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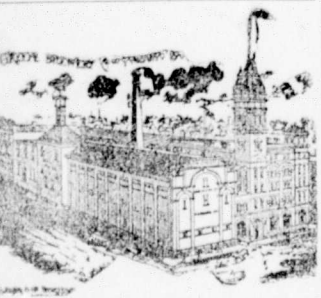
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THE GUARDIAN'S MYSTERY:

OR, Rejected for Conscience's Sake. BY CHRISTINE FABER. CHAPTER XIV.—CONTINUED.

But, despite the hope she strove both to impart, and to feel, and the cheerful tones she assumed, there was a gloom upon her spirits, much more than even the occasion seemed to warrant. It was as if the finger of inexorable fate were pointing to a separation greater than even distance could make between herself and her beloved companion. At tea, Aunt Deb and Miss Liscome bore them company; Aunt Deb was particularly cheerful, owing to her perpetual gratitude for the awful danger her brother had escaped, and she kept up a light but still, to her three spiritless companions, a sort of exasperating conversation, for it compelled answers constantly from each of them in turn. Miss Liscome wanted to be permitted to observe in silence the face of Miss Hammond who sat directly opposite to her, and to wonder in what special feature was the charm that had won Wilbur. In her opinion Miss Hammond's manner, her looks, and her forehead too low, and just now she was frightfully pale. But she had to acknowledge the charm of the delicate skin and that other more potent charm of youth. Miss Hammond's face bore no lines, nor wrinkles, nor creases of age.

It never occurred to her to think about Miss Hammond's character, nor to wonder at, or admire, the resolution which could put aside so tempting an offer as Sydney Wilbur's heart and hand. Such heroism was beyond even her conception. She was conscious of nothing but a violent jealousy of the girl, and a secret, but none the less deadly desire to crush her if she could. She hated her with all her little vain soul for the love she had won.

All but Aunt Deb were glad when the meal was finished, and hearing her ask, or rather command, Prudence to accompany her to her room in order to help her finish some sewing upon which both had been engaged during the afternoon, Agnes and Florence repaired to the parlor.

They sat in silence holding each other's hands and looking into each other's eyes with the dearest attempts at cheerful expressions of contentment, until Florence could bear it no longer. In desperation for something to break the agonizing monotony, she tried—

"Sing for me, Agnes."

Agnes went to the piano; she had little heart to sing, but she could not at such a time, refuse any request from Florence, and thinking it would harrow herself less to sing something from the music belonging to the Wilburs, than the strains with which both she and Florence were familiar, she opened one of the books of melody lying on the piano. They were mostly light airs, but cheerful ones, and when having sung a couple, Florence begged her to continue, she came suddenly upon "Kathleen Mavourneen."

"It may be for years, and it may be for ever," rang out in her exalted, triumphant tones, and with an expression in the singer's voice that told her own aching heart was in the quivering strains.

Florence felt her own heart would burst if she waited to hear more, and she stole from the room leaving the singer who now seemed unconscious to everything but that she was giving vent to emotions with which her soul was full.

The hall-door opened, and Wilbur entered, pausing a moment as the strains reached him. Then he stole to the parlor-door; Florence had left it partly open. He looked within, and seeing his sole occupant, went noiselessly in, standing behind the singer and hardly daring to breathe lest he might betray his presence.

But her own feelings were overmastering her; the agony of parting with Sydney, with Florence, the anticipation of an unknown future, the vision of Mr. Mallaby, the craving for the affection of a father, mother, brother, sister to which to flee in order to fill the awful gap that would be made by Florence's departure, seemed to have been rendered more intense by the very words she was singing, and in the middle of the second stanza her song gave way to the great sob that had been gathering in her heart from the first, and she laid her head on the piano, and gave utter way to her grief.

Wilbur could not control himself; he forgot his promise not to appear in her sight; he forgot all his former regard for her extreme delicacy, and rushing forward he caught her in his arms.

