

TANGLED THREADS

"There is no 'but' that can be said against her," interposed Marjorie, and mimicking the woman's affection to perfection. "She is the sweetest, dearest, most generous-hearted girl in the world; and her mother—well, if all you people would just stop your gossiping long enough to study that woman's character, you would be improving your time to better advantage."

"And you would do well to cultivate a little more civility, Miss Impertinence," retorted Miss Lampton, with a very free face.

"I suppose I would," observed Marjorie severely; "but, if you please, I'll have my say out first, for I'm quite stirred up over hearing those really good people so slandered. Why, the Seymours have a summer home in the Adirondacks where I go to visit, my aunt, Mrs. Sturdyant, sometimes, and everybody there thinks 'the world of them.'"

"Probably nothing is known of Mrs. Seymour's—or whatever her name be—history there; however, your mother is responsible for the story; so suppose you turn your quills upon her in the future." And with this arrow from her own quiver, shot with a withering glance at Marjorie, the ruffled spinster went into the house.

Her curiosity had been aroused to the highest pitch regarding the mystery about the Seymours, and several times she had tried to sound Mrs. Ellsworth upon the subject, but the woman had told all she cared to of that episode in which she had so disgracefully figured in her youth; hints and insinuations served her purpose as well as anything, and so the "pumping act" had not been at all successful.

"Never mind," this queen of idlers and busybodies would say to herself upon these occasions; "I'll have the whole story one of these days. I never yet set about finding out about people that I did not accomplish it some way."

She felt it her duty to keep her eye upon the Seymours, and, one day, she went to call upon Mrs. Forsyth, with whom she had some acquaintance, both ladies attending the same church. She was in her most affable mood, and the call was, apparently, very agreeable to both parties until Miss Lampton was about to take her departure.

"So you have the Seymours with you?" she casually observed, as she abstractedly a card from her case and laid it upon a table.

"Yes; and how sorry you have been to lose them from your house—they are such delightful people!" Mrs. Forsyth returned, but with a wicked sparkle in her eyes.

"Yes—yes, they seemed to be very nice," rejoined Miss Lampton, with a doubtful intonation; "but we learned that their past history has rather a high flavor."

"Ah!"

"Of course, it is none of my affair, and I am the last person in the world to say anything against anybody," the woman went on, but not quite liking the tone her companion had employed; "but, as you are dependent upon your business, I thought it would be no more than fair that you should be warned, lest the reputation of your house should suffer."

"Thank you for your good intentions," suddenly interposed her hostess suavely, but with a slight emphasis on the adjective, which caused her listener to flush hotly; "but, really, I do not see that the reputation of my house will ever suffer through the Seymours. They are favorites with everyone here; and, as for their history—well, we all have had episodes in our lives, you know."

Miss Lampton was politely bowed out, but there was a queer look on her face as she went on her way.

"What did she mean by 'episodes,' I wonder!" she muttered to herself, with an uncomfortable shiver.

Poor Marjorie was very wretched during these days. She grew to hate her life more and more as time went on, for Mrs. Ellsworth was developing more of a sordid, grasping disposition with every day, a determination to extort the utmost farthing, together with an oppression and grinding down of her servants, that was entirely at variance with her hitherto free-and-easy manner of living.

She hated, too, the servitude and work which were necessary to her mother's refusal to keep sufficient help to do all that was necessary, and thus she was obliged to perform certain duties every day that were exceedingly obnoxious to her.

Thus there was gradually taking form in her mind a determination to get away from it all, by some means, and at the earliest possible opportunity.

"Oh, if I could only go home with Aunt Eliza!" she sighed again and again; and then a sense of shame, in view of wishing to desert her mother, a life of ease, and supine dependence, leaving her to fight out her battle with poverty alone, would rush over her, and she would feel mean and miserable.

"I will find somebody who has lots of money, and will get married," she thought, "and then I can give mamma a home she need not work at all." She resolved, though with a feeling of despair, as she thought of the fact that she had really and truly poured all the love she was capable of bestowing upon any human being, into the arms of a miser.

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party in Colorado Springs, for she told herself that Rob and Helen would be sure to meet and then everything would be explained between the lovers.

Often her curiosity regarding Helen and her interrupted marriage would almost get the better of her, and she would feel that she must see her friend and find out all about it, in spite of her mother's prohibition.

But always at such times a realization of her own unworthiness and wrongdoing, her treachery toward those who had been kind and sincere friends to her, would so humiliate her that she instinctively shrank from an interview with them.

