

NOW FIRST PUBLISHED.

# A Winning Hazard,

BY MRS. ALEXANDER.

Author of "Her Dearest Foe," "The Wooing O'er," "A Crooked Path," &c., &c.

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## CHAPTER I.—SOME LETTERS.

It had been a disagreeable day—disagreeable and depressing, with a leaden sky, fierce gusts of wind, driving sudden heavy showers of rain in every direction; on the blast boxed the compass and spread seas of mud over road and footway. It was cold, too, with a clammy chilliness that could not be shaken off by exercise, and needing the warmth of a good fire, even more than frost and snow.

So a middle-aged lady evidently thought, as she carefully tended one burning in an old-fashioned grate—old in the sense of forty or fifty years ago, when these receptacles were high over the hearth and admirably contrived for sending the heat up the chimney. The apartment it warmed was a dining-room, and opened with folding doors into another, furnished as a drawing room. These, with the entrance hall, occupied the ground floor of a semi-detached house in Paragon Place, Nottingham, one of the oldest among the many "villas," "terracettes," "terraces," and "places" which now adorn that favorite suburb. The lady was tall and thin—even bony, with a long face, a pointed nose, and somewhat pained expression—she had rather faded brown eyes, dark thick eyebrows, and a good deal of iron grey wiry hair, which was coiled neatly on the top of her head and secured by a large tortoiseshell comb, which added to her height, and was unconcealed by any device of lace or ribbon. Her dress of deep crimson merino was protected by a large black silk apron, and her rather bony hands, were clothed with kid mittens—unmistakably old gloves cut down.

She seemed in deep thought as, fangs in hands, she carefully picked up a coal from the grate beside her and put them into the glowing hollows of the fire. Then she rose from her knees and put back the settle into a corner between a tall bookcase and the fireplace, standing still a moment to listen to the rain as it was dashed furiously by the wind against the window.

"He is late to-night," she said, aloud. "I had better shut up." The light was nearly gone; she struck a match and turned on the gas. Then she closed the shutters and drew the dull red moor curtains, looking round as if to see that all was in order.

There was nothing out of place, the room looked comfortable, for it was clean, well-kept, and bright with the firelight dancing on the highly polished furniture. It was in a sense well furnished, too, with the solid ugliness peculiar to the earlier half of the present century. The walls were lined with well-filled book-shelves, leaving scarce room for a small sideboard, and certainly none for any ornamental adenda. A heavy bronze clock and two vases adorned the mantelpiece, and two solemn arm-chairs stood right and left of the fireplace.

"The buses will be crowded in such weather," she murmured, again turning to the table which was laid for tea, but with a plate, knife and fork, a large spoon, and a small silver cruet on one side. She rearranged some trifling irregularity in the disposition of these articles, and going to the cupboard under the book-shelves, at the other side of the room, she took out a pair of worked cloth slippers, and put them to warm in the fender, contemplating them in silence for some minutes.

Suddenly a sharp ring at the door bell startled her. She went swiftly into the hall calling, "Hannah, here's your master."

"I'm coming, ma'am," replied a stout middle-aged woman, opening a door at the end of the passage. Paragon Place had no basements, and in another moment the "master" was putting his dripping umbrella in the stand and wiping his soaked boots on the mat.

"You'll be very wet, Samuel," said his sister (the lady just described), as she stood way of the dining room.

"Yes, I am somewhat wet. I was long in finding a place, the buses were crowded, and the rain drives," he returned, in a dry voice—so dry that humane persons always wishes to lubricate his throat; indeed, he himself sought to relieve it by frequent "hems."

"Let Hannah take your boots off, and I will bring your slippers," pursued his sister. "You need not go to your room to-night. Hannah can fetch your coat."

"No thank you; I prefer going up-stairs." Mr. Samuel Wincks was a very punctilious personage, and could not partake of his evening repast without performing a toilette, which existed in taking off his best daylight suit, and putting on an old one. The transformation did not occupy much time, and the "master" soon re-appeared.

