

Literature.
A MONSTROUS WRONG.

CHAPTER XLIII.
Dolores hesitated. She was profoundly moved by her mother's words. Her brave, unselfish soul, capable of the sternest act of self-sacrifice, was being brought up to the highest pitch of heroism.

"There is his escape from all this disgrace, mamma," she said, in a low, broken voice. "And only one!"

"Melcombe told you, then?"

"Yes, mamma. He alone knows your history. And he has offered to keep your secret, if I will marry him!"

"But you love Sir Basil Nugent?"

"It is impossible in any case, that I should ever marry Basil. My life is but one, and by its sacrifice I can save three valuable lives from disgrace and sorrow."

"I will not accept such sacrifice. You do not like Melcombe?"

"I may learn to like him. He knows that I love Basil, and is yet content to take me as his wife. I cannot be unhappy, mamma, in such a marriage, knowing all the good it will accomplish."

"But, Dolores—"

"Not one word of remonstrance, mamma. I must do what I think right."

The heroism of the little face, the streaming light in the velvety black eyes, the noble, uplifted expression on every feature, made Dolores look to her mother like an angel from heaven.

"Will not this marriage seal your own misery, dear?" asked Lady Glenmorris, bewildered, struggling with grief and relief that she possessed her.

"I dislike Melcombe, or the marriage is to be a sacrifice to you, I will not consent to it."

The girl looked up with a bright, brave smile. What bitter anguish underlay that smile, her mother could not guess.

"I am sorry, my dear, that I cannot cheerfully, as I can be your mother, and not even Lord Glenmorris would waver at our intimacy, or suspect our relationship."

"I would give you for weeks at a time, and you would visit me. I should see Lord St. Maur again, my own grandfather, whom I love, but who will never know me as his grandchild, and I might be able to cheer his declining years. I should know many joys, you see."

"But Sir Basil Nugent?"

"The girl's head dropped, so that the anxious, loving eyes could not see it. It was a full minute before Dolores answered, in her brave, loving voice:

"God will comfort him in time, mamma. And this life is not for long, even at the longest. Some day I shall know all the truth, and say that I did right."

Lady Glenmorris caught her daughter closer to her breast, and showered kisses upon her, tender, passionate, full of anguish and yearning, and full of a strange, deep reverence for the heroic young soul, that took up its heavy cross with such brave serenity.

She protested against the proposed sacrifice, she wept over Dolores, as she talked wildly of flight; but the girl overruled all her scruples after a long struggle, and induced her to consent to her decision.

Lady Glenmorris did not know how much that decision cost her daughter, nor how deeply Dolores must have disliked Melcombe, else she would never have yielded her consent, as she did at last.

"Now that the matter is all settled," said Dolores, "let us plan our future, mamma—that we shall do to each other. And tell me of Lord Glenmorris, and of my little brother, and of your home and life."

The marchioness complied with this request, and began a chain of evidence which brought the two very near to each other in love and sympathy, and which confirmed Dolores in her resolution to sacrifice herself for the good of others.

Lady Glenmorris remained until all the day with her daughter, unable to tell herself a word, except when she appeared at the usual hour in charge of a tempting little lunch, which the marchioness remained to share. It was late in the afternoon when the visitor rose to take her leave.

"My stolen visit is over," said her ladyship, with a heavy sigh. "I could not have remained so long, Dolores, but that Lord Glenmorris ran down into my way home before seven o'clock, and nearly drove me away."

"I shall have time for dinner before he appears. How glad I shall be when all this secrecy and subtlety will be over, mamma."

Elspeth had summoned a maid, and Lady Glenmorris descended and entered it, giving as her point of destination the corner of Oxford and North Audley streets. Here she discharged the duties, completing her journey on foot.

She mounted the marble steps of her house and rang the knocker, sharply. A liveried servant gave her admittance, and she ran lightly up the stairs to her home.