Helen, on her part, was grieved at the existing state of affairs, for she had really been very fond of Marjorie, and she would have been glad to renew their friendship, in spite of the barrier which had arisen between them after the girl's confession of love for Rob.

She, also, had wondered what could have brought Mrs. Ellsworth to Colorado Springs, for she had supposed them to be still traveling with the party, which Mr. Lancaster and Rob had joined. She often asked herself if it could be possible that they had returned earlier than they had intended, and if the Ellsworths had stopped off at that point for reasons of their own, while the others went on. It was very evident that they had met with reverses, or they would not now be keeping in a boarding-house. And who was Mrs. Sturdyant, whom she knew had been regarded as a wealthy woman? Why had she not opened her heart and home to them? Thus it will be perceived that Helen's curiosity had also been aroused, and had it not been for the wretched reports which Mrs. Ellsworth had circulated—although Mrs. Seymour had kept the worst from her—she would have been tempted to seek Marjorie herself.

But one day she overheard some people discussing these very reports, while she was waiting for some change in a store, and she went home to her mother in a great state of excitement and indignation.

"I cannot understand it, mamma!" she exclaimed. "I cannot understand why the woman would say such false things! What cause can she have—what right to assert anything so disgraceful? Why, it actually makes my blood boil to think of it—to have our good name so assailed, when there is not a word of truth in the story!"

Mrs. Seymour felt that the time had come when she must tell her daughter something of the truth, for there was no knowing to what lengths Marjorie Ellsworth would go, and she wished her to be prepared for whatever revelations might come later. And yet she could not tell her all—ah, no! She must never learn the name of her father, if she could avoid telling it, for she never could allow the two to meet and recognize each other as father and daughter! Helen was hers alone, by every right, moral and divine, and she meant to keep her thus always.

"Helen," she gravely observed, in reply to her excited remarks, "do you remember that, when you told me of your acquaintance with Marjorie Ellsworth, I said I wondered if she could be the child of Marjorie Walbridge?"

"Yes, mamma; I also remember how queerly you spoke of her—almost as if you hated her."

"Yes, and no doubt I did manifest some such feeling for the moment," replied Mrs. Seymour, flushing as she recalled the fact, "for I had abundant reason; and now I have come to feel that it is only right I should tell you that Mrs. Ellsworth is Marjorie Walbridge."

"Mamma, can that be possible?" And she is that 'false friend' of which you have already told me?" queried Helen, astonished.

"Yes; although I would have been glad never to have had to speak her name again—in fact, to have buried all the past with which she is associated in oblivion."

"You need not tell me anything more dear, if it pains you to talk about it," said Helen considerably.

"I think it will perhaps, be best for you to understand something of her history, and why she is trying to injure us in the way she is doing," returned Mrs. Seymour, after a thoughtful pause, during which she had been almost tempted to take Helen at her word, for she shrank sensitively from the task before her. "The impression which she has been giving people about us, the insinuations which she has been sowing broadcast, while absolutely false, as far as involving any disgrace on our part, are nevertheless, in a way founded upon fact."

"Listen, dear," interposed Mrs. Seymour, checking her with a gesture; "you must let me tell it in my own way, and you must be content with what I tell you, for there are some things that I cannot talk about—that withered my youth, and bereft me of my greatest joy, my highest hopes in life. Marjorie Walbridge was my roommate for three years while we were in the boarding-school, where I had been sent to complete my education. The year before she was to graduate, her father failed in business, then suddenly died, leaving the girl an orphan and absolutely penniless. She appeared to be heartbroken because she could not go on with her school, and, as my father had left me a comfortable little sum, I told Marjorie that I would be responsible for the expenses of that last year, for I expected to be married as soon as I left school to a wealthy gentleman, and felt that I could well afford to be generous to that extent, while she would be thus prepared to teach, and earn her own living. We graduated at the same time, and, as she had no home to go to for her long vacation, I wrote, asking my Aunt Wesley—my mother's half-sister, with whom I was to remain until my marriage—if she would receive my friend, also. Cordial permission was given. A month later, I was married, and Marjorie was my maid of honor. I then invited her to come to me until she could find a good position as a teacher. She lived with me for more than a year, making no effort whatever to get anything to do, and, although I could not fail to feel that she was encroaching upon our hospitality, I treated her like an own sister, and provided liberally for her every need, for my husband was generous as a prince, and gratified my every whim. Well, Helen—I cannot begin to tell you all—that girl betrayed me in the basest possible way; it was she who, after worming herself into my husband's confidence, made him believe that I was unfaithful to him—"

"Oh, what ingratitude! She was, indeed, a 'false friend!'" exclaimed Helen at this point.