He was nearly a head shorter than his sister, and even thinner, with a curiously dried-up look, as if many such drenching nights would not suffice to irrigate and soften his desiccated surface. His black hair was thin and ragged on his temples, his keen intelligent dark eyes gleamed under bushy eye brows; while a wide thin lipped mouth and large strong jaw redeemed his face from insignificance. He walked to the fire, and held his hands to the flames, rather small, brown, lean hands.

"Yes, it has been a wild day," he said, as if continuing the same strain of thought, "and a busy one. I expected Boucher early, and he never came, so I had to do his business as well as my own."

The speaker was the second partner in the firm of Boucher and Wincks, old-established solicitors, of which Wincks was practically the head, as Boucher was rather a swell, having inherited the business from a hardworking father, and preferred playing at being country gentleman, in his pretty place, near Potter's Bar, to sitting at his desk in the Moorgate street office.

"He gives you a heap of trouble," observed Miss Wincks.

"All goes in the day's work," returned her brother, resignedly, taking his place

at table, as Hannah reappeared with a tray and put a hot water plate before him; lifting the bright cover, she displaced a tempting chop, with its accompanying tomato sauce.

"Ah," said Mr. Wincks, inspecting it. "That loaf," nodding towards a nice brown crusty one; "it's not new, is it?"

"Yesterday's baking," said his sister, reassuringly, and they began their frugal repast, which on the lady's side consisted chiefly of a boiled egg.

Beyond the little civilities of the table, few words were exchanged, and when the servant had cleared away, Mr. Winck's rose very deliberately, brushed the crumbs from his waistcoat, drew forward one of the arm-chairs, to which a moveable reading-desk, furnished with a socket that held a waxcandle, was affixed, and settled himself therein, with an air of habitual and permanent occupation.

Having lit the candle, and adjusted the desk, he paused as if in deep thought, then he drew from his breast-pocket a note-book and a somewhat thick letter. He returned the former to its receptacle, and slowly drew from the envelope three enclosures.

Meantime his sister had looked up the sugar basin and cruet in the sideboard, and taking a work-basket which stood on a small table beside the other armchair, sat down under the gasoliers, and began stitching a short strip of linen with exquisite neatness.

The usual evening at Paragon Place was inaugurated. For many a long year the brother and sister had passed their after-dinner hours in this way, with unvarying sameness. He refreshed himself after the day's toil by forgetting everything around him in some tough and solid book. She found occupation and diversion in working for him.

"For these hours of comparative recreation she reserved the lighter and more ornamental kinds of needle-work, stitching cuffs and collars, marking articles of under-clothing in fine red cross stitch, or working slippers, and knitting warm woollen waistcoats, which she considered it her sacred duty to provide by the labor of her hands, instead of buying them at less cost both of time and money. There was silence for a few minutes, during which Miss Winck's looked at her brother with a faint sense of surprise. He rarely or ever brought home letters from the office, and never spoke about business. Now his attention was evidently absorbed, and there was an unusual expression on his short, keen, quiet face. It was softer, and had an amused look withal—a slight twinkle gleamed in his sharp eyes.

"Don't you want your book?" she asked.

"Eh—what? Yes! please give it to me, Bess."

She rose and took it from a shelf which was placed conveniently beside the fireplace. It was a large thick volume, and, at the date of this story, a new work, being the first volume of Buckle's "History of Civilization."

"Thank you!" he returned, taking it, and placing it unopened on his desk, while he continued to muse over his letters. Three were enclosed in the envelope, two were written in a strong, business-like hand. "Dear Miss Carey," it will give me great pleasure to introduce you to my father, Mr. Samuel Wincks, Boucher and Co. Their business is chiefly preparing railway bills for parliament. It is probable they will have the management of a new scheme for a line in Ireland, and Mr. Carey's knowledge and experience of that country might be of use to the firm. Pray let me know where to find you when you move to town. Believe me, your very truly,

"G. Brett."

This was dated Llanowen, January 30. No 2 was dated "Albion Hotel, Liverpool, Feb. 15, and written in the same hand."

"Dear Miss Carey,—Thank you very much for letting me know your whereabouts. I shall be in town early the week after next. When I have seen you and ascertained your views, I propose introducing Mr. Carey personally to Mr. Wincks, who is my special agent—a good man in every sense. Looking forward to seeing you soon.