"My darling! our separation shall not be—you have consented—you will consent—you will tell me not to leave you."

He held her so tightly that for a moment she could hardly even struggle in his arms; then, with a desperate effort which alarmed him for the result of his impetuous action, she freed herself, and in her horror at having been actually in his embrace, and her fear of yielding at last to him, she shrank from him as though he had been some unsexedly thing.

"Agnes," he said, his voice sounding hoarse and unnatural from his own wild emotions, "do you fear me? Has it come to this, that you shrink from me?"

He approached her, but she shrank further away, in her desperation praying unconsciously aloud:

"Oh, my God save me! Holy Mother of God help me!"

He stopped short, astonished, grieved and angered at her prayer, and astonished and grieved, he said, at length, "why should you fear me? It is the powerlessness to move her resolution. Could she love him, he argued with himself, and love him as he loved her, and still act in this manner? Other Catholic women equally as good, had married Protestants, why should Agnes Hammond hold herself superior? He had not asked her to give up her religion; he had not even demanded that she should sacrifice one of its requirements; then, why her refusal to marry him? Might it not be owing to a sort of natural obstinacy in her character or even a secret hope that he would improve his love by becoming a convert to Catholicity for her sake—at which thought his whole soul rebelled. Not even for Agnes Hammond, passionately as he loved her, unless that motive were accompanied by sure and full conviction, would he renounce the Faith of his fathers.

"Agnes," he said at length, "you need not fear me; if in the ardor of my regard for you—a regard which I now feel you neither understand, appreciate, nor return—I have forgotten myself, I beg you to forgive me. It is the last time I shall so offend."

He turned from her, going toward the door, but before he reached it, something impelled him to look back. She, staring at his words, knowing how mistaken he was, and feeling that she could not let him go with that cruel thought of her, had taken a step toward him, bearing in her face, a wild, agonized and imploring look. In an instant he was at her side again, every thought of her gone but that she loved him.

"Agnes, my own! your face has recalled me—your eyes speak the words which your tongue has so cruelly refused to utter, and remember all that I have promised with regard to your faith, all, remember—I demand no sacrifice from you—you will tell me now that you will marry me."

It was well that the poor, tempted creature lost not for an instant the thought of prayer. Having learned so sadly the little dependence to be placed on her own strength, her soul had hardly intermitted for a second, its silent petition for help; and now she was enabled to answer with a firmness which even he felt were vain to endeavor longer to struggle against.

"If my face seemed to recall you it was because you had wronged me by saying that I neither understood, nor appreciated, nor returned your regard. Perhaps the best evidence of my doing all three is the very sacrifice I am making. I do not love you less, because I love my God more, nor would you in your better and manlier moments even seek to make me do that which was contrary to my principles. Now, in kindness to me, go, or permit me to leave you."

She moved as if to pass him, but he placed himself before her, and he asked once more, in answer to marry me, irrevocably now?"

His whole eager passionate soul was in his eyes, and he turned them full upon her, compelling her to meet them.

"Do not move, as if to pass me, before!"

"Irrevocably now?"

"He turned away, and went again to the door, and out; she heard his quick step as he strode, rather than walked to the parlor, and then she went up stairs to Florence, who had but just become calm after the burst of grief evoked by "Kathleen Mavourneen."

"Let me cry a little, dear," she said, putting her arms around Florence's neck, "I think it will do me good."

XXV.

In the bustle of the preparations for departure the next morning, Anne forgot to deliver Miss Liscome's parcel; indeed, the domestic was so much bewildered by demand by "Aunt Deb," that it was a wonder, as she herself expressed it, after the words she had any sort of a head left upon her shoulders, and such being the case she did not consider herself to blame for having neglected poor Miss Liscome. But she did not intend to tell that lady that her failure to deliver the message was due to anything save Mr. Wilbur's own absence from home, which was quite true, and which she did not think it her duty to disclose.