"Yes, dear," continued her mother, with white lips. "It was she who encouraged that other, of whom I have told you, to believe that I was unhappy with my husband, regretted my choice, and would be glad to be free. It was she who planned to admit him to my private sitting-room, and then, when he was in the midst of his passionate avowals, in which he assumed that I wished to escape from the life I was leading, she managed, by a clever maneuver, to have my husband walk in upon us, having heard, as he believed, enough to incriminate us both. When I tried to argue and explain, he would not listen to a word of defense from me; he said he had heard enough with his own ears to convince him of the truth, and to know, no man would presume to make such proposals to a married woman if he had not had plenty of encouragement to do so—and so on. I cannot rehearse the scene," sighed the woman, wearily.

"I was so crushed, heart-broken, and humiliated because of his lack of confidence in me," she presently resumed—"I was so wounded, and offended—for I was proud and passionate, as well as that, as I have told you before, I left him after my beautiful home—and Helen, I have lived alone ever since."

"Mamma! What do you mean?" exclaimed the girl, sitting suddenly erect, and shocked to her soul, from her mother's painful intonation, and the wording of that last sentence, a suspicion of the truth flashed upon her. "Mamma—then, my father didn't die! But you told me—"

"Yes, dear, I told you that I lost him before you were born. I allowed you to believe him dead—he was dead to me—for I could not bear to have your life blighted by a knowledge of the true nature of my trouble, while I knew that you would be ceaselessly tormented with a yearning desire to find and know him. Sometimes I have felt that I had done wrong to keep the truth from you, as well as the knowledge of your existence from him. But I felt that you belonged exclusively to me. I never could part with you, and I was too proud, and obstinate and selfish, to tell him, and let him come to see you, and win your love."

"And—and is he living still?" queried Helen in a scarcely audible voice.

"Yes—or was less than two years ago."

"Who is he? What is his name—the name that rightly belongs to you and me? Where does he live?" cried Helen in eager tones.

"Those are questions, Helen, that I do not wish to answer," said Mrs. Seymour, with firm-set lips. "And you must not press me to do so. The past is past, and nothing can change it now, and I am so bound up in the past that I cannot bear that you should ever meet him. It can do you no good to learn the name which you assert rightly belongs to us; it would only make you restless and miserable. The one we have borne in the past will do well enough for us in the future."

"But—"

"My darling, you must not press me upon this point," interposed Mrs. Seymour, with a sharp, "and now, let us drop the subject, for I cannot talk more about it. I have only told you this much to show you how wickedly Marjorie Ellsworth has perverted the truth. In a certain sense, I have no right to the name I bear, and you never had a father; she has taken that way to smirch our reputation, and drive us out of the place; but she knows that the impression she has given is as false as false can be."

"Well, tell me, mamma," Helen began eagerly. Then she checked herself weakly, as light suddenly flashed upon her. "Ah, but you do not need to—I know already!" she sighed.

"What is it that you know, dear?" queried her mother, while she searched her face with a rapidly beating heart and clouded eyes.

"I was going to ask you if that other man, who made such dishonorable proposals to you, is still living; but, of course, I know; though, for the moment, I forgot—and, oh! she came on, with flaming eyes and crimson cheeks; 'I think he did you as great a wrong as that woman who plotted to ruin you! What right had he to annoy and insult you in any such way, while you were the wife of another man? Why could he not have left you alone? Oh, he has not only ruined your life, but he has ruined mine, twice over!' she concluded, her thoughts reverting to the telegram and letter from Mr. Lancaster, which she still had in her possession.

"Oh, what you mean by saying that he has ruined your life twice over?" her mother inquired, a look of perplexity overspreading her face.

"Why—why," faltered the excited girl, with a sudden start, as she remembered that she had never known anything about the letter and telegram. "I—of course, since he was the cause of all the wretchedness you have known, and was, in that way, the means of depriving me of my father, he has been guilty of a double wrong to me, and I will never forgive him—never—never!" she concluded passionately, and then she burst into a terrible fit of weeping.

[To be Continued.]

PRINCESS SAWS WOOD.

London, July 3.—Princess Louise Augusta paid a surprise visit Friday to the labor home of the Church Army in Crawford street, Marylebone. She saved a log of wood, afterward chopping it into firewood and working the bunding machine.

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Lord Desborough and Lord Howard de Walden are also excellent swordsmen.

SUMMER TOPICS OF DIPLOMATS

The Rapprochement Between Britain and Russia.

THE PAN-ISLAMIC AGITATION

Germany's Attempt to Play Off England Against the Muscovite Empire.