"I am, yours very truly,

"G. Brett."

The third was in a lady's hand, a little large but refined and clear; it bore the date of the previous day, and the address was "Oakley Villas, Nottingham Hill."

"Dear sir,—The enclosed will explain my object in writing to you, a liberty which I trust you will excuse. Soon after I received the second letter, Mr. Brett was called out of town, and will not, I think, return soon. Meantime, my dear father is terribly depressed, and is sorely in need of work. Can you not give him any, and may he not call upon you? He has met with sad losses: perhaps the worst is partial loss of hearing. It is right to let you know this. Of course, it does not prevent his being as clever and full of knowledge as ever. I do hope you will be so kind as to consider my application favourably. Now Mr. Wincks, on your honour, not a word of this to anyone.

"Yours faithfully,

Katherine Carey."

Samuel Wincks was immensely interested by this application. It was totally unlike any previous experience of his life, which had from his youth up been a sandy desert of application and routine, though by no means an unprofitable one, as the position he had attained to proved.

"George Brett" who signed the two letters enclosed was well known to him. He was a wealthy railway contractor, though by no means of the first rank in that vocation, having risen from a "ganger" to his present station while still in the prime of life. He was a hard-headed, hard-fisted man, and not likely to risk much in recommending another. He was

a widower of some years standing Mr. Wincks knew, and had a couple of grown-up sons; but this suggested no explanation of his unusual interest in an unfortunate man to Samuel Wincks.

One facet of human nature only touched him on his blind, insensible side. The strong physique—the red hair, the florid complexion, the full and often smiling lips of the successful navy, which could close cruelly enough at times, told the desiccated little lawyer nothing.

"Do you know a place in this neighbourhood called Oakley Villas?" asked Mr. Wincks, as he returned his letters to their envelope, and the envelope to his pocket.

"Oakley Villas?" repeated his sister. "Yes, it is higher up, nearer St. Mark's Church; a tumble-down sort of place. Half the houses are unfinished, and the plaster is falling off the rest. The few that are occupied have lodgings to let. Servants who have saved a bit of money and those sort of people are tempted by low rents, and overlook the disadvantages. Why do you ask? Have you to recover any bad debt there?"

Mr. Wincks shook his head. "No we don't do that kind of business," he said. "I have had an application from a man who lives there and wants work. It's a fairly respectable locality, I suppose?"

"Yes. It is quite genteel—shabby genteel. And Miss Wincks relaxed into silence. Her brother opened his book, but did not at first give his attention to the page before him. The letter he had just received interested and even amused him. It was extremely unlike those he was in the habit of receiving. No woman of business habits or knowledge of the world would have written such a mixture of entreaty and independence. The curt injunction at the end indicated a sense of complete equality; the writing, the look of the epistle altogether, stamped it as the work of a gentleman, though Samuel Wincks had had but small experience of such "kittle-cattle." Then it gave no details. It said nothing of the previous training or experience of this candidate for employment. Of course the inference was that he must be a lawyer, or a lawyer's clerk, and possibly he might be useful as the projected railway business might necessitate some additions to the staff already employed by the firm, but Mr. Wincks wished the writer and her father were not Irish!

There was always something doubtful—something not quite trustworthy about the natives of that "most distressful country."

At any rate, he should like to see the writer of that letter. He could judge the case more clearly if he saw both father and daughter. Perhaps, after all, Brett had some reason for drawing back from the proposed recommendation. Should he write and ask? No, not after the sort of confidence reposed in him—not after reading that curious command, "on your honor, not a word of this to anyone." But if the father had any idea of seeking for work he must be able to refer to former employers. "Well, I'll see him—I'll see both," was Winck's conclusion. "I'll be cautious—very cautious." Having made up his mind he dismissed the subject, and was soon deep in the fascinating pages of the volume before him.

Silence reigned unbroken—the wind had fallen, and the ticking of the mantelpiece sounded like a loud and solemn admonition on the stern necessity of employing the fleeting moments well and diligently.

About the same time silence did not reign in another parlour—or drawing-room, as its owner insisted on designating it—at no great distance from Paragon Place. In short at No. 27, Oakley Villas, the shabby-genteel, unfinished locality described by Miss Wincks.

