

# The Die is Cast For Better or For Worse.

CHAPTER XII.  
The Wolf at the Door.

But, of course, she went into the shop; and, as casually as she could, fighting hard to keep the color from her face, she asked if there were a letter for her. Her heart leaped, and then seemed to stand still, as the woman handed her a letter.

"Twopence, please," she said. Scarcely knowing what she did, Kittie parted with the two precious pennies, and, with the envelope hidden in her hand, went into the grounds of Chelsea Hospital, and, sinking onto one of the seats, sat gazing before her, and breathing hard. It was some time before she could open the envelope.

It was a short letter, but every line of it breathed the passionate love which had overwhelmed her on that moonlit night.

He had reached the place, Quirapata. It was a wild, beautiful country. He had to work hard, but it was work he delighted in. The man he was with was one of the very best; and he, Lashmore, would be perfectly happy if— There followed words, burning words, of love and longing, which made her burn as she read them, made her thrill from head to foot, and filled her heart with a longing which she felt must be even keener than his. At the end came a pregnant sentence:

"Dearest you remember our last words? If I should send for you, if, for any reason you wish to come to me without waiting for me to send for you, you would come! Sometimes I lie awake, and wish you were poor and friendless—a cruel wish, but I can't help it—that you had no one to turn to but me, and that you were obliged to come to the poor devil who loves you better than his own life."

She gasped with a choking sob. His wish had been granted. She was poor and friendless. If she were really Eva Lyndhurst she could go to him. She closed her eyes, and saw a beautiful, sunlit country, far away from this present misery; she saw him standing—no, hastening to meet her—with outstretched hands, and love in his eyes; she saw herself falling on his breast, felt his arms enfolding her, succoring her.

She rose from the seat, weak, and trembling, and thrust the vision from her. For a time she walked on mechanically; then she remembered the registry-office, and slowly made her way there. There were several persons waiting in the stuffy room, women, old and young, but all careworn, and shabbily dressed. The person at the desk had nodded to her, and pointed to a chair, and Kittie sat down, and waited with the others. Her turn came at last, and the person in charge beckoned to her.

"I suppose there is something for me?" said poor Kittie, trying to smile. The official turned over the pages of her ledger. "Let me see, Miss Bowman—that was the name Kittie had given—well, I may have something here; but I don't know whether it would suit you. A lady wants a companion. Have you any objection to travel, Miss Bowman?"

Kittie could have laughed at the question. "Not any," she replied. Her heart would have beat fast with hope, but the visions she had thrust from her had left her numbed with despair. "I should like to travel. What is it?"

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"It's a lady who is going abroad. She is somewhat of an invalid, and wants some one, a lady, as a companion. She will take her own maid, but the maid may be ill on the voyage, or she may not, of course."

"I understand," said Kittie. "Perhaps she would engage me. I am not likely to be ill."

"Well, at any rate, you might go and see her; there's no harm in trying. I'll give you her address. It's quite close here."

She wrote "Mrs. Vanstone, 116 Hans Crescent," on a slip of paper, and Kittie went off with it, thinking, it must be confessed, very much more of the letter in her pocket than the slip in her hand.

Mrs. Vanstone was at home, and Kittie was taken upstairs to a daintily furnished room, in which as daintily a lady reclined on a couch. She was a woman still in her youth, rather pretty, and evidently amiable; for she received Kittie in kindly fashion, told her to bring a chair near her, and explained what she wanted; and it was obvious that she was much prepossessed by Kittie's face and manner.

"By the way, I hope you are not delicate," she said, after a pause. "You look rather—"

Kittie's lips trembled a little. "I am very strong," she said. "I have only had one illness in my life that I remember, influenza. But I have had a great deal of trouble recently."

Mrs. Vanstone glanced at the plain black dress, and the white face, and nodded sympathetically. "And I am very poor. It is difficult to find work—I hope you may engage me."

"Really, I think I will," said Mrs. Vanstone, "for I am sure we should get on very well together. I want a lady—oh, I've seen so many! Such a quantity of old frumps, and young women who are worse than old! Yes; I think I will. Go to the table there and write down your references."

Kittie went to the table and wrote the name of the clergyman of the church in the grimy square near her attic; he had been to see her several times, and had wanted to help her.

"Thanks," said Mrs. Vanstone. "I'm sure it will be quite satisfactory. And now about the arrangements. We shall start on the 24th. Will that be too soon for you, Miss Bowman?—oh, please tell me your Christian name!"

The human mind is a complex machine. Kittie could not give her own name, and, absently, mechanically, the other name that was always in her mind, slipped glibly from her lips.

"Eva," she said; and the moment she had said it she would have recalled it, with a throb of terror. But it was too late.

