



A Child of Sorrow.

CHAPTER IV.

"I hope she was not hurt," said Heroncourt; "was not upset by the shock. Sometimes a lady suffers afterwards from such an encounter."

"Oh, no," said Carrie, smiling. "She was very much distressed about the man; but she slept like a top, and she's been out shopping. There was no harm done. She's sorry she's lost her bracelet, and so am I, for I gave it to her, and bracelets are not frequent in our family."

"There's no cause for regret on that account," he said. "I had the good luck to pick up the bracelet soon after I had parted from your sister. Here it is."

Carrie sprang to her feet with a cry of girlish delight.

"You dear, good man!" she exclaimed, just as she would have exclaimed at Ricky. "The bracelet! Oh, how pleased Maida will be! She thinks more of that stupid thing—"

As she spoke, the door opened and Maida entered. She stood for a moment regarding the two. Her face had been slightly flushed by her walk, but the flush grew deeper as her eyes rested upon Heroncourt, and their expression became cold and almost resentful.

"Maida, this gentleman has found, brought back your bracelet," explained Carrie. "He found it after you had gone—"

She stopped, her glad young voice arrested by the coldness in Maida's face.

Maida took the bracelet, but did not put it on her wrist.

"It is very kind of you. Thank you very much," she said.

Her voice came like a douche of cold water upon Carrie's enthusiasm, upon Heroncourt's subtle and half-unconscious pleasure at her presence.

"Not at all," he said, saying the only thing a man can say under the circumstances. "I am very glad I found it. I am also glad to hear that you are none the worse for last night's unpleasant occurrence, Miss Carrington."

"Thank you, I am quite well," responded Maida, as coldly as before. "I am very glad to get my bracelet back. It was a present from my sister."

"So she has told me," he said. "I count myself very fortunate in being by the merest chance, able to restore it to you. I must not intrude upon you any longer. I ought to have sent it by post, perhaps; but I was anxious to know how you were. Good-day—good-bye."

He was gone, leaving Carrie to stare at Maida as she walked to the chair by the table which he had occupied, and, sitting down, gravely fastened the bracelet round her wrist.

"Well, of all the monsters of ingratitude—!" began Carrie.

Maida raised her head.

"He should not have come here," she said. "He was quite right—he should have sent it by post. Wait, Carrie; you are younger than I am—you don't know the world even as well as I do. This gentleman—he is no doubt someone of consequence, perhaps someone of rank—he is not a fitting acquaintance for us."

Carrie uttered an exclamation of impatience and chagrin.

"Oh, Maida, what idiots we are! We do not know who he is—what his name is! We have let him go without asking him. And we shall never know now—"

"It does not matter in the very least," said Maida. "We do not want to see him again. Why should we? Hush! There is father coming up the stairs. Do not tell him, please! He would only be worried and annoyed. You know how careful I am, how careful I must be, to avoid making chance acquaintances—"

She broke off as Mr. Carrington came in. He looked pale and worried; his tall hat was drawn over his brows more than usual, the hand that held the little, black bag gripped it tightly and nervously.

"You are back early, father," said Carrie.

"Yes, yes," he said, hurriedly and nervously. "I—I have come for some papers. I shall have to return to the office at once."

"Is anything the matter, father?" asked Maida.

"Matter?" he repeated. "Er—no—well, yes; things are going badly in

the city, and shares are dropping rather unexpectedly. I sha'n't be able to dine and go to the theatre with you to-night; but Ricky must take you. Yes—yes! I wish you to go. Things may be better to-morrow."

He kissed them both, took some papers from his desk, and left the room. When he had got outside he drew a long breath and set off wearily, with a mechanical gait, towards the city.

In most of the houses the business was done for the day, but he climbed to his small and poky office on the third floor of one of the houses in Colman Street, and, tilting his hat on the back of his head, sank into his chair, and, spreading some papers before him, began to make some calculations. The room was hot and stuffy, the notes from the dust danced in the sunlight which pierced the grimy windows as if it were mocking, by its joyousness and brightness, the care-laden man. There was no blind to the window, or Carrington would have drawn it and shut out the sunlight which tormented him.

For more than an hour he bent over his desk making rows of figures; adding up here, subtracting there; every now and then something like a groan escaped his lips, and he wiped the drops of perspiration from his forehead with the back of his large hand. He was so engrossed that he did not hear footsteps on the stairs, did not hear them approach the room, and the knock at the door made him start and look round apprehensively.

He sat still for a moment or two, and muttered:

"They can't know already?"

The knock came again, and, instinctively, smoothing the lines from his face and forcing an expression of ease, he said as carelessly as he could:

"Come in!"