It was one of those contradictory edifices which might be described in Irish fashion as turning its "back to the front." That is, the entrance, staircase, and smaller rooms faced the road way, while the best rooms looked to the rear, over what was intended to be a general and ornamental garden, but was as yet only a wilderness of grass and bushes, with a few lilac and arbutum trees—the remains of a shrubbery which was once attached to a large house now pulled down.

A sitting room, of fairly good size, occupied the widow of the house, and two windows opened on a much-rusted balcony from which steps led to the wilderness above described.

The windows were closed, and the shutters unconcealed by the carefully looped up draperies—muslin at one side and tapestry cloth at the other. The furniture scanty, the carpet worn; but all looked clean, and there was an air of comfort about the apartment, though the means to that end were scanty. The fire was small, but bright; and in a wicker arm-chair beside it a gentleman was sleeping—an elderly gentleman, with regular aquiline features and grey hair—though this was hidden just then under a red silk pocket-handkerchief which had been placed over it; and his outstretched feet rested on a hassock and were encased in neat shoes.

At a table just under the gasolier sat two girls; one was darning a sock, several more lying in a neat pile beside her; the other, and elder, was making entries in a small account book with something of a careworn look on her face. They were in fact the eldest and youngest survivors of several children born to Robert Carey, now forgetting his troubles for a while under the merciful spell of sleep—the fair darning being little over nineteen, and her sister between seven and eight years her senior.

The latter rose quietly and went to a writing-table at the end of the room; she was above middle height with a rather square figure; her face was broad, but pleasant looking, with good teeth, dark eyes, and a refined, though rather fretful mouth. Her hair was dull brown, but there was plenty of it, and it was well and carefully arranged. Opening a drawer she took out a large "port-monnaie," returned to her seat and began to examine the contents.

"What did you spend to-day, Kate?" she asked.

"Only two shillings for those exercises," returned her sister, looking up; "and, oh, I gave two pennies to a poor little boy; but I think they were my own, Alicia. It's no matter, though; and I will give you the change." She felt in her pocket in vain; then she stood up and shook her skirt. I must have left it upstairs."

She was taller than her sister, with a rounded plant figure that sank down easily into low seats, and surprised strangers by rising up into sudden unstudied stateliness; her auburn brown hair was turned loosely back from the forehead, round

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which it grew in a graceful well defined curve, and twisted in a not too tidy coil at the back. In reply to Alicia's complaint she said:

"You are too thoughtful, really, Kate! Have we so much money that we can throw it about?" she turned a pair of big dark grey eyes, further darkened by long, nearly black lashes, on the speaker, and smiled, showing a set of small white teeth as her soft red lips parted.

"Yes, I am careless; but, indeed, I do try to think. I'll run up and look for it." And give yourself so much trouble," pursued Alicia, but Kate had disappeared, only for a minute or two, as she came swiftly back with a tiny plush purse which she put down beside her sister.

"I left it in the pocket of my dress, and oh! it got so wet before I could find shelter." It would have been better to have spent your two pennies on an omnibus instead of giving them to that beggar. Then you walked both ways. Kate nodded.

"There isn't much harm done. Serge stands the rain."

"You'll soon have to leave that off," returned the elder.

"That" meant the well-worn black alpaca prettily trimmed with lace and ribbon which had once been Kate's very best.

"Oh, no! I love it! It will bear more 'doing up'."

"Eh? What were you saying, my jewel?" exclaimed the sleeper, suddenly waking, "I didn't exactly hear," and becoming aware of the handkerchief over his head and ears he snatched it off. "A ha, Katey, you're up to your tricks, trying to keep your old dad asleep while you're talking treason."

"No, papa!" (young ladies did not say "father" or "mother" then.) "Alicia thought of it. There is a draught from the windows."

"Thank you, my darling; you take too much care of a worthless old fellow whose day is gone by, faith, and is no use to himself or any one else, though, mind you, I am not past my work, only what use is it to us; nobody will give me any," he added dejectedly.

"It is too soon to say that, dear," returned Kate, raising her voice a little and speaking with deliberate distinctness. "You have only begun to look for something; you must not expect to find it in a week."

