desperate means of forgetfulness—drunk."

"All this," she said, "is very useless. It is merely going over the old ground again. Voluntarily you cut yourself adrift from me. You forfeited all right to a husband's name. You left me heart-broken, alone, at the mercy of strangers. To such mercy I owe my child's life and my own."

"I thought," he said humbly, "your own people would have taken you back."

"Did you think I would ask them? Did you know me so little?"

"I ought to have known you better, but I did not. And this child, Barbara, she is 9 years old, she told me."

"Yes," was the curt answer, "9 years old yesterday. She—she does not know. No; I could not burden her young life with so sad a history. She only thinks of her father as dead."

"He had better remain so," was the answer; and the hopeless bitterness of the one struck painfully on her heart. She looked at the worn and altered face, the pathetic eyes, the lines that suffering and endurance had drawn on brow and cheek. Strangely, sadly altered he was, indeed; but for all that he had told her, he was better worth loving now than when he had been only the laughing, debonair young Laird of Ardersier, whose barren acres and burdened estates had long been forfeited by his own folly.

The humiliation of his present position touched her to a sudden sense of pity for him. Only a private—a player in the band of a Scotch Regiment—who he had once been so courted, and gay, and blessed by fortune!

"Why did you do that?" she said at last, as her eyes wandered over his uniform.

"It was my last act of folly," he said. "I believe I was not in my right senses; but there was no help for it, and I found my knowledge of music might be easily turned to account. So I sank the Laird of Ardersier into plain Angus Fraser, whom no one recognized, and now no one remembers."

"It must have been a great change," she said, with momentary compassion.

That little touch of softness in her voice was harder for him to bear than all her previous coldness. He turned aside to hide the great tears that gathered in his eyes.

"And—used to it now," he said huskily; "and—there is one thing I should like you to know, Barbara, and that is that from the hour I recovered my senses, and knew at last what I had done, I made a vow to give up that fatal habit that had been my ruin. I have kept that vow for nine years. I mean to keep it all my life now. Oh, if you only knew what it cost sometimes—the longing to stifle thought, to dull memory, to forget—even for an hour—your face and its reproach!"

"I am glad to hear this, for your own sake," she said, very quietly. "But I see only in prolonging an interview that is so painful to both of us. Having satisfied yourself as to the existence of that picture, don't you think it would be as well to return to your—duties?"

He started; his eyes darkened with sudden anger.

"I had forgotten," he said, bitterly, "it is only a woman who never lets sentiment interfere with duty. Well, good-by, Barbara; time has not softened you, I see; but you might say one kind word to the poor devil who has only learned too late what he has lost—wife, child, home. You must allow it is hard."

"Not so hard as you made my life; not so hard as to learn one had been mocked and deceived," she cried passionately. "There was a time, Angus, when I was so desperate and so wretched that I could have killed myself, or you. If it had not been for the child—"

"You will not say 'our child,' Barbara," he pleaded.

"No," she cried, dashing the tears from her eyes, and facing him with the old, hard, desperate look. "No, I will not. What right have you to her love, even to her knowledge?"

"Then," he said, gravely, and yet with a certain proud dignity that she could not but recognize, "there is but one thing more to say. Our lives lie far apart, severed forever. Why do you not claim the freedom the law can give you? It is so easy to do. Four years' desertion, by Scotch law, and your refusal to return, that is all that is necessary."

She turned very white. A crowd of memories were rushing back; the tumult of feelings, long opposed and kept back by sheer force of resolution, surged wildly now through heart and brain. She had loved him so dearly—so dearly. Were even her wrongs and her sorrows sufficient to drown the memory of that love, or harden her to its appeal for pity?

"I—I could not do that," she said, brokenly. "After all, you are my husband."

"Barbara!" he cried, breathlessly. "Oh, my wife—my love—my sweetheart of long ago!"

He threw himself on his knees and buried his face in the folds of her soft, white gown, his strong frame shaken with sobs.

"Oh! hush, Angus, hush," she cried, striving for self-command, and terrified at this sudden tempest of emotion. "You will wake the child," she added, suddenly, as she turned and looked at the alcove where stood a little white-curtained bed. He raised his head then and followed her glance. The curtains were drawn slowly aside, and a little hand pushed away a cloud of tumbled curls from two sleepy, wondering eyes that gravely regarded them both.

"Well," she said, "this is—funny. Have you come to call on us?"

"Were you in his feet in confusion. Barbara flushed to the roots of her bright hair, but seemed incapable of speech.

The child bent forward and looked at them thoughtfully.

"Were you the man in the frame there?" she asked. "I told mother all about you when I came home. But you seem to know each other."

Still silence. Angus Fraser could not speak and Barbara would not.

The child rose suddenly and slipped out of the little bed and crossed the floor to where they stood, and then gravely regard-

ed them from beneath the tangle of curls that clustered about her pretty brows. Then, suddenly, she turned toward the photograph frame.