London, July 3.—Three prime topics will occupy European chancelleries this summer which, in their development, seem calculated to make history. The Pan-Islamic movement in Egypt, the rapprochement between Great Britain and Russia, and Germany's attempt to secure a British or a Russian understanding by playing off one country against the other.

Seemingly minor events have been rapidly succeeding one another in Egypt, revealing that the withdrawal of the Turkish troops from Tabah and the consent of the Sultan to negotiate the Sinal boundary line were merely surface matters, and that their passing left undisturbed a genuine cause for alarm in Egypt. In the last few years Pan-Islamism has been surreptitiously substituted for the narrower and more obvious "Nationalism" of Egyptian opposition to British domination and the vulnerability of the country has increased by the consolidation of the Turkish power in Syria and the construction of the Hedjaz Railway, which, though convenient for pilgrims, can also serve strategic purposes. The other day the emissaries of the Senussi sect attacked the British-Egyptian garrison at Taldit, in Kordofan, southwest of Khartoum, and murdered forty native soldiers. This was described in an official report by the British foreign office as a disturbed and purely local affair.

And yet the intelligence that isolated garrisons have been subjected to similar attacks, and that English and Egyptian officers on hunting or exploring expeditions have been ambushed and slain. There have also been mutinies among Egyptian troops. The Cairo informant declares that a wave of fanaticism, the force of which no one is aware of, will presently break upon Egypt, propagated by the Senussi, who believe that they have received divine authority from somewhere.

It is significant, in the light of the frugal cable dispatches which now emanate from Cairo, that the British troops sent to Egypt and the Sinal hinterland to force the Turk from Tabah, have not yet been withdrawn.

Although the terms of the Anglo-Russian understanding are still incomplete, there is little doubt that statesmen in St. Petersburg as well as in London are agreed that the present is the psychological moment for a rapprochement on grounds of policy, because it cannot be hoped that, if things are allowed to slide, the interests of Great Britain and Russia in Persia will remain the only interests very seriously involved there.

On this point M. Robert de Caix, intimate of the French foreign office, has written in Le Journal des Debats of Paris.

"That an arrangement will be accepted in principle no longer admits of any doubt. For more than a year the whole attitude of England has tended toward it. The British press, which has enough political sense to change its tone now that the factors of the international situation have themselves changed, no longer treats Russia as it did before the Russo-Japanese war and during a great part of the conflict. Further, it is no secret that the King of England is bringing to bear on the rapprochement between his country and Russia that firmness of purpose and political tact of which he has given constant proof since his accession."

Germany possesses two enticing baits which she thinks should strongly appeal respectively to Russian and British impressionability. If the revolution in Russia does not progress too far or rapidly, a word from the finance minister of Germany will be sufficient for Berlin bankers to advance large amounts to the tottering dynasty. The fact that German syndicates are buying Russian government lands should not incidentally be lost sight of. As to the Bagdad Railway, its financing is no longer held out to Great Britain; it is taken as a matter of course that Great Britain desires the road built, and will have no political obstacles in Germany's way, if only a satisfactory agreement could be reached. This change of front was recently remarked in an inspired article in the Grenzboten, a political weekly of Berlin.

"Great Britain desires the Bagdad Railway to run into Koweit, a port on the Persian Gulf, and she must, therefore, in the comparatively near future, enter into negotiations with Germany. The question must be settled soon, for the termination of the line at a seaport will necessitate the construction of works, customs houses, etc. A German postoffice must also be established at the end of the track."

Another pointer is to be found in the following paragraph in the same article: "Germany is now certainly entering an Asiatic sphere of interest, but in a purely economic, not a political capacity. On the other hand, however, the line is of political and military importance to Turkey, for which it will open up vast tracts, and for which, in case of war, it will facilitate the mobilization of the troops stationed in Asia Minor. In other words, the construction of the Bagdad Railway signifies the strengthening of the Mohammedan world, with which Great Britain has principally to reckon."

In the meantime communications are being exchanged between the British admiralty and the French ministry of marine to see in how far the French navy may, according to the Anglo-French entente, be represented in the approaching visit of the British fleet to Cronstadt. And the German Baltic squadron of twenty-six battleships and cruisers, under

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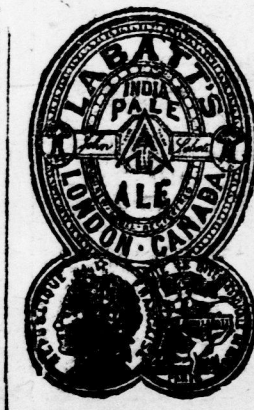
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