

Literature.

MY LAST CHANCE.

I was nearly at the end of my meagre resources, and growing desperate, despairing, and, I fear, on occasions, suicidal. Every day for weeks I had fruitlessly studies the advertisement columns, answering those requiring ladies' help, mothers' help, governesses, even to that of the nursery, though, as some say, a fortune had been expended on my education. The truth was, I was almost penniless, without a soul to help me, and I was ready to accept absolutely anything rather than starve. As a final effort, after much consideration, I sold my last piece of jewellery, save a brooch, and with a portion of the money—the whole was not twenty shillings—hazarded another advertisement. "It's a forlorn hope," I thought, in a very slough of despondency. "It is only throwing good money after bad, and money I sorely need. I shall not have one answer. I never do. Still, 'Nothing venture, nothing have.' It will only hasten the final catastrophe by a day or two." So my advertisement appeared. It is quite true what Pope says: "Hope springs eternal in the human breast." I told myself about once every half hour that I didn't hope; but I did. I could not help it, and felt I could almost have jumped out of my shoes when, a few minutes after I had heard the postman's knock the next morning, my landlady pushed a letter under my door. I literally pounced upon it. Yes, it was an answer to my advertisement. My heart in my mouth, or feeling so, I tore off the envelope, and read "Gordon Square"—that sounded well—"London. Mrs. Octavius Smythe would like to see F. H., whose advertisement she has just perused. Mrs. Smythe will be at home and see F. H., between six and seven tomorrow evening." London! I was living at Gomshall, where my last engagement had been. The return fare, third-class, was four shillings. I thought of my poor little hoard, and, taking it from my purse, arranged it on the table. "It's a lot to spend upon a chance" I reflected. "I wish Mrs. Octavius Smythe had been a little more definite, that is, explanatory, also a little more thoughtful in respect to time. Between six and seven! If I'm delayed at all, I shall only catch the last train. But the money! Were it twice as much I must not miss a chance. There."

lost the train there was no other. It wanted yet ten minutes to the hour when I entered the station, and put my hand in my pocket for my purse wherein was my ticket. My purse had gone! The first moment I believed it, the next I didn't. It was impossible. The terror of what its loss meant to me made me say it couldn't be. But it was. Here were my handkerchief, my keys; but purse there was none. When I had been surrounded by that surging crowd it must have been stolen. I felt indignant, humiliated at being made a victim. Then the real horror of my position broke upon me. How was I to get home? How was I to pay my fare, for my return ticket, had, of course, gone with my purse? I was literally without a penny, without a friend who could assist me, alone in London. For a moment I could do nothing. I felt too sick and dazed even to think. Then what must I do—what could I? Whom could I ask where all were alike strangers? Who would lend me the money? Would they believe I had lost the purse? I had not a card, not even an addressed envelope to prove who I was, and assure them the loan would be returned. I felt ready to cry, but by an effort restrained my tears, and, the booking office being at the moment empty, determined to try the booking clerk. "Where for?" he asked, sharply, as I appeared at the pigeon-hole, and, before I had half got through my nervous, hesitating recital of my position, coolly walked away and began casting up figures in a ledger. Oh, what was I to do? I would, I must try the ticket-collector. "Lost your purse, eh? Stolen! Don't you know anyone to borrow from in London? That's bad. Please stand aside." A train had come in, the people were crowding down the stairs. I had to move. I drew into a retired corner, then raised my eyes to the clock. Oh, Heaven! It did not want five minutes to the starting of the last train. If I missed it what was I to do? Do! What could I do? Treble the money then could not take me home. I should have to wander about the streets until morning—the London streets. What hotel would take me in without payment? Who would run the risk of a stranger's forwarding the sum afterwards, if it were lent? I began to feel faint, hysterical; and my terror, no doubt, showed on my white face, as I stood leaning against the wall in that retired corner, when I became aware, like one awakening from a dream, of somebody speaking to me. It was a young man, handsome, pleasant-looking, and respectfully dressed, though his clothes were not of the newest. "I beg your pardon," he said, raising his hat, his voice low and musical; "pray believe I mean no impertinence in addressing you, but you seem in some trouble. If I can be of any service, please do let me be!" I think I must have looked very piteous; I know my eyes were brimming with tears, as I raised them to his face. What a pleasant, kind face it was. I did not hesitate an instant in answering him, and explaining my position. "Ah, London is a very bad place," he smiled. "Its thieves could almost steal one's head without one's knowing it. Have you far to go?" I told him. "Will you permit me to assist you?" he asked. "Remember, it might be my own case."