Aunt Deb wondered a little that Prudence did not come over, but secretly she was just as well pleased; it might be unpleasant to have Sydney meeting her, should he happen to leave his solitude, as he was likely to do on this last day.

Miss Liscome had not made her wonted call on the Wilburs, because she wanted to be early on the pier from which the steamer was to sail; and that she was early, was really expressed, by her presence of not another female, and the presence of much of the bustle which attends an out-bound steamer. She had not gone to the house through fear of being unable even there to murmur her farewell to Mr. Wilbur, and she could not with decency announce to Deborah, since the latter had taken her earlier departure, that she was invited, her anxiety to get away in order to be in time for the departure of the vessel. There did not seem to be any impropriety in meeting them all on the pier, and certainly during that meeting there must be an opportunity for her to say what she wished to say, if not tender, to Mr. Wilbur.

She had arrayed herself, as usual, in some light-colored juvenile costume, as becoming as it was unsuitable, and with her rouged cheeks and a great bunch of monthly roses in her bosom, she looked rather an out-of-place sight, on the pier, and no one could help being struck by her appearance still more out of keeping with her surroundings, was the morning itself—dark, cloudy, windy, as utterly unlike the summer season to which it belonged, as Miss Liscome herself was unlike the youth and beauty she strove so desperately to counterfeit.

Every body who chanced to pass looked at her; sometimes even a laborer wheeling his handcart went slower to have a better view of her, and a couple of red-faced, middle-aged, and seemingly jolly tars tried to oggle the "old gal," as they called her, but she indignantly put up her parrot and turned her back to them.

She found patience and consolation in the thought that Sydney by this time had in his possession her little gift; it never occurred to her that she might decline to receive it, or that he might return it to Anne with a message of unmistakable

displeasure for the giver. Not dreaming of the utter contempt which her report of her interview with Miss Hammond had inspired, she entertained only her own old pleasant thoughts of him.

At length, the passengers and their friends began to arrive, and as carriage after carriage deposited its load, Miss Liscome felt some anxiety lest her friends might come too late for any but the most hurried farewell. To add to her discomfort, the day grew more threatening, and the dark, comfortable-looking costume of every lady about her, made her somewhat painfully conscious of her own inappropriate attire.

But her fears were all forgotten the moment the Wilbur conveyance drove into sight, and to the astonishment of all three companions—Sydney was not there—she first to notice them as they alighted, was staring-looking Miss Liscome. Florence, despite her heavy beard, could not forbear smiling at the creature's ridiculous appearance, and her look of disapproval, which she could not conceal, at the absence of Mr. Wilbur.

"What on earth are you doing here, Prudence Liscome?" spoke up Deborah sharply, her sharpness arising from the fact that Miss Liscome might not believe her when she should tell her that she did not know until the last minute Sydney would meet them instead of accompanying them, and that had she known it from some other source, she would have vacated her seat in the carriage.

Miss Liscome, however, was relieved so long as she felt there was still a chance of seeing Sydney, and she summoned courage to say:

"Do not mind, dear Deborah, about not having intended to come in with me. I left the world didn't you follow me when I left the steamer, and not make me lose you in this manner."

It was Miss Wilbur's sharp, shrill voice—Miss Wilbur accompanied by Miss Liscome. Together they had been searching for her, and the search had not made on the vessel, and she had not made the scowling looks darted at her by both.

"I beg pardon," she said, drying her eyes and turning to accompany them, "I had forgotten that I was keeping the carriage waiting."

"I never believed," continued Miss Wilbur as they treaded their way to the family vehicle, "in the sickly sentimentality of waiting to see a steamer off. You have said good-bye on board, and what more is there to do?"

"When Sydney went away before and when I knew he was going to be gone a whole two years, or more, I went home immediately that I said good-bye to him, and plunged right into my work. That's what I did, Prudence Liscome," as if it were Prudence who had been guilty of the sentimentality she deplored.

"I have no doubt of it in the least, dear Deborah," mildly answered Miss Liscome, and by that time they had reached the carriage.

