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BY CHARLOTTE M. BRADEN.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

"I MUST SHARE HER AT ANY SACRIFICE." (Continued.)

"I can never do that," she said to herself—"I must not do it; for Cyril's sake I must claim Cyril's own, cost what it may."

So, a hundred times each hour, she argued to herself; one reason overstepping another, one argument seeming to her stronger than another, until the tired brain grew weary, and the aching heart ready to break.

What was she to do? She appealed from earth to Heaven; she raised her weeping eyes to the clear, blue skies; she tried to quiet the whirl of her thoughts, and find out what her duty was. She tried to find the highest and the noblest, but the storm of emotion was too great for her—thoughts, feelings, inclination, duty, all warred together; the overtaxed brain gave way, and a violent fever was the result.

She was not the first whom duty, inclination, principle, and pity, all warring together, had brought to the verge of the grave. When she discovered what was the matter with herself, and tried in vain to arrange her wandering thoughts, she grew still more frightened. What would happen if delirium should seize her, and she should talk of those things that she would so fain have kept secret? She knew Lady Clotilde's kindly feeling for her. What if she should come to visit her, and hear only one word of this terrible secret?

Silvia trembled; and in her nervous fear she did exactly what she should have avoided—asked Mrs. Greville not to let Lady Dyncourt see her, so betraying to both a hidden, secret fear they could not understand.

She was some time in recovering; but Mrs. Greville kept faith most honorably with her. She allowed no visitors, however friendly, to enter the room; she engaged a strong nurse, accustomed to delirious patients, who paid no more heed to her raving than if it had been so much Greek; and then, when slowly, but surely, Silvia recovered, she forbore asking her any questions, or teasing her by any remarks, which was, perhaps, the greatest kindness of all.

Days passed by, and Silvia, looking like the shadow of her former self, began to resume her duties and take up the burden of life. She had come to no decision as to what she should do; she was no nearer any definite resolution than she had ever been; it was all chaos to her. She could see no gleam of light in the darkness; no sunshine, no break in the thick cloud. Turn which way she would, all was misery, confusion, unhappiness and despair.

"If I could but find some stronger, clearer mind than my own to lean upon," she said to herself; "if I could but take my trouble to some wise, learned, good man, who could tell me in Heaven's name, and for Heaven's sake, what was best, how thankful I should be. I must wait—I must do nothing hurriedly."

But the sound of the name Dyncourt had grown almost terrible to her—it was full of torture. One hour she said to herself that she must take patience—she must wait—do nothing on her own responsibility; the next such patience, such waiting, seemed to her little less than deadly sin. There was a duty to be done, and she must do it; there was justice to be claimed, she must claim it.

No wonder that the sweet face grew thinner and whiter every day. Mrs. Greville became alarmed at last. "Silvia," she said, one day, "I must speak plainly to you. Do you not know that unless you change, and that quickly, you must die?"

Silvia raised her beautiful, startled eyes to the handsome face. "I do not know anything of the kind," she said, gravely. "Then it is in high time that you should be told that you are just recovering from a dangerous illness. You neither eat nor sleep, smile, or rest. How do you expect to get strong?"

"I had no thought about it," said Silvia. "No; that is very evident. Do you want to leave your boy quite alone in the world? The lovely, gentle face grew white and wistful.

"My boy! Oh, no—a thousand times no! What could he do without me?" "Then change your ways, my dear," said Mrs. Greville, brusquely. "I cannot help seeing that some terrible sorrow is playing upon you and eating your very life away. I do not ask what it is; I do not seek your confidence; but I advise you, if, for your son's sake, you would wish to live, do something—anything rather than what you are doing now."

Very plain words, but Mrs. Greville was accustomed to very plain speaking, and in this case it was most beneficial.

"For my boy's sake I must live," thought Silvia; "yet for me life can never be anything but a burden."

The day following, as she sat in the library, writing some letters for Mrs. Greville, that frank, imperious lady entered.

"Now, Silvia, you remember that little lecture I gave you yesterday; show that you have profited by it. Lady Clotilde is here, and wishes you to go out for a drive with her?"

The girl shrank, white and shuddering, faint with dread, even at the very sound of the name.

"I—I can not go," she cried, faintly. "Nonsense," was the calm reply. "You must—it will do you good. Surely you can not refuse Lady Clotilde any favor she asks from you?"

Silvia trembled violently. "Whatever it is that is wrong," said Mrs. Greville to herself, "it concerns Lady Clotilde, although she may not know it."

How the argument would have ended is quite uncertain, but that Lady Dyncourt appeared that moment on the scene. "Silvia," she cried, "how glad I am to see you! I had not patience to wait for your answer, so I followed Mrs. Greville. Do you know that it is three weeks since I saw you?"

And Lady Clotilde, bending down, kissed the white face, while a low moan came from Silvia's lips. "If I could but die!" she murmured to herself. "How am I to bear it?"

How was she to stab that loving heart, to blight that life, to bow that graceful head with such deep unmerited shame? "I will not hear one word of excuse," said Lady Clotilde. "The morning is fine, the air fresh. Come, Silvia, you can not say nay to me."

CHAPTER LXIX. FACE TO FACE AT LAST.

"SILVIA," said Lady Dyncourt, when they were caught of sight, "I cannot understand you; you make me very unhappy. Have I done anything that has displeased you?"

"The white, silent face was raised for one half minute, and then turned silently away. "How can you displease me, Lady Clotilde? You have always been kindness itself to me."

"Then tell me frankly, why have you changed so utterly to me? You do not know all you were to me, Silvia; you were sweet and refreshing as a wild woodland flower among warm exotics. I used to enjoy your society as I did the fresh breeze blowing over the heather, and now you shun me, you avoid me, you even turn your face from me lest I should see it! Why is it, Silvia? What have I done?"

The pale lips quivered, the lines of anguish round them deepened. "You have done nothing, Lady Clotilde," repeated the faint voice. "What could you do?"

"There is no effect without a cause," said Lady Dyncourt; "if I have done nothing, why have you changed so completely to me?" "I am very unhappy," said Silvia, making a great effort to control herself and speak calmly. "I am the most unhappy creature, I believe, living at this moment in the world; and my unhappiness has changed me, Lady Clotilde. I am changed toward my own self. Pray, pray forgive me if I have seemed changed to you; I have not meant it. I owe you nothing but affection and reverence—nothing can change that."

"But, Silvia, unhappiness need not make you shun me. I know all your story; you have no secrets from me. Why not trust me, and if anything has happened, tell me?"

She did not understand the almost convulsive shudder that made the delicate figure at her side tremble. "I am hurt, Silvia," she continued, after a time. "It is so seldom that I love any one as I love you. I am cruelly disappointed."

And the kind face grew sad, the kind eyes filled with tears, it was hard to bear. Yet, if she suffered now, what would her suffering be should she obtain one glimpse of the truth? Better by far that Lady Clotilde should think her cold, capricious, mean, changeable, unkind—anything rather than that she should know the truth; for Silvia was still undecided as to what course it would be right for her to adopt.

"I have promised you," continued Lady Dyncourt, "my friendship while I live; I have given that to few. I promised you that my husband's interest should be used for your son to advance his career."

She paused abruptly, for Silvia had laid her hand on her arm. (To be Continued.)

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The object of Festival being a desirable one (the repair of Teacher's dwelling at Brookfield) the Committee would respectfully beg a share of public patronage. Contributions gratefully received by Agnes Cowan, Sarah Penstone, Jessie Eales, and July 17, 1885. A. E. NEVILL, Sec. Com.

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