"What a pretty name," said Mrs. Vanstone. "I am stupidly fanciful about names; but I like Eva. I will write to your reference, and then to you; and then you must come to me, and help me to make the preparations for the voyage. They told you at the registry-office what I was prepared to give? No?" She mentioned a sum which seemed more than liberal to Kittie. "Well, then, I think that is all. Oh, you'll want an outfit for the voyage. It need not be a big, expensive one. Perhaps I can help you—we shall see."

They talked together for a little while longer; then Kittie rose. Mrs. Vanstone shook hands in a friendly way, and Kittie was leaving the room

when her possible employer said, with a laugh.

"You haven't asked where we are going!"

Kittie smiled. "No," she said. "I don't think I care very much. I have been looking for work for so long—and it doesn't matter where I go."

"Poor girl!" murmured the dainty lady pityingly. "Well, we are going to Buenos Ayres. Good-by, till I write."

Kittie went home to her attic, her mind flashing like a swallow from Lashmore's letter to this prospect of an engagement. She sat on the edge of the bed, and read his letter again and again, until every word of it was engraven on her heart. He wanted her, was longing for her. If she could only go! Then she thought of Mrs. Vanstone. Buenos Ayres!—where was it? Kittie had not the least idea. Among the few belongings she had brought with her from Denbigh Street were some school-books. She turned them over until she came to an atlas, and, referring to the index, discovered that Buenos Ayres was in South America; she had turned to the map and found the place, and she was mechanically reading the names round about it, when, suddenly, she came upon the word, printed in very small letters, "Quirapata."

She neither started, nor cried out; but the blood ebbed from her face, and left it deathly white; and she stared at the map with a coningling of wonder, terror, and awe in her eyes.

### CHAPTER XIII. A Matter of Speculation.

Herndale fell in love with Eva before the end of the first week; so much in love that he would have proposed to her, if she had permitted him to do so, but she would not; and every one knows how easily a woman can keep even the most ardent of men at arm's length. Herndale, however ardent he might be, would never act on impulse, or without making sure of his ground. He was not impulsive, as Lashmore was; passion would never carry him away, would rather make him more calculating and astute. But he courted her, after the manner of his kind, and contrived without any difficulty to spend most of his time at her side.

He had sent for a couple of horses, and he rode with her, walked with her, and fished with her and Sir Talbot; and he was always entertaining full of information, and unobtrusively attentive. Eva had not forgotten Lashmore, he was sure; but she was forced to admit to herself that Lord Herndale had justified Aunt Emily's praises; but she was certainly not in love with him—not yet, at any rate—and whenever she was away from him she was conscious of a certain misgiving about him.

Charmingly as he talked and behaved, she felt that she did not know him any better than on the first night he arrived; there was a suggestion of secrecy, of concealment—it was difficult to analyze the grounds for her doubt, but it was there all the same. One day they were out riding together, and were alone, for Sir Talbot's horse had cast a shoe soon after they had started, and he had begged them to go on, saying that he would go back and get another horse, and meet them as they returned. It was a lovely morning, and Herndale's heart beat rapidly as he glanced at the beautiful girl beside him. Nearly every young woman looks at her best in her riding-habit, and Eva, in her youthful grace and beauty, was enough to set any man's heart a-beating. He found speech, generally so fluent, though deliberate, difficult; he drew nearer to Eva, and was about to speak, to say something that would lead up to a proposal, when Tim, no doubt also carried away by the beauty of the morning, rushed from the other dogs, and, barking joyously, jumped up at Eva's mare. The horse was startled—they were cantering—and shied violently, so violently that Eva swayed in the saddle, and looked as if she were about to fall. The blood rushed to Herndale's face, and a cruel look came into his cold eyes; he carried a crop with a long thong; and, pulling up, he lashed at Tim, and, not content with one stroke, thrashed him with a kind of fury, until the wretched dog fell to the ground. Herndale continued to thrash him, the horrible swish of the thong mingling with the agonized yells of the dog.

Eva had been carried on a little way, but she succeeded in turning the mare, and, for a second, sat stricken speechless by the scene, and the cruel and ruthless expression of Herndale's face. It was as if a mask had dropped from it, and revealed the man's true nature. She rode in between him and the dog, narrowly escaping a cut from the whip, and with a cry of indignation and anger, slipped from her horse to pick up Tim! but Tim was too frightened to permit even his beloved mistress to approach him, and, still howling, he fled homeward. Herndale saw his mistake, his face grew pale, and he bit his lip, as he was dismounted, and stood beside her.

"He is not hurt, not really hurt," he said pleadingly; "and he deserved all he got. He might have thrown you; indeed, he very nearly did so. Pray do not be anxious about him; he is all right."

Eva turned from him, and, refusing with a gesture his offer to assist her, got to her saddle. They rode on in silence for some time, Eva, her face pale and set, looking over her shoulder now and again to see if Tim were coming back.

(To be Continued.)

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