



**IN THE TOILS;  
But Happiness  
Comes at Last.**

CHAPTER VI  
SIX MONTHS LATER.

To-night she had been reading "Hamlet" for the fiftieth time, and, for the moment, had almost forgotten the present and the past, until it got too dark to read. When she began to think, it seemed gliding from one dream to another, her life appeared so unreal. Only once had anything happened to form a connecting link between the present and the past. One night at the theater she had seen two people that she knew; they were Lord Heathcote and Lady Florence; they were in a box almost opposite to one in which she sat; and instinctively, she could not tell why, she had drawn behind the curtain. Stephen Rawdon had noticed the movement and the sudden flush which spread over her face, and was about to ask her the reason of them; but he himself looking across seemed as embarrassed, and drew back also.

This was the only thing that had come out from the past, as it were, and she had only seen them once.

It had been instinct alone that had caused her to conceal herself; she did not know that Charlie Heathcote had been most interested in the search for her at the time of her disappearance.

Olive was thinking of him now—the free, open grace of his handsome face, the true-hearted ring of his voice, and the kindly look in his eyes as he took the box from her hand—thinking of him, and the cold stare of Lady Florence, in an aimless fashion, when the rumble of the cab wheels roused her.

She raised her head and listened; then, as she heard the outer door open, and footsteps along the passage, she laid down her book and rose, with her hand upon the bell. Before she could ring it, the door opened, and Stephen Rawdon entered.

He paused for a moment, and even by the dim light of the fire she noticed a strange look on his face. His glance shifted quickly from her face to her hand, as he said quickly:



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"The lights," replied Olive. And she could tell the terms upon which they were by the cold restraint of her voice.

"No, not yet—I like this light," she said hurriedly.

And he came and stood in front of the fire, warming his hands, and looking round the room and furtively at her as she resumed her seat.

"Reading again!" he said, with a forced smile. "One would imagine you were cramming for an examination. What is it? Shakespeare. Ah, always a play! I sometimes think you are stagestruck."

"I have very little else to do but read," said Olive, looking up at him steadily.

He was silent a moment, then he shifted his position so that the light fell upon her face, while his was in the shadow.

"No," he said, "I fancy you must find it rather dull, eh, now, I am obliged to be out so much?"

"Are you obliged?" she asked quietly, without raising her eyes.

"Of course," he answered.

"I did not know," she said.

"No, you don't know everything," he said moodily. "I've wondered, lately, whether it wouldn't be better if you did know a little more."

Olive looked up at him steadily.

"I think it would be better for us both," she said. "I know nothing of—of anything that is happening—"

"Or going to happen," he puts in, with a twist of the lip that might have answered for a smile.

She repeated his addition.

"Since—since the day we were married," she went on, no shadow of a flush on her pale face, "I have been in ignorance of what our life should be; I have thought sometimes that it should not be what it is."

"What do you complain of?" he said, leaning against the mantelpiece, and looking down at her with a strange mingling of expression on his face, eagerness, doubt, nervousness, desperation. "You have a comfortable home, plenty to eat, drink, wear—"

Olive looked up at him with a cold, questioning regard that made him wince.

"I have done the very best for you while I could," he went on hurriedly.

"It is not my fault if I cannot keep it up. Yes," he continued, setting his teeth; "it is as well that you should know how the case stands; it was foolish to have kept it back, perhaps; I did it for the best. In one word then, I—or rather, we—are ruined."

Olive did not start or turn pale; she simply looked up at him questioningly.

"Ruined!" he repeated moodily, but with his dark eyes watching her furtively. "I have been unlucky for the past three months; everything has gone wrong; the cards—"

he stopped abruptly, and bit his lip. "A man may have a run of bad luck when he least expects it, and that is my case, when the rumble of the cab wheels roused her."

There was silence for a moment; then Olive looked up.

"This is what I had to learn," she said.

"Yes," he replied. "You don't seem."

"Why should I be?" asked Olive, calmly. "I have been used to pover-

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ty; until we were married I earned my own living; I can do so again. I shall be glad to help you; I would have been glad to have helped you from the first."

He looked at her with astonishment for a moment, then burst into an unmitigated, mocking laugh.

"What!" he exclaimed. "Do you think that you can do any good at dressmaking? Why, all that you could earn in a month would not keep us a day!"

Olive flushed at the cruel rebuff.

"If I could do more!" she said regretfully. "But at least I can do what I can." Then, moved by a sudden impulse, she got up and put her hand on his arm. "You will let me help you," she said.