The door opened and a man entered. He was a middle-aged man, short and thick-set; in dress, something like a sailor or a maritime clerk, for he wore a dark serge suit, with a coat like a pea-jacket. His face was round, his eyes were blue, with an almost child-like expression; he wore side whiskers, and his head, revealed as he meekly took off his hat on entering, was almost bald. His whole aspect was ordinary and commonplace.

And yet this commonplace man, who stood meekly and patiently in Carrington's door-way, was going to influence, going to change, Maida Carrington's life.

CHAPTER V.

This commonplace individual, who was going to influence Maida Carrington's life, stood in the door-way regarding Carrington's furrowed face in a timid, deprecatory manner.

Carrington regarded him for a moment or two with the usual blank air with which one waits for a stranger to speak; then suddenly an expression of recognition dawned on his face, and he rose with outstretched hand.

"Why, it's Purley, isn't it?" he exclaimed. "Josiah Purley! Come in. Why, who would have thought of seeing you?"

The man came in with a shy smile and took Carrington's hand, shaking it automatically and in a hesitating fashion.

"Sit down," said Carrington, dragging a chair forward. "Why, how long is it since we've seen each other? Where did you come from?"

Purley, still smiling deprecatingly, replied, in a low, slow voice—the voice of a man who has known what solitude means, a solitude in which the faculty of speech becomes difficult for want of use.

"Yes, it's a goodish time, Carrington," he said. "Lemme see! The last time we met was in Paraguay. I've lost sight of you since then. I've been travelling about; been stuck on one of the Pacific Islands, doing a little trading and trying to grow tobacco. Where have I come from? Well, I might say Klondike, though I've been about since then."

Carrington smiled and nodded as if he understood.

"Always were a wanderer, weren't you, Josiah?" he said. "You're looking well, though a little worn and grey about the gills. You've lost your hair, too."

Purley nodded and rubbed his bald head absently.

"Yes, I'm fairly well," he said. "I lost my hair in my thirteenth fever. I ought to have lost my life; but somehow I seem hard to kill."

Carrington smiled again.

"You always were pretty tough,"

he remarked. "Did the tobacco turn out a success?"

"Well, no," replied Purley, with a kind of reluctant candour. "I think it would have done, but the natives from a neighboring island swooped down upon me and dug it all up; they thought it was good to eat. It made 'em deadly sick and they cut up rough and I had to, up-stick and clear out."

"That was bad," said Carrington, sympathetically. "Been lucky since?"

"Well, no," admitted Purley. "I've had two or three good things; but just as I was going to pull 'em off, something always happened—just at the last moment, as you may say. Sometimes it was my partner vamoosed with the coin; sometimes the market fell when it ought to have risen; sometimes accidents happened, such as a storm or an avalanche; it was always something or other."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said Carrington. "What can I offer you? I've got a bottle of decent sherry here—"

He got the usual office sherry and some biscuits, and Purley took a glass and sipped the wine slowly, looking into the glass in a reflective way.

"I was in a sherry business, too. Started a vineyard in the Palmas; but the phylloxera swooped down on the vine and left 'em about as bald as I am. You're looking well, Carrington; got a bit more meat on you, perhaps. How's things with you?"

However dire the straits the city man may be in, it is a rule with him to keep a good face, and, like the Spartan boy, conceal the fox that is gnawing at his prosperity; because his credit is the most important thing to him—it is the breath of his nostrils, the prop of his commercial existence; so Carrington smiled cheerfully and answered as brightly as he could.

"Oh, so-so; I mustn't complain. I've had my ups and downs, of course, but I'm not doing so badly."

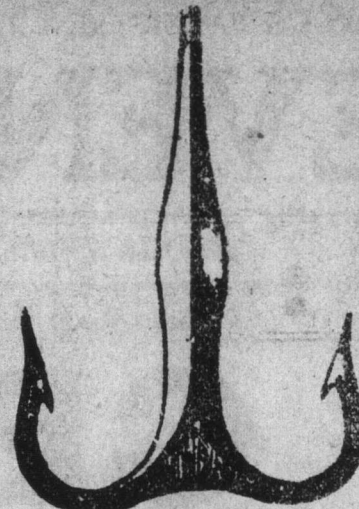
He leant back, and put his thumbs in his waistcoat pocket with the air of a man who is too modest to boast.

"That's good," said Purley. "I'm glad to hear it. 'Married?' he asked, shyly.

(To be Continued.)

Vegetables should never lie in the water after they are done cooking. If they do they will be soggy and tasteless.

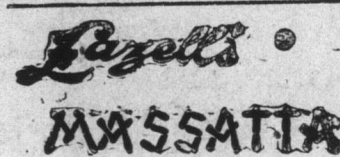
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