Agnes shrank into a corner, thankful that a drive of little more than a half hour would free her from the presence of her companions.

The exterior of Mrs. Denner's house was more pretentious than either Miss Wilbur's, or Miss Liscome's, but as Prudence said afterwards to Deborah, it was utterly without style, and in a very unaristocratic neighborhood.

These facts, however, did not trouble Miss Hammond, as she hurried out of the carriage. She stood a moment at the carriage door to thank Miss Wilbur for her hospitality, and to say a brief adieu to each lady, without however, offering to accompany it with her hand. Then she went quickly up the stoop of the house, and the carriage drove away.

XXVI.

Mrs. Denner was absorbed—hands and mind in desert-making when one of the little wide-eyed, tow-headed Denners rushed down to the kitchen and announced "Miss Hammond's in the parlor and she wants to see my ma."

"Merciful sakes! Miss Hammond?" Mrs. Denner's eyes in a sort of disbelieving astonishment opened as wide as those of her offspring.

"Whatever shall I do? I am not in trim to see such an elegant young lady as she is," and she looked down ruefully at her soiled calico dress, and then leaving the latter she had been vigorously mixing, she went to survey herself in the glass of looking-glass that hung near the dresser.

"She said she wanted to see you right away, ma," urged the little Denner.

"Merciful sakes! then, I'll have to go up just as I am." And smoothing her dress as if that were to give it a more decent look, she ascended to the parlor.

It was two years since she had seen Miss Hammond—the latter preferring to spend all the holidays of her last school year in the convent with Florence—and Mrs. Denner could hardly help mingling with her kindly welcome, expressions of delighted astonishment at the way the young lady had grown.

"Mr. Mallaby kept telling me that you were getting tall and handsome, but you beat everything that he said. Excuse me for saying so Miss Agnes, but you're an out-and-out beauty."

Agnes smiled a little, but it was in a delectable way. She felt as if her recent trial had crushed beyond chance of resurrection, every emotion of vanity.

"I have come to stay with you, Mrs. Denner; unexpected circumstances causing me to terminate my visit sooner than I thought to do. But I suppose it makes some accommodation for me, can you not?"

"She looked so tired and sorrowful as she spoke that Mrs. Denner's motherly heart was touched; she could not refrain from calling the young lady "dear child," instead of the formal "Miss Agnes."

"What a dear child! You should be accommodated through the whole house had to be turned upside down. Mr. Mallaby told me as you would come in about two months, and knowing that, as the house was slim in boarders—it always is at this season—I just set apart a room for you, and though it isn't as freshly furnished as I want to have it, perhaps you won't mind it for the present."

So far from minding it for the present, Agnes thought, when she was ushered into the large comfortable apartment that it would do very well for all time. Its neatness certainly pleased Mrs. Denner's own appearance, from which Agnes had instinctively, but secretly, been struck; Miss Hammond was speedily to learn that Mrs. Denner's own appearance was the only slovenly thing about Mrs. Denner's boarding-house. Whether it was that combined care of matrimony and boarders made her insensible to the effect of

solled, and untidy-hung skirts, collarless waists, and torn aprons or that, did she bestow care upon her person it might seem like the evidence of an unworthy vanity, not even the boarders, finding such strange contrast between the appearance of the mistress and the appearance of the house, could determine, and every day, save for an hour or two on Sunday, Mrs. Denner was to be found in that condition which necessitated when anybody called to see her, the ejaculation:

"Merciful sakes! whatever shall I do, to go up to the parlor in this trim."

His heart, however, was in its proper condition—large, sympathetic, and kindly—and perhaps no one of her boarders who rarely left her save to return, experienced that fact in shorter time, than did good heart-sick, home-sick, lonely Agnes Hammond.

