

The dead woman was his mother; and perhaps, too, he had been so long used to injustice, that it seemed to him only in the natural order of things, and the wonder would have been to be treated otherwise.

Constance Deverell was buried, as became the lady of the Manor, with chanted requiem, and incense, and light of many tapers; and if the remark was made that it was strange Clinton was absent, the answer was that he had been telegraphed for, and perhaps the message had not reached him.

It certainly seemed like a grim irony of fate that the younger son, for whom alone the mother had lived, did not stand by her deathbed, or follow her to the grave; it was Max who closed her eyes; Max whose hand dropped flowers in her grave.

And Max, alas! was still to bear the curse that grew up out of the dead mother's wrong to him, for "the evil that we do lives after us;" and the dead hand still held the living in cruel grasp.

CHAPTER II.—BERYL.

"Of all the dull, horrid, stupid, dead-and-alive, do-nothing-all-the-year-round holes that were ever invented, I call Middle Marston the very worst."

And having delivered herself of this emphatic protest, Miss Beryl Clavering, aged nineteen, sat on the table to take breath.

"My dear Beryl!" remonstrated Miss Clavering; but as Aunt Laura ejaculated "My dear Beryl!" in appropriate intonations on an average about five times a day, it produced no effect on the reprobate mind of the young person to whom it was addressed.

Certainly a small house on the outskirts of a small country town, with only a decidedly prim and starch old maid for a companion, was not the most lively dwelling for a girl, young, high-spirited, with a quick receptive brain, a passionate heart, a vivid love for life and movement, and a form and face of greater beauty than she, by the way, had any idea of.

For Beryl was very innocent—"green" town girls would have called her; she had lived here ever since she was eleven, when her father died, and Miss Clavering knew about as much of the world as dear, pious old maids generally do know.

She was quite unable to cope with Beryl, who had far too much force and independence of character to be cramped down to Miss Clavering's idea of a "young lady," and so became a "tomboy," and, but for a naturally fine and noble disposition, which could not be really spoilt, might have become haughty and overbearing. As it was, the girl was impulsive and headstrong, and badly needed discipline; but she was not likely to improve very much under the continual process of beating her wings against the bars of her cage.

"It is a hole," she repeated, pushing her hands through the rich, soft curls that clustered over her head, and rippled in all manner of wicked little tendrils about her forehead. "I don't believe there are a thousand people in the place; and there are no plays—nor a theatre to have them in; no concerts, no anything!"

"My dear Beryl," said Aunt Laura, with a rising intonation, "you really should not talk so. What does a young girl, or anyone, indeed, want with theatres and concerts? I am sure the country about here is beautiful, and the weather just now is most enjoyable."

"I know every tree and blade of grass for twelve miles round," said Beryl, pulling the ears of Del, the handsome young mastiff, in whose society she was in the habit of taking long rambles.

Del had no more business in the breakfast-parlor than Beryl had sitting on the table.

Aunt Laura liked "dogs in their place," which meant that she didn't like them at all; but Beryl rode rough-shod over this, and many other rules.

"And in the winter," continued Miss Clavering, "there is plenty of amusement in the town."

"Oh, lots!" said Beryl, beginning to count on her fingers. "Let's see. There are penny readings every fortnight in the parish school room, when the rectress plays seven-octavo pieces on a six-and-a-half-octave piano, and leaves out all the top notes; and Miss Butterman Wandle says in monotone; 'I'm to be Queen of the m'y, mother-r, I'm to be Queen of the m'y!'—and there is the 'Service of Songs' at the Wesleyan Chapel—two. What's three? Oh, the Middle Matron, Glee Union, once a month, 'The Chafers,' and something about 'Umphrey with his fyle,' and the lectures at the Mechanics' Institute, generally by people without h's, and about political economy, or missionaries, or something dull and stupid—"

"Beryl!" cried Aunt Laura, rising from her seat in her righteous anger—there was no "my dear" this time—"you positively shock me by your discontented, irreverent, censorious mode of talking. You are always quizzing and finding fault, and quarrelling with your lot in life; and I positively will not hear you speak as you do about missionaries."

She stalked towards the door, Beryl sitting silent, but with a very wicked, impenitent smile lurking about the corners of her pretty lips. Of course, she ought to have apologised for outraging Aunt Laura's "prejudices," as the young rebel termed them; but she didn't.

Aunt Laura, like most old ladies, was great on missions to Chinamen and Hottentots, and there was a missionary box in the hall, but Beryl never put anything into it, and she couldn't endure Aunt Laura's church in the town, with its high pews, dull service, and long sermon.

She liked the church at Little Marston, across the fields and through the Marston Woods.

Aunt Laura protested in vain against her niece going to this church, at which Middle Marston held up its horrified hands; but Beryl went all the same, with Del for an escort.

(To be Continued.)



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