The luxurious room was fragrant with the scent of hot-bath steam, and warm with the genial glow of the red fire in the silver grate. The candles had not been lighted, and the soft shadows of the darkening day began to gather in the great chamber. Lady Glenmorris noted neither warmth nor luxury. As she crossed the threshold her gaze became riveted near the hearth, where she perceived an expression of gravity and sternness, which she had often seen upon it of late.

His presence struck terror to her soul. Since that night at King's Home, when she had asked in vain for her confidence, he had never entered her private apartment, and she scarcely spoke to her existence of her fatal secret had been as terrible for him as for her. Could his denance in her? Had he not been unable longer to bear this horrible estrangement? The wife's heart gave a great bound in sudden excitement and hopefulness.

"You are home early, Hugh," she said, tossing aside her hat and shawl. "I did not expect you until a later time. Have you been back long?"

"I have not left town yet," she said. "The faint color slowly drifted out of the lovely blonde face of Lady Glenmorris. You have not been out of town?" she said.

"I missed the train," said the marchioness briefly. Lady Glenmorris sat down in the nearest chair.

"I returned home to find that you had gone out," continued the marchioness. "I made some calls, and lunched at my club. I returned on horseback to find that you were still absent. You have not been gone all day, it seems. Where have you been?"

The wife quailed before the stern eyes of her husband, those eyes with their accusing, What could she answer? She had not made the faintest pretence of shopping that day. She had been nowhere but to Rolloingham Row. A partial confession of the truth was unavailing. "I have been to spend the day with a young lady—a friend of mine," she said, trying to speak carelessly.

"What young lady?"

"That was a question which Lady Glenmorris dared not answer. To reveal Dolores's name would open the way to a score of new perplexities and dangers. "It is no one whom you know, Hugh," she said, and in spite of her efforts her voice trembled. "The young lady is a portrait of mine in whom I am deeply interested, but you have never seen her."

"She has a name, I suppose? Why do you not mention it?"

upon the name I bestowed upon you.—Be warned before you go further. I cannot live longer in this way. I am torn with jealousies and distrusts. Unless you choose to give me a wife's confidence—the confidence I have a right to demand—I shall send you back to King's Home and leave England. A crisis in our lives has arrived. I demand either your confidence or our separation."

Lady Glenmorris could not answer. Her husband waited some minutes in a dead silence, and still she did not speak. Then, with a face white as her own, and with lips compressed, and stern and rigid features, he rose and went to the room, his words continuing to ring in the ears of his unhappy wife long after the echo of his tread had ceased.

CHAPTER XLIV.
THE PROMISE.

Dolores was served with dinner at six o'clock, and Elspeth moved to her lack of appetite, and at the pallor that replaced the color which excitement had brought to her cheeks during the afternoon. The old serving-woman, like Lady Glenmorris, was struck by the change a few hours had made in the air of the girl, and did not fail to note her air of self-reliance, and her devotion, and her contrasted so singularly with her youth.

"Surely you're pining for fresh air and change, Miss Dolly," exclaimed the old woman. "It's no good to be staying indoors and working so hard at your age. You need the country, or some relaxation, in my opinion. You shouldn't be staying in this fine evening, but there is no one to be taken to a concert, and the like, and you've no friend's house to run into. It's an ill thing to be so alone in it as the wife, Miss Dolly."

"But I need not stay in all the evening," cried Dolores, eagerly. "I do want fresh air, Elspeth, and exercise. Let us go out for a ramble. We can walk like you to Belgrave Square. We might perhaps see Lord St. Maur, Elspeth, and I would give much to see him. Will you go with me?"

"I'd go with you anywhere, Miss Dolly, and you know that," declared the old woman. "There's no harm in going to Belgrave Square that I can see. We should get there before her lordship's dinner hour, and would be sure to see him, if the blinds weren't down. 'Tisn't every time we'd have the luck 'o' last."

She brought out her mistress's hat and cloak and put them upon her. Then she put on her wraps, and Dolores led the way down stairs and into the street.

A feverish desire had come upon her to see again, here, her own grandfather, St. Maur. The tie of relationship between them, while it could not be acknowledged and while it was to her a source of the bitterest shame, yet, for Lady Glenmorris, a strange sweetness also. She loved and admired the grand old peer with a great enthusiasm. She had looked upon him as a man of a noble and generous character, and she had found that he possessed a noble soul, a great strong, true and tender nature. A keen sympathy had been established between the old and the young, and the thought that she had brought his wife should often give her comfort and joy.

Yet, in spite of all the arguments she thought to fortify her resolves, she shrank from a marriage with Melcombe with a shrinking increased with every moment. He would come for her answers this evening, and she could not put him off longer. Before giving him his answer she yearned to see again her lover, Sir Basil Nugent. He was a constant visitor at St. Maur House. What more probable than that he might be there to-night?

The two—the slender girl, and the sturdy old serving-woman—started along the streets until they signalled, and engaged for their excursion.

The pair alighted near their destination and discharged their cab. Then they approached the house with slow and hesitating steps, half-fearful of being recognized, yet drawn on by a fascination which Dolores could not resist.

She put her little round hat well over her forehead, and hid her eyes in the folds of her silk handkerchief. Elspeth's big, old-fashioned bonnet and long waterproof cloak and heavy gaiters hid her from observation. They were not likely to attract attention, and she gathered evening. The street lamps were lighted, shops were at their gayest, and people were moving swiftly along the streets, the March air having a keen chill in it to-night.

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of light from the room fell full upon the young beauty, in all the splendor of its youth, beauty, the softness, sweetness and tenderness of its perfect features. A wild cry escaped his lips.

Lord St. Maur, who had been behind him had seen also that exquisite face, and echoed that cry.

The curtains fell from Sir Basil's grasp. He bounded into the hall, and opening the outer door, and dashed into the room, and recognized him. She had stood transfixed under his scrutiny, but as he disappeared from the window he seized the old servant's hand and sped away like a frightened deer. She turned the nearest corner, Elspeth pausing beside her, and neither paused until they were safe in Knightsbridge road. Here they found a cab and were speedily on their way home.

Sir Basil, upon reaching the street, had found no trace of them. He had run to Grosvenor Place in search of them, thus giving them time to escape, and completely missing them. After some minutes' vain quest he had realized their escape, and returned to St. Maur House.

"It was Miss Wynn," he exclaimed, remembering the morning-room. "I lost her completely, my dear mother."

The earl had sat down by the window. He turned his rugged old face toward his guests, and every stern and hard feature was radiant with tenderness.

"You see she loved me, Nugent?" he exclaimed, "also she would never care to revisit this place secretly, in the hope of seeing me. She loved me and I swear that I will find her, my poor little girl, I will adopt her. She shall never, never leave me. What can be this cruel mystery that drew her from me? I will prove it; I will devote every energy to this search for her, and to clearing away this wretched cloud of misunderstanding. If I thought that her flight was the work of the Victoria, I would see her ladyship and compel her to listen to a revelation that should teach her humility. Little Dolly so near me—and yet beyond my reach! At any rate, I have learned that she loves me."

Sir Basil Nugent kept silent, but his haggard face might have spoken for him had the earl been less preoccupied.

Meanwhile, Dolores and Elspeth pursued their journey homeward.

"How your heart beats, my poor lambs!" said the old serving-woman, who had been holding her young mistress in her arms. "We've had a great fight, and all for naught."

"Not for naught," Lord was good to us. We saw the lady, and she was so good to us. Both? We saw the said lady, and my dear Dolly, how could you, knowing him so well, have asked her to marry him, and to do so without his consent, and Elspeth took her silence as denial.

They alighted at the end of Rolloingham Row, and presently gave themselves admittance into the house, and entered the Villa. Upon entering the dwelling, they were met by the housemaid who said that Mr. Melcombe had called, and that he had declined to wait, upon being informed of Miss Wynn's absence, but that he would call again during the evening.

Dolores ascended to her parlor. She had scarcely removed her hat and settled herself comfortably in her easy-chair, when a double-knock, peremptory, and not unlike a postman's, testified to Melcombe's return.

He was shown up stairs. Dolores arose to receive him. As Melcombe shook hands with her, he noticed the new expression of sadness and resolution upon her young face, and his heart thrilled with prospective triumph.

Elspeth busied herself in the adjoining chamber. Dolores asked her visitor to be seated, and he drew a chair quite near her own.

"I desire, first of all," he said, in his smooth, fluent tones, "to ask your pardon for my brusqueness last evening. Dolores, I was betrayed by my passion for you into threats, which I have ever since regretted."

"Then you did not mean them?" asked the girl quickly.

Melcombe looked somewhat discomfited.

"I did not mean to be rude," he declared. "I might have clothed my meaning in milder terms, but I was, with all my soul, and I would die to gain your love in return. I am come to-night for your answer to my suit. I think of all the answers covers—the honor of a noble name, the happiness of three content persons, the safety, perhaps the life, of one—and then give me your answer!"

"I have thought until my brain reels," answered Dolores. "If I consent to marry you, Mr. Melcombe, it will be for your sake or mine, but for the sake of the three you have mentioned, I will be frank with you. I do not love you. I do love some one else."

"I know all that," he said.

"I did like you, but since last evening that liking has turned to loathing," said Dolores, with a frankness that made him wince. "You have shown yourself base and ignoble in pressing your advantage, in leaving blackmail upon an innocent, in deeply wronging her, and in treating her as the price of her safety. If I pay her ransom with myself, what security have I that you will keep her secret?"

"I will keep it, if you please. Why should I proclaim the shame that would become my own by marriage with you? Men of the world do not boast of his honor."

"The girl's cheeks flushed painfully.

"I might have known that," she said. "But as I am what I am, why do you seek to marry me?"

"I do not love you!"

"The ardent glances of his small, pale eyes, the fervent expression of his rapt face, attested to the truth of his expressions of love. Dolores shrank yet and hid her face behind her hand.

"Give me up, promise to marry me, Dolores," he exclaimed, "and those you love are safe! Refuse and they perish! I will marry you, if you can be much with your mother."

"I have told you that I love I regard you. I have told you that I love an her. If you are utterly pitiful, Mr. Melcombe, then take me as I am, and I will marry you, if you wish."

Melcombe had won! In a transport of delight, he seized her hand and carried it to his lips. She drew it away hastily and wiped it against her dress, as if his touch had contaminated it.

"I will dispense with caresses, he said softly, and I wish you would leave me now. I have loved far away from all my hopes to night, and I cannot bear your presence longer."

Melcombe rose up. He could afford to consider her caprices now that he had so nearly won his game.

"One word more, Dolores," he said. "I will not consent to a long engagement until you have consented to my marriage, and the sooner it takes place the better. Will you wait suit you?"

"No, no, not so long."

"I will not wait longer. We will be married next week. Dolores, become married to-morrow. You will have ample time to prepare your trousseau; if not, you can prepare it afterwards. Only you must be married next week, on Thursday."

"So soon! Next week! Oh, Heaven pity me!" cried Dolores.

"If you intend to marry me at all, the sooner the better. I shall come to see you every day, Dolores. Best resign yourself to the inevitable. Next week you will belong to me, and I shall then claim all your thoughts, my pretty one!"

He did not prolong his stay, but he turned to go, and as he emerged into the street he muttered triumphantly:

"My fortune is nearly made! She has consented to marry me. She shall be my wife before she fully realizes the situation. And then to prove Queenie Redburn's marriage to Lord Owen Keith Lennox, and the legitimacy of my beautiful Dolores! What a sensation! I shall make! How they will gush their teeth and be ready to die of chagrin. I have played my game well, and am contented with my lot. For Nugent, and he sneered. "I wonder what he'll say when he discovers the truth, and that his Dolores is my wife?"

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