"In a week! No, nor in a month of Sundays," said Carey, rising and kicking away the hassock. He was tall and gentlemanlike in bearing, with kindly blue eyes, fine features, and a quantity of fine grey hair. "I've a confounded headache and a pain across the small of my back. I've taken cold!" a loud sneeze—"Yes, I've taken cold!" it is nine o'clock. I'll go to bed. I may forget my troubles for a bit; if this goes on much longer I'll be sleeping a sleep that no waking."

"Dearest papa, take a warm drink, it may help you to throw off your cold—some whisky and hot water."

"Whisky?" he interrupted, indignantly. "There isn't half a bottle left, and I don't know where the next is to come from."

"Very true," said his eldest daughter, "some black currant jam and boiling water will do just as well."

"Thank you, no—the remedy is worse than the disease," a look of extreme disgust passed over his countenance. "Good night, my darlings, remember if I am released from this battle of life I have always suffered on your account, to see my treasures in a low beggarly den like this."

"Nonsense, daddy, dear! If you will only cheer up we will be quite content," cried Kate.

Alicia brought him his candle, and both kissed him lovingly, as he blessed them solemnly before quitting the room.

"He is awfully low tonight," said Kate, in a low tone, looking after him with moist eyes.

"Yes, he is tired, but a good night's rest—and he generally sleeps well—will set him right. He will be quite another man to-morrow morning." So saying, she returned to her accounts, while Kate took up another sock, and for a few minutes neither spoke.

"How many days are there before the 28th?" asked the accountant, suddenly.

"Twenty," returned her sister.

"Three weeks! I really don't know how

we can hold out till the 28th, and Reilly never sends the rent on the day it is due! I am sure I don't think there is anything more we can do without. If it were not for papa we need not have dinner, but that is not to be thought of."

"No, if we had no dinner, Mrs. Salter would be quite unmerciful about the rent."

"I thought I had done so well in arranging to pay only once a month," resumed Alicia, thoughtfully, "and now it seems to make matters worse. It is far harder to pay six pounds than thirty shillings!—and Dick Travers is out of town, or I am sure he would lend papa five pounds for a few weeks. Then I could manage, but as sure as we come down to breakfast on Monday I shall find the bill on my plate."

"Oh, no, Alsie," cried Kate, flushing up. "Anything rather than that! Why Dick is nearly as poor as we are, considering how he is obliged to appear."

"Nonsense! He is ever so much better off!" and Alicia, whose pet name was Alsie, turned out the contents of her purse, and began to count them, making neat but sadly diminutive little piles of gold, silver, and copper.

During this operation, a sharp, startling knock made Kate drop her work. "How late the post is this evening!" she exclaimed, the bright colour fading from her cheek. In another moment, the small servant, with a letter, came in.

"Please'm, the postman says this was refused at Oakley Street, and he wants to know if it's right here."

"Yes," returned Miss Carey, adding, as the girl left the room, "It's from Cousin Dick. How could he make such a mistake!"

"What does he say?"

"Not much. He will not be back soon, and he asks if my father has had that introduction to Mr. Wincks yet," concluded Alicia, with a sigh, handing the note over to her sister.

There was a pause and the elder resumed. "He evidently hoped a good deal from Mr. Brett's introduction; I am sure he would be awfully vexed with you if he knew the truth."

"I don't agree with you," said Kate! You would have been lifted over all troubles—and probably the dear father, too."

"How do you know I should not have been troubled into an abyss of worse worries than ever? I don't believe much in Mr. Brett's affection. If I loved anyone I would not leave him or her in the lurch and go back on my word because I was not loved in return! It was very shabby of him. Why, it was his suggestion of work for dear old Dad that made me so eager to come up here; not that I am sorry we came, I believe we will get on ultimately, but—"

"You seemed to like Mr. Brett well enough when we first met him at Llanowen?"

"Yes, he rather interested me. I respected him as a strong, honest, capable man. When he first asked me to think of him as a possible partner for life I did try to think of it—it is so dreadful to be poor—but, after, a strange sort of horror seized me, and that day, here, when he asked for a final answer and talked a heap of nonsense, I would have jumped into an open grave rather than marry him."