next-of-kin to Samuel Bridgy, who died recently in Australia, intestate, you are the inheritor of his wealth, about two thousand a year in shares and property. If you will favor us with an early call, we shall have the pleasure of explaining more fully. "Your obedient servants, CLODD, TENNES & SHAM." Inheritor to two thousand a year! The inheritor to my mother's cousin, Bridgy, who had run away years ago to Australia, and never been heard of! How the next half-hour passed, I don't quite know. I believe I fainted, or lost my reason, for of it I remember nothing. "Now, this room, my boudoir, I require to be panelled, and with hand-painted scenes of English scenery." Two years had elapsed since my accession to Samuel Bridgy's money. I had just purchased a charming house in old Kensington, and was informing Mr. Lampton, the art furnisher, what I wished done. "Six months ago, I knew the very man for that," replied my companion. "A clever young artist, a good, noble, hard-working fellow; yet fate seemed ever against him. Try as he would—as he did, he never got on, while heaps of mere dabblers did. I fancy it almost, at last, broke his heart, or his spirit, which is about the same thing." "Why not give him this paneling to do?" I asked. "I wish I could, madam," replied Mr. Lampton; "but for six months I've quite lost sight of him. I heard once that he had been desperately ill. I sent round to Newman Street, to inquire, and word was brought back that poor Greville had left there three months previously." "Greville!" I ejaculated. "Not Stanley Greville?" "That's the man, madam. You know him?" "He once, though a stranger," I answered, my heart beating and throbbing most foolishly, "did me a great service, one I shall never forget. Mr. Lampton, I would give I know not what to find him—to be of service to him. Is it not possible you could assist me? You say—say, by the manner you speak—I am sure you are his friend." "I am, indeed, madam!" he ejaculated, fervently. He was a dark, brisk, impulsive little man. "And trust me, I'll not leave a stone unturned that may help you." But all the stones, metaphorically turned, brought no news of Stanley Greville, of whom, from the night of our acquaintance, I had thought constantly. Over and over I had almost prayed to see him again, and a feeling, a whisper, like a still, small voice, had ever come to me that I should, and—well, let me confess it—that thought or belief had made me happier than the possession of my wealth. But the months had sped by without a sign, until Mr. Lampton had mentioned him. How many more months were now to glide on without a sign, for all our efforts failed, leading to no result, save failure; and known to myself alone, like Clara Vere de Vere, though from a different cause, "I pined among my halls and towers, The languid light of my (poor) eyes (Were) wearied of the rolling hours." Another year, yet no news of Stanley Greville, when one day about dusk, I was hastening home through the park, thinking of him, as I was ever doing. That part of the park seemed deserted, save for myself, when I became aware of a man sitting upon a seat I was approaching—a shabby man, with that air of hopeless despair and dejection, the outcome too often of want, one sees so often. Yet there was something more than pity that attracted my attention in this case. My inner self was conscious, by its keener, subtler essence, of that which my grosser outer self was not. But suddenly he arose, and a quick electric thrill ran through me. He hurried swiftly on, as one who has arrived at a sudden resolve, and I, perplexed, what to do, followed, full of much joy, for I knew I had found Stanley Greville at last! Through the shadows under the trees he went, I scarcely able to keep near him. Where was he going? I must speak before he left the park. What was this? A gleam, a sudden shine of pale light before him—the gleam of water. It was to that he was hastening. I knew, then, the truth. My heart stood paralyzed with terror, with fear; a weight felt on my limbs. But as he reached the fatal edge my strength came, and with a cry I ran forward, and with both hands clasped his arm, clinging to him. "No, no!" I cried. "No, no; not that, Stanley Greville. Be a man, fight and live. Oh! Heaven! not that!" He looked down at me, startled, and I saw how thin, pale and haggard he was. He knew me, even in the dusk, for he exclaimed: "Is it you? How did you come here?" He did not speak as if years had divided us, but as though we had parted but yesterday. Had I been in his thoughts, as he in mine? "Heaven and gratitude sent me," I answered, hysterically, "I think, to save you. What you contemplated doing was through despair. Ah! I know what that is. But you need despair no longer."