She felt it in the delicate and tempting little repast which was brought to her by Mrs. Denner's own hands, and by the tender, motherly manner in which that good woman insisted that Miss Hammond partake of the repast should she be down and have a quiet little slumber; and she waited in order to place the "dear child" comfortably in bed, and to draw the blinds so as to exclude the light. Then she went out softly, and back to her dessert-making, wondering a little what could have been the "unexpected circumstances" which had terminated so surprisingly soon Miss Hammond's visit. Neither could she quite control her desire for Mr. Mallaby's return from business—fortunately he was not away on one of his suburban trips—in order to see how he would take his wife's unexpected coming.

She heard him on the stoop at length. The sound of his voice mingled with the voices of the children by whom he was surrounded, coming into the kitchen through the area window, and she hurried to meet him, receiving him just as he had left himself in with the whole boisterous crowd hanging about him.

"Go away, every one of you! you're a disgrace to any house, piling in, in this manner, and how Mr. Mallaby can stand it, I don't know."

Mr. Mallaby was as much surprised as were the children who had become inordinately and simultaneously silent. Never had Mrs. Denner before objected to anything they did when they were in company with Mr. Mallaby.

He hastened now to apologize for them.

"They mean no harm, ma'am, and it's my own fault."

"But I want to speak to you, Mr. Mallaby, so just go away every one of you," and she turned them all out, unceremoniously, even slamming the door upon them, and then she drew Mr. Mallaby into the parlor, the door of which room she also shut.

"Miss Agnes has come—she's here now."

"Miss Agnes has come," he repeated, looking bewildered, and as if he quite doubted the fact.

"Yes; she said that 'unexpected circumstances'—them's her very words—made her end her visit so suddenly. She looked awfully sad and tired, but I didn't ask her any questions as I didn't think it was my place to do so. I just got her as a bit to eat and made her lie down as soon as possible."

TO BE CONTINUED.

A DISTINGUISHED GUEST.

In Chinese visiting etiquette the rank of the caller is denoted by the size of his card. Thus the visiting card of a high mandarin would be an immense roll of paper, nicely tied up. The late Admiral Porter once engaged a full-blooded Chinese servant, and Mrs. Porter immediately thereafter attended a reception. John Chinaman attended door, and received with great disgust small paste-boards of the visitors, and, evidently with an opinion of his own of the low condition of the Admiral's friends, pitched the cards into a basket, and with scant ceremony showed their owners into the drawing-room.

But presently the gas man called with a bill—a big piece of cream colored paper. The card satisfied John; with deep reverence he received it. With low salaams, he ushered the bearer not only into the drawing-room, but, with profound genuflections, to the dismay of Mrs. Porter, right up to the centre of the room, where that lady was receiving her distinguished guests, and then John, with another reverent and meekly retired, doubtless supposing that the owner of that card was a person of high distinction.

Father Burke's Reply.

Father Tom Burke, the Dominican priest who so successfully refuted the false theories Froude, the great English historian, tried to impress on the people of this country regarding Irish history, a number of years ago, was riding one day in Dublin on top of an omnibus and reading his breviary. A theological opponent got on and thought to read Father Tom a lecture.

"The Lord tells us, sir," he said, "that when we pray we should not be as hypocrites are, who love to pray in public and at the corners of the streets that they might be seen of men. No when I pray, I enter into my closet, and, closing the door, pray in secret."

"Yes," replied Father Tom, without taking his eyes off the book, "and then you come out on the top of an omnibus and tell everyone all about it."

Weak Young Men and Women are seen everywhere. Heredity or over-study renders them unfit to cope with the responsibilities of life, susceptible to consumption or decline. Medicine is failed and must fail for they need food. Take cod liver oil? No! Their poor stomachs rebel. Take emulsion? No! They are equally distasteful. Nothing will effect a cure but Maltine with Cod Liver Oil. This is rendered palatable and easy of digestion, is quickly assimilated, and the malfine, equal in nutrition to the oil, and even surpassing it in energetic action upon the digestive processes, unite in producing increased weight, improved color, and that elasticity and buoyancy which herald returning health. Maltine with cod liver oil has a remedial value ten times greater than emulsions. Try it.