"Why, it is broken," she said, and stretched out her arm and took it down from its place. Then she looked at the face no longer hidden by those jealously locked doors, and from it to that other face—pale and tear-stained now, and yet with a strange light of happiness in the dark eyes that watched her so attentively. "It is you," she said, triumphantly, "I was quite right. Then you did know each other—once."

"Yes," she said, "my mother. 'You were quite right, Barbara.'"

The child laid the frame back on the table and glanced, in her quaint, direct way, at the tall, soldierly figure.

"I should like," she said, "to know who you are—really."

He glanced at that downcast woman's face, where the tears were trembling on the lowered lashes.

"Will you tell her, Barbara," he said, very gently, "or shall I?"

"You?" she murmured, her voice low and and uncertain; but all the hardness and coldness gone from it now.

He laid his hand on the little golden head—he was trembling greatly.

"I am a—friend of your mother," he said, "who loved her very dearly; but I was very foolish, and wicked, too, in those days of long ago—"

"Ah," said the child, below her breath, "it is another story of the 'long ago.'"

"And I offended her, and hurt her very cruelly," he resumed. "And so, having forfeited all rights to be any longer her friend, I went away, and lived my own life, as—as she has lived hers. The years passed; we were dead in name to one another. Of her life, her fortunes, her welfare, I knew nothing. Oh, child, I had added brokenly, 'may you never know that death in life of an unbroken silence between two who once have loved! The grief is not so cruel or so hopeless. Well, the months and the years went on, and—and, one night, that man who was your mother's friend heard a voice that spoke of her, and saw a face that had her look, and once more knew that life had brought them near each other. But the past had borne bitter fruit, little Barbara; and he saw the shadows of his own sins rise and face him like phantoms of dead hopes and forfeited joys. So, that is all the story. Perhaps some day some kinder thought may linger in her memory of one who loved her, even when he sinned most deeply. She finds it hard to believe that, little Barbara; for women so often judge of men as they would judge themselves, and, therefore, they cannot excuse because they cannot understand. Life has many hard lessons to teach—perhaps that is the hardest of all."

"And are you sorry you hurt her and offended her," asked the child.

"So sorry," he said, brokenly, "that if I could lay down my life to win her forgiveness—or—make her happy once again, I would do it, gladly—to-night."

The child came close to her mother's side and took her hand.

"Mother," she whispered, "he is so sorry, and he looks so sad, and you have so often said you have not one true friend who loves you—could you not forgive him because it was 'long ago?'"

The woman's face was uplifted then—the great tears falling unchecked from her dimmed eyes.

"Angus," she said, "your child pleads for you. I—I am not, perhaps, so hard or so unforgiving as you think. Let the past be forgotten and its errors and its pain buried in the years that have held them."

She held out her hand and he fell on his knees and pressed his trembling lips upon it.

Pale and averted, the child drew near. Her mother placed her arm around her, and both gazed with tender and compassionate eyes on the figure of the kneeling man.

"He is your father, Barbara; kiss him and call him that," she whispered.

The child bent forward and put her pretty lips against the bronzed and care-worn brow.

"Father," she said, wonderingly. He looked up, his eyes radiant now, his whole frame trembling with agitation.

"She may call me—that?" he said, breathlessly. "Then, Barbara, will you not say what I asked you, a little while ago? She has reconciled us—she may yet unite us. Heaven bless her—our child!"

"Yes, Angus, my husband—our child!"

DYAK DELIHANS.

Blandishments of Borneo's Dusky Maidens.

The Dyaks, except on special occasions, are a temperate nation, and like all people who use the betelnut are seldom given to excess. At their feasts, however, a special license prevails, and an immense quantity of taak, their national drink, is consumed. It is a tippie I never could indulge in, and one or two trials were sufficiently suggestive that I was not built to indulge in the flowing bowl as demonstrated by taak. The liquor is an abominable mess, in color like thin milk, with an odor that a polecat would envy, and in taste utterly indescribable.

If I had a pet enemy who was susceptible to the blandishments of female fascination and entreaty, I'd take him to Borneo and get him to attend a feast where the nectar would be freely dispensed by sirens, than whom Circe was a novice in witchery and voluptuous abandon in comparison, and if in half an hour he wasn't sport for the merry cup-bearers I would forfeit my hope of prize money in the next war; for be it known that the female Dyak is a most abstemious lady, but her moral code does not extend to keeping brute man from over-indulgence.

On the contrary, with artful insinuation, gross flattery, seductive looks, bewitching coquetry, and finally by caresses, they knock a big hole in a visitor's resolution, and it invariably winds up in the victim getting filled up, to the great amusement of that fascinator, who brings her friends to jeer at the impotent but conscious sufferer.

No Delilah better knows her power than a beautiful Dyak girl and uses that power with more freedom to make a fool of strong man nor is more inclined to exert her beguiling fascinations to undo him; but in America we are used to run the gauntlet of more dangerous if less openly conducted perils, and I for one was proof against the arts of the temptress who assailed me several times; though what it would have resulted in had the tippie been good punch I am afraid to conjecture.

The pun is mightier than the sword—it has killed more people.