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"Always papa," she replied.  
"Have you had a happy life—Katie, tell me—a happy life?"  
"Yes," she answered. "Papa, you know that I have never had one moment's care or trouble, one moment's sadness, since I was a child."  
"Thank Heaven for that!" he said, gently. "If I should die, Katie, die and leave you, would anyone make you think me unkind, ever make you love me less?"  
"No, never, papa," she said, laughing at the notion—"never."  
"Kiss me. Tell me you love me," he said. "Will you remember in the after-years that I would have given my life at any time to save you from pain?"  
"Yes," replied Katherine, and obeying his wish, she clasped her tender arms round his neck. "I love you very dearly, papa," she said, "more than I can tell you; and I am longing for the day to come when you will be strong and well again."

Later still, when Katherine was going to her room, he called her to him; and taking the bright young face between his hands, he kissed it.  
"Good-night, my darling," he said; "and may Heaven bless you?"  
She wondered at the solemnity of his words, little dreaming that she had heard his voice for the last time.  
"You are not quite so well to night, Jasper," said Lady Brandon.  
"No," he said. "There is a strange fluttering at my heart. I feel faint—it will pass away. The day has been so very warm."

"I wish," said Lady Brandon, "that you would consult Sir William Fletcher; they say that he is the cleverest physician in England."  
"I will see about it," said Sir Jasper.  
It was a lovely June night, one of those nights which never seem to grow dark; the air was rich and heavy with the odors of the sleeping flowers; the dew lay on the white lilies, on the roses, on the purple passion-flowers; the wind stirred ever so faintly the fresh green leaves. It was one of those nights when it seemed impossible to turn from the sweet face of nature. Veronica had stood for more than an hour at the open window of her room, when one of the servants came to say that she was wanted in Sir Jasper's room.  
"Is Sir Jasper worse?" asked Veronica, in alarm.  
"The valet said he seemed very ill, miss," replied the girl; "but there was nothing said about his being worse."  
Without loss of time, Veronica left her room. She had not undressed. She still wore her evening dress of rich black lace with crimson flowers. She had taken the diamond stars from her hair, and the black, shining waves fell in rich profusion over her shoulders. On her neck gleamed a cross of rubies and diamonds. She walked through the long corridors, where the moonlight lay in great silver floods, making everything else darker by contrast. Sir Jasper could not be worse, she thought; the servants were most of them in bed, and there was no confusion. She went to the door of his room—a room she had never entered. It was ajar, and Lady Brandon stood near it. She looked pale and anxious. She had on a white dressing-gown, and was toying nervously with the blue ribbons.

"I do not understand it, Veronica," she whispered. "Sir Jasper has sent for you and for me—he wants us particularly. No one else is to come near. He looks so strange all half frightened. Come in!"  
Veronica entered the statesman's chamber. It was a large and magnificently furnished apartment. She saw wonders of rosewood, china, statuettes, pictures, and books. On the bed, with its silken hanging, she saw Sir Jasper, with a gray look on his face and dark shadows round his eyes. She went up to him, and his eyes, looking into hers, told her that some strange, unrevealed secret was between them.

"Close the door," he said—"fasten it securely; no one must interrupt me. Marie, my wife, come here. It is you who will have to forgive me. I have sinned against you; but my sin always appeared to me in a better light than that in which it does now. It is a gilded sin—a sin so shrouded with sentiment, reserve, poetry, sensitiveness, that I hardly know where the wrong begins or ends—a gilded sin, my poor Marie, and the punishment will fall on an innocent head. Veronica, come nearer to me. I have sent for you—I have a story to tell. Kneel here where I may see your face. Keep those eyes—dead Giulia's eyes—fixed on me to the last, that my strength and my courage may not fail me. Marie, whom I have wronged, give me your hand; I have a story to tell you."

The night-lamp was partly shaded; its feeble rays fell on the gray face, on the dark, wistful eyes, on the thin white hands; fell on the two kneeling figures, on Veronica's beautiful face and Lady Brandon's troubled features. The wind, when it stirred, sent a gray spray of clematis beating against the glass; outside the beautiful, solemn summer night lay brooding over the fair, sleeping earth.

Sir Jasper told his story calmly, plainly, distinctly, describing his motives, blaming his own fastidious, sensitive reserve; blaming his own shrinking from pain; blaming his own weakness and folly which had led him so far wrong—led him into what he truly called "a gilded sin." Lady Marie listened with silent, bitter tears.