He moved uneasily, his eyes dropped under the steady, splendor of hers, and he turned suddenly pale.

"You—you can help me," he said suddenly, in a low, hurried voice; in another and a better way than that."

Olive sank into the chair again—for the first time she had made an overture to him—had shown any tenderness, and he had let it pass unnoticed.

"Tell me how, and I will do it," she said quietly.

"I knew it," he said, with a strange mixture of confidence and doubt; "I knew you would—you have always been a—sensible girl. Yes, you will help me. Who should help one another," he added, with an uneasy laugh. "If man and wife do not."

Olive looked up waiting, and as if to avoid her regard, he moved further into the shadow and began walking to and fro.

Then he stepped in front of her, and with a pale face and forced smile, said:

"Look here, Olive, I have determined to trust you. I've told you that I have got into a mess—it don't matter how; ill luck is the same, come how it will. I've had a run of bad luck since—since we were married. That's not your fault," he added hastily, as he saw the delicate lips twitch and then set firm. "Matters have come to a crisis. This afternoon I thought that the worst had come, and it will, without a doubt, if we do not seize the chance which Fortune has thrown in our way."

Olive looked up. The clock on the mantelpiece chimed the half hour, and he put his hand on his watch pocket with a start.

"Forgot!" he said, with a harsh laugh; "that went a month ago. This clock is right? There is no time to lose. What is there for supper in the house?"

Olive thought a moment.

"No matter," he said quickly, "tell them to put on what they have, and make the best of it; light up the room and make it cheerful; I will get the wine."

Olive rose.

"And," he added, with a sudden

flush, "tell them to lay for three."

"For three?" said Olive, with great surprise.

"Yes," he nodded, "I have asked some one to come in. Make haste back, and I will explain. It must be ready in a few moments."

Olive went out to give the necessary instructions, and while she was gone, he went to a cabinet in an adjoining room and poured out a glass of brandy. His hand trembled as he held the glass, but the draft seemed to give him courage and composure, and when Olive came back, he was standing in his old attitude, and met her with a curious smile.

"Have you told them?" he said.

"That's right. Now, listen; there are only a few moments in which to—"

arrange matters. This evening I was wandering about Pall Mall, wondering whether anything would turn up, and stopped for a moment close to a club to see if I had a cigar. Two men came down the steps; one I knew by name, the other as an old acquaintance. His name is Derrick—Hastley Derrick. They stopped on the step so close to me—they could not see me—that I heard every word they said. They were saying good-by. Derrick starts to-morrow morning—to-morrow morning, remember—for India. His friend asked him to go to a house to bid a certain lady good-by, and Derrick replied, saying he had an engagement. I heard him say something else—that he had a large sum in gold and notes about him."

Olive, listening with calm attention, raised her eyes and fixed them upon the pale face above her.

Stephen Rawdon glanced at her furtively, and went on more quickly:

"As I was walking on, I felt a hand on my shoulder, and found that Derrick had seen me and caught me up. Now, I never liked this Derrick. He served me a shabby trick once. The story is too long to tell you now, but the point of it is that he won a large sum of money from me at cards. I haven't forgotten it, and I ought to have had my revenge long ago. I might, when he came up; the thought struck me that it would be a capital opportunity of getting my own again. Do you follow me?" He broke off, clearing his throat excitedly.

Olive, staring straight at the fire, inclined her head.

"I never liked the man," he went on, as if there was some excuse in the assertion, "and it made me mad to think that he was off from these parts and that I shouldn't get a chance to rake my money back. Well, I told him that I was married, and he wanted to be introduced. He asked me to introduce him to you, pointblank; made a point of it, in fact. What could I do but invite him to come and spend the evening?"

Olive's face set like stone.

"Of course, I didn't think there was a chance of his coming, and was quite surprised when he said he would. Quite surprised!" he repeated, with an uneasy laugh. "Well, he will be here in"—he looked round at the clock, and did not turn again, "in ten—by Jove! he may be here in five minutes. Now, I want you to help me make it pleasant for him."

"You know what I mean," he said, flushing and frowning—"don't look as if you didn't understand. Laugh and talk, and give him all the usual attentions; and"—he broke off with a laugh, as if the idea had just occurred to him—"the last time I was with him, he and some other fellows played me a rather clever trick; they hoaxed my wine—"

Once more she looked up.

"Ah, you are not up in slang—yet," he said, with an ill-concealed sneer. "They put some laudanum into my glass, and sent me to sleep for a couple of hours. Don't you understand?"

(To be Continued.)

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