"I don't think there is much difference in men," said Alicia, with a quick sigh. "They are all very selfish; but there they are and we must make the best of them."

"I'll never make the best of any one I don't like, Alsie, and if Mr. Brett had been a true-hearted man as he never would have said so spitefully as he was going away—'under the circumstances you cannot expect me to carry out my intentions regarding your father.' That did cut me up; however, well, see," she stopped abruptly.

"Oh! they are alike, especially when they are in love," returned her sister. "It seems to me that being in love draws out the worst part of every man's nature."

"It ought not to be so," said Kate, and added no more; she knew her sister's experience had been somewhat bitter, and warmly sympathized with her.

"I am very tired," she resumed; "let me go to bed, perhaps tomorrow's post may bring up some luck."

(To be continued.)

## BE CAREFUL WITH THAT LAMP.

I SINCERELY hope that Mrs. Filmer has abandoned the custom of keeping an oil lamp burning in her room at night. She does not say what the necessity was, but I trust it no longer exists. If possible to avoid it, no light should burn in a room where people are sleeping. The reason ought to be plain enough, yet we all need lessons in common caution. This lady had hers, and was fortunate in coming out of the affair as well as she did.

Writing about it she says: "It was in the summer of 1886, not long after the death of my husband. I had been used to keeping an oil lamp burning in my room for convenience during the night. One night I accidentally overturned the lamp, and a blaze kindled in an instant. Terrified half out of my wits I sprang from bed, seized the burning articles and ran downstairs with them just in time to prevent further disaster. Happily for me I escaped without slight burns, but not from consequences of another kind."

"The fright and shock quite prostrated me. Do what I would, after the danger was all over, I was unable to banish the subject from my thoughts. My nerves seemed completely unbinged, and I rapidly grew feeble, excitable, and debilitated. My appetite failed, and I had no relish for my ordinary food. There was a bad taste in my mouth, headache, distress after eating, loss of flesh and ambition, with a disposition to worry and fret over things which, when I was well, had no influence with me whatever. I sought to build up my strength with beef tea and other nutritious and digestible forms of diet, without success."

"The doctors whom I consulted, said I was suffering from nervous debility and weakness. They gave me prescriptions, which the chemist made up for me; but they had no effect, and what I suffered I have no words to tell you. My health appeared to have been all broken up suddenly, as a railway train goes to pieces in a collision. Month after month I struggled with this strange ailment, but could find no remedy to relieve me. Not until January, 1887, did I see my way out of the trouble which followed my adventure of that fearful night."

"At that time (January, 1887) I chanced to come upon a little book about Mother Seigel's Syrup, as a cure for indigestion and dyspepsia and the complaints attending it. Letters that were printed in that book from others who had been cured by this remedy, gave me confidence, and I got a bottle from Mr. J. H. Brown, patent medicine dealer, 15 High Street, Margate. After taking it I felt decidedly better. I could eat and digest needed food; my nerves were more under control, and I got better sleep and rest. I will merely add that, feeling sure that Mother Seigel's Syrup was helping me, I continued to take it, and eventually recovered my health. For this I thank Mother Seigel's Syrup; and if you think so singular an experience as mine would be of interest or use to any one, you may have my consent to publish it. (Signed) (Mrs.) C. L. Filmer, Thanet Cottage, Draper's Road, Margate, July 24th, 1895."

Now I invite the reader's attention to a double fact: First (as is daily shown in these articles,) that indigestion will disorder and disease the nervous system; and (secondly) that a violent shock to the nervous system will produce indigestion of a profound and intractable type. The latter fact is illustrated by the case we are now considering. There is no space here to treat of it at length. Let it suffice for the present that, either way, the remedy must be addressed to the digestion—not to the nerves. No competent physician treats a so-called "nervous" disease as a nervous disease. He seeks for the location of the evil force, which is commonly the stomach; corrects that if he can, and leaves the nerves to right themselves as they always do. This is what Mother Seigel's Syrup did for Mrs. Filmer, and will do for you, in case (which Providence forbid) you are ever overthrown in like manner.

Water rents are higher at Pittsburg than any other city in America.