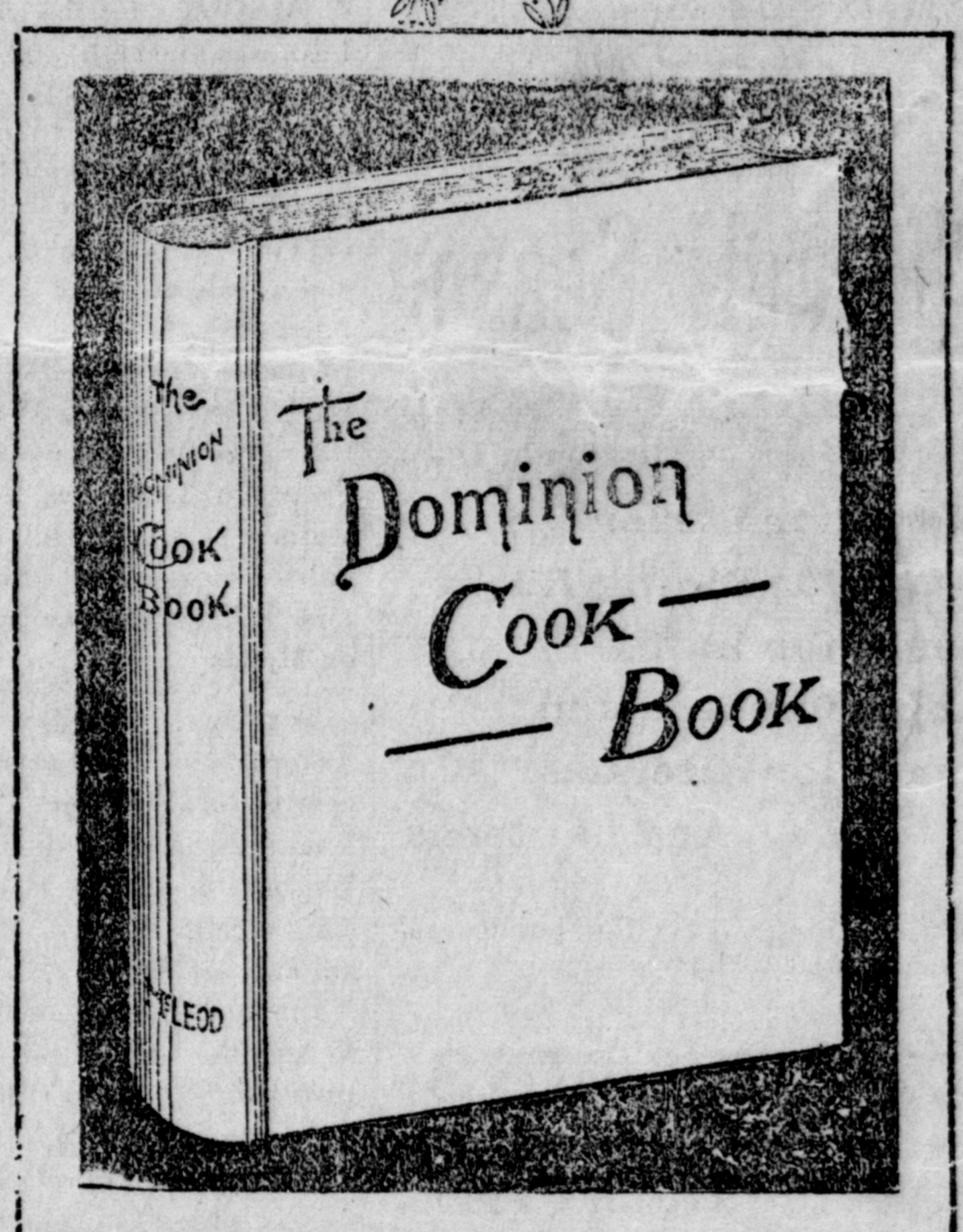
There is work to be done. Mr. Lampton—you know him?—he has work for you. Oh! for months we have been seeking you." "We!" he repeated. "Yes. Mr. Lampton told me all, and I am no longer poor. Oh, yes, there is much for you to do, and you shall make a name yet." "How good and kind you are," he said, fervently. "I have but taken a leaf from your book," I laughed. "Ah! you do not know." "I know," I answered now, gravely, "that no one has a right to give up hope. At the eleventh hour, when all appears darkest, the silver lining of our black cloud will show. It was so with me. It should be so with you. Come with me; trust me. I will prove it." He seemed half bewildered, but came with me as I bade, and I have kept my word. Of those English landscapes in my boudoir Stanley Greville was the painter; now he is their master—and mine!

Little Tompkins (on his dignity)—Marie, I've been a good husband to you all these years, have been patient and have put up with every humiliation, but fiercely the worm has turned at last. You shall not have my son's trousers cut down for me. Sunday School Teacher—Johnny, who was Paul? Johnnie—He's de feller wit' de funny bunch of whiskers dat's t'rowin' a bluff at de English. Cook's Penetrating Plasters. AGENTS WANTED—FOR "THE Life and Achievements of Admiral Dewey," the world's greatest naval hero. By Murat Halstead, the life-long friend and admirer of the nation's idol. Biggest and best book; over 500 pages, 8x10 inches; nearly 100 pages halftone illustrations. Only \$1.50. Enormous demand. Big Commissions. Outfit free. Chance of a lifetime. Write quick. The Dominion Company, 3rd Floor Caxton Bldg., Chicago.

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