

Colonel Bryce was actuated purely by a benevolent desire to offer a home to the penniless orphan. Her's was a mind quite incapable of estimating properly the generosity of her husband, whom she regarded during the few years of their married life as an old fogey. The death of Colonel Bryce, after a short illness, left her a meagre pension. Her income appeared all-sufficient during Ethna's childhood, but as the time approached for her daughter's appearance in society, Mrs. Bryce found herself sorely straightened to procure toilets in which her darling might "look like other girls." A second cause of anxiety was presented to her by an alarming illness, during which she was confronted with the awful possibility of leaving the world before Ethna was settled in life. Restored to ordinary health, after a tedious convalescence, the thought of Ethna's marriage seized upon her mother's mind in a morbid fashion. Mrs. Bryce was one of those who consider it necessary to shape the designs of Divine Providence. She was quite ignorant of the wise old maxim that "Those who meddle often mar."

The pleasant cottage, "Sea-Side Holly," was rented to an invalid for the winter, and the cosy home exchanged for the questionable comfort of a boarding house in the city. In order that Ethna might see something of life, the place chosen was patronized by a variety of young men whose studies or business made the central locality desirable. Called away from home by an illness in my family, I was absent from town for many months, and on my return was informed that Mrs. Bryce and her daughter had gone home. I saw them but rarely in the years that followed, but was reminded of them when looking over "Aunt Hilda's Portfolio" last summer. I saw therein a package, bound with a silken cord of violet and crimson; over the knot that tied it was sealed a paper, whereon I read, "Not to be opened until after the death of Mrs. Ethna Bryce De Vere." I laid aside the bulky manuscript, and thought no more of it until during the past week, whilst indulging in the leisure permitted the convalescent, I read in the death list the notice:

"Please pray for the soul of Mrs. Ethna Bryce de Vere, widow of the late Jerome de Vere."

Opening my cabinet, I took the sealed packet reverently forth. The wrapper removed, I found myself confronted by a lovely girlish face, from which the soul looked out with appealing eyes, as if imploring deliverance from some calamity. In them I read reserve, sorrow, surprise. The eyelids appeared heavy with the weight of unshed tears; and this was a face made for laughter.

Fancy a merry, roguish baby, with eyes of blue, and hair a tangle of golden curls, and think of this joyous creature, when surprised by unkindness. An eclipse of the sun on a June afternoon has just such a weird effect upon the reckless bloom of that beautiful month; it is like death in the midst of life. The happy heart-beats of this innocent girl had evidently been suspended by some tragedy. "The lot of woman is full of woe," thought I. While I gazed upon the face of my friend of years gone by, a caller was announced; he was a priest, and my well-beloved friend; friend also to so many whose sorrowful hearts would have been desolate indeed but for the priestly consoler, rich gift from God's own treasury:

"I have come," said Father Clovis, "with a commission to you from a death-bed. Mrs. de Vere, whom I attended in her last illness, requested me to give you this packet."

"A singular coincidence," I replied. "Whose is this likeness, Father Clovis?" and I handed him Ethna's photograph.

"I know not, my child."

"Ah, look again, Father."

"No, my child," he said, after a careful inspection, "I have never seen the original."

"Why, Father, this was Mrs. de Vere at twenty."

"I do not doubt it, but I never knew the face of my penitent. She told me, on her death-bed, that she came to me regularly to confession when she was a young girl; but that was thirty years ago. Recently she came but occasionally; she lived far from our church."

I showed him Aunt Hilda's packet, which I had just unsealed, and prayed him to remain until I had glanced over these two legacies.

In Aunt Hilda's I found letters from Ethna. They were arranged consecutively,