

NOW FIRST PUBLISHED.

A Winning Hazard,

BY MRS. ALEXANDER.

Author of "Her Dearest Foe," "The Wooling Out," "A Crooked Path," &c., &c.

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SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I.—Kate and Alicia Carey are daughters of a Dublin solicitor, who, through misfortune, leaves Ireland for Wales with a view to economy. While in Wales they meet Mr. Brett, a wealthy railway contractor, who fell in love with Kate. He induces her father to go to London to seek employment, saying he will introduce him to his agents, Messrs. Winks and Boucher. This he fails to do. Kate Carey writes to Mr. Winks, unknown to her father, and encloses two letters in which Mr. Brett promises assistance, asking for employment for her father. She anxiously awaits a reply, but does not receive one. She, however, receives a letter from her cousin Dick Travers, advising that he is in London and about to call upon them.

CHAPTER II.—Mr. Carey and his daughter, returning over the Irish coast, are met by a party among whom is Dick Travers, who has had some reverses, is now secretary to Lord Elnair. Carey at length hears from Boucher and Winks, making an appointment at their office in London. Carey, accompanied by Kate, sees Mr. Winks, and accepts a position as clerk. Winks speaks to Kate with a view of employing her also.

CHAPTER III.—Carey, settled in his situation, proves himself useful. Kate is surprised by a visit from Dick, and an hour passes pleasantly. Dick, on leaving, promises