

PRUDENCE

(Continued.)

Mrs. Crane was her most absorbed air. She was looking at the large mass of color representing that most pathetic, marvellous moment in the life of Christ, Prudence was also studying the picture, but with the air of one ready to dimple into smiles at anything more interesting and attractively personal.

"Oh, Jonas," said Mrs. Crane, brightly, as she extended a cordial hand. Prudence looked delighted, and made room for Jonas at her side.

"Now," said Mrs. Crane, "this is just what a clergyman ought to like, and isn't it wonderful! Just look at those Jewish women, and those children!—That dear little thing there! Isn't it perfect?"

Jonas looked. "There is a great deal of color, he said, critically.

"Oh, but you know," said Mrs. Crane, "that's what they like so over here now. Don't you remark it?—They make color a perfect—a perfect idol."

Jonas, whose eyes had unconsciously been filled with the tender harmonies in Cornwall Gardens, answered nothing for a moment. Then he said, studying the picture,

"Well, it isn't my idea of the scene. And he turned to Miss Marlett. "Prue looks very tired," he said, smiling.

"Oh, no wonder," said Mrs. Crane. "She's going to be such a belle! I've been with her at the school, and now Lady Frances Holbrook wants to go to her school in the country. Really I had her, until she came over, the English were so cordial."

"They're perfectly lovely," said Prudence. "Don't you want to come and have some lunch with us? I look tired, so do you. Come, Aunt Rebecca, do remember all there is to be done before this evening."

Mrs. Crane stood up with a pleased smile. "Yes," she said, looking at Jonas for approbation, "Prudence is regularly in society."

Prue laughed. It was her old gay laugh, yet her eyes showed those of Jonas with a fervent air.

"Aren't you proud of me, Jonas?" she said, coaxingly.

"Of course," he answered, gravely; "but I wish you looked less tired."

He stood up and followed the ladies down stairs, where they took a cab, and Jonas, sitting opposite to Mrs. Crane, listened to her discourse upon London society, now and then glancing at Prue's fair face to read in its expression of sympathy with his distrust.

But there was more. The girl was supremely contented, supremely happy. She ate her luncheon, and talked about the afternoon, freely imparting her plans to Jonas, displaying a little note-book full of engagements, and wondering whether she should enjoy the theatre. Mrs. Crane touched Jonas's arm with a significant smile.

"Of course you will," he said, radiantly. "We know who'll be there."

"That young Mr. Simonson. Did you know, Jonas, his uncle is a real lord over here, and one day he is to have the title."

"I know," said Jonas. "Well," said Mrs. Crane, drawing a long breath, "I think people in London would hear of our doings, they would be surprised."

"I am writing home to-night," said Jonas, a little grimly. "Tell them I say."

"Oh, what you like. What shall I say?"

It was the second time he had heard the word applied to the girl whom he had vowed to shelter from the world with his very life, but coming from Mrs. Crane it had a bolder significance.

"How am I to say that, Prue?" he said, smiling across the table upon Prue's contented young face.

"Oh," said the girl, "call it fun—that's what I call it. Tell them I'm having a perfectly elegant time."

"I am writing to George Mayberry," said Jonas, "and I won't forget your message."

In spite of their many obligations, the ladies declared after luncheon they had an hour or two on their hands, and would like Jonas to take them to see something. He was eager enough for their service, and standing in Regent Street, hurriedly enumerated such places as he considered likely to interest them. Westminster occurred to them all as peculiarly congenial. The Abbey was one of the spots which Jonas had frequently discussed with Prudence in a replete way, aided by stereoscopic views and a magazine article or two they read together during the winter evenings. It hurt him a little to see that the calm radiance of her face remained unchanged while he made his suggestion, and when they were in a cab whirling toward the Abbey she said, with her lovely smile, "Westminster, isn't it? And almost before Jonas could utter a word, she had turned to ask some trivial question of her aunt.

But in the Abbey Prudence's fluttering thoughts concentrated; solemnized by the silent, hushed presence to which Jonas conducted her, reverent and awed, he could lift his face up to the very vault of Heaven with bared head as he stood among them. Prue looked, asked questions, and listened to Jonas with respectful attention, but what would he have given for an hour of the old sweet companionship, in which the girl gave freely all that she had to give, while he unlocked the store-house of his mind or lavished on her the homage of his deep, whole-souled nature. There had been no promise for the future exchanged between them had only seemed to strengthen his devotion and her trustful dependence. She knew—she must have known—was she waiting to speak until she was older, in obedience to a promise made her dead brother. Six months ago he and Prudence would have stood in this grand old monument with her, the old knight, the link-boy's extinguishers, the heavy door, the porter's niche, remain in solemn preservation, and the dusky hallway and staircases are ponderous with suggestions of the past.

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in one of the old stalls, looking now and then at Prudence's beautiful face shining beneath the broad-brimmed felt hat. The girl's rich tints felt him with a sort of peace; he hardly knew what to call it, but it seemed to give the love and longing that sometimes crept into his very soul. Was it, he wondered, because she was so unutterably lovely? He looked intently at her soft, smiling face, which he had often seen in the dark, sweet, untroubled eyes; at the waves of warmly colored hair that showed beneath her hat; at the delicately moulded chin, the childlike bloom of the lips that looked like roses, or, as he was, his eyes, his very soul upon her beauty. Yet he was almost unaware that he was counting up her charms, that he was rejoicing in her exceeding loveliness; something higher, stronger, swifter, was in the conscious part of his mind—the dream that had filled him since boyhood, the hope that had made of toil a pleasure. He leaned his face down upon his hand, and looked at the mirror in which he saw his own face, and the vision that had been the day-dream of all those working, toiling years. It was Prudence, always Prudence, the girl sheltered in his keeping, the wife waiting for him, the mother of his children, the woman who was to be the inspiration, the guardian, the friend of all his life! And had this been reality, or only the fantastic folly of a man who passionately idealized not only his choice of life, but the objects of his concentrated desires? Jonas, untroubled, untroubled, by all the mental conflicts of the past few days, refused to answer to himself these untroubled questions. He tried to reduce thought to mere numbers, if it would not flow into another channel, and Prudence, glancing shyly toward him, was struck with the repressed intensity of the man's face and look. To his vision, Jonas heard of his own, that was a tall, strong figure, with the same plain, earnest face she always remembered, and had never criticised. She never questioned whence came the light that filled his eyes when he was preaching, or perhaps when he was walking up and down the old-fashioned parlor in Ponkamak, talking to her or reading aloud. Those hidden chambers of the mind, those untrodden, mysterious places, which were so much a part of her, she had never seen. Their outcome she felt without analyzing the source, or questioning whether there might not be a tremulousness in response to the movements of her own mind. She looked up at him now, realizing the lines of fatigue about the honest eyes and strong mouth, seeing with swift regret that he was pale and tired; but no depths were stirred, no longing to know that the man who had been so close to her, she would have slipped one of her little hands tenderly toward him had she dared; she would have gladly ministered to his physical needs; indeed, she began to think whether she had been right in urging Jonas to stay in London when he had found them on his way to Nice; but her introspection went no further than this vague doubt of her own infidelity, and compassion for the weariness expressed in Jonas's face.

"It is over," he said, in a moment, while Prudence was thinking what she ought to do.

Prudence started, and demurely walked after her aunt and Jonas down the aisle, a little flustered by the glances of admiration freely lavished upon her as she went. She forgot to say anything to Jonas about his health as he had been looking at her, and she had not then, as she remembered later, she should see him the next day. When they had driven off, the young man started for another solitary walk. Where his steps took him that afternoon Jonas Fielding never knew, but he walked on and on, piercing the fog, through which street vendors with their flaring lamps were to be seen, before he found himself at his hotel, and after so much walking, he was weary and had a little of a relief to find some home letters, and also a little note from Miss Armory. The latter was quickly read, but Jonas held it a long time in his hands. It bore the air of Belgravia in its faint scent, pretty monogram, and unobtrusive crest.

"DEAR MR. FIELDING (it ran),—I really feel that we have made a good beginning to-day, but cannot go on ending. You must come up again, and we must be sure of finding me at home between eleven and one o'clock every morning. The chief object of this note, however, is to ask you to try and find me at the Lyceum this evening, where you will find us in box No. 1. Don't think I am going to be too persistent in my efforts to control your destiny, but I am not the ruling power you seem to imagine. Do you know, I felt after you went away as though I would give a great deal—for well, even the cobble-stones on Broadway."

"Sincerely yours, HELENA LISIE ARMORY."

Jonas re-read the letter once or twice before he laid it in its envelope. He smiled to himself with the air of a man who wishes he could alter a decided opinion. Then, after one or two turns about his room, he sat down and penned the following reply:

"My dear Miss Armory,—I am very much obliged to you for your kindness in writing me that note, and I am glad that anything I have said may feel as if you would like to see your native land soon again. I shall have a great deal to talk to you for always as kind as you were to-day. I feel very much obliged to you, but I don't know as anything in particular is making me. I only suppose we must have periods of peculiar mental and moral shock once in a while. I would rather have had just this one in America, I think, than in the humor for the theatre to-night, or I should certainly go, but I hope your party will enjoy it very much. Very truly yours, JONAS P. FIELDING."

When he had written this note the young man held it a long time in his hands. He had written it, and he had not given for an hour of the old sweet companionship, in which the girl gave freely all that she had to give, while he unlocked the store-house of his mind or lavished on her the homage of his deep, whole-souled nature. There had been no promise for the future exchanged between them had only seemed to strengthen his devotion and her trustful dependence. She knew—she must have known—was she waiting to speak until she was older, in obedience to a promise made her dead brother. Six months ago he and Prudence would have stood in this grand old monument with her, the old knight, the link-boy's extinguishers, the heavy door, the porter's niche, remain in solemn preservation, and the dusky hallway and staircases are ponderous with suggestions of the past.

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