"So you were married before, Jasper, and never told me," she sobbed; "and I always thought that I was the only one you loved. How could you deceive me?"  
"I am sorry, Marie, for the past. I can hardly expect you to understand—I can hardly understand myself; it is so difficult, looking back. I loved her so well, and I lost her so soon! I could never speak of her, my dear dead Giulia. I could not utter her name—it tore my heart. I could not look men and women in the face while I talked of her, my dead love."  
"Then," said Lady Brandon, "you have always loved her best, Jasper—living or dead—always the best."  
"You have been a good, true, tender, faithful wife to me, Marie," he returned; "but she was my first love."

Veronica had listened like one in a dream. This was her history, then; and the golden-haired sister whom Assunta had never ceased to mourn was her own mother! She was the daughter of the famous statesman, Sir Jasper Brandon, who was looking with such wistful eyes into her face.  
"You are my own child, Veronica," he said, while Lady Brandon wept as one who could not be comforted—"my own daughter—dead Giulia's child! I have longed so often to take you in my arms and tell you so. I did not love you when evil spirits whispered to me that you had cost your mother her life; but I have learned to love you since you have been here, my daughter. Kiss me Veronica. Say 'Father' to me just once."

She laid her fair face on his, half frightened at its gleaming chill.  
"My father—my dear father!" she said.  
"You love me, Veronica—do you forgive me?"  
"I love you, and I have nothing to forgive. See, father, I kiss you again."  
Then Sir Jasper took two packets from under his pillow.

"There is another thing yet to be told," he said, "and this, my poor Marie, I know you will feel. I feel it myself, but I cannot, I dare not, die until I have done justice to Giulia's child. It is the law of our race, one that I have neither the power nor the right to change, that, failing a male heir, the eldest daughter shall succeed. You, Veronica Brandon, are my eldest daughter, so you are my heir—the heirs of Queen's Chace and the domain of Hurstwood."  
"That cannot be," cried Lady Brandon—"that is too cruel; it will kill Katherine!"  
"I hope not," he said, faintly. "It is cruel—Heaven knows I feel it to be so; but it must be done."  
Lady Brandon had drawn her hand from his feeble grasp; her face flushed hotly, her eyes were full of angry fire.  
"My child shall not be robbed," she cried. "I will appeal to all England. It shall not be."  
"All England could not prevent it, Marie," he said, sadly. "My eldest daughter must be my heir; after my death she becomes Baroness Brandon. I am quite powerless in the matter."  
"It is wickedly unjust," she cried. "I wonder at you, Sir Jasper—you who all your life have passed for an honorable man. You must not, you shall not, do my child this wrong!"  
"Hush, Marie!" he said, sadly. "Do not reproach me, dear; I have suffered enough. Listen, Veronica. This is my will. In it you will find repeated the story of my first marriage; in it you will find that I have made you what you are—my heir. I have made handsome provision for Katherine; handsome provision, Marie, for you."

"You have robbed us!" cried Lady Brandon. "What am I to say to my friends when they hear of this?"  
The baronet continued:  
"This second parcel, Veronica, contains all the papers you will need to prove your identity—the certificates of your mother's birth, marriage and death. There is the certificate of your birth also, and every other paper which your aunt Assunta thought necessary to prove your claim. Take them, Veronica. Kiss me my daughter; my strength fails me. Promise me one thing in your mother's name—will you promise, Veronica?"  
With her white lips on his, which were no less white, she whispered:  
"I promise."  
"Be kind to my wife and Katherine," he said. "Promise me."  
"I will," she replied.  
Then she raised her head, for a long, quivering sigh from him frightened her. "Go fetch Katherine," he said—"Kate—my own Kate."

"Are you worse Jasper?" cried Lady Brandon, forgetting her anger in her fear. A smile that Veronica never forgot came over his face as he turned to her.  
"No, not worse—better," he said. "I see it all now." And the next moment he was dead.  
The two horrified spectators stood looking at each other, unable to move. Lady Brandon cried out:  
"He is dead, he is dead Veronica!"  
Then, going up to the bewildered girl, she seized both her hands. "Veronica," she cried, "hide these papers. Promise me—swear to me—that you will not mention one word of all this until I have spoken to you again. Swear it!"  
"I promise," said Veronica.

(Continued on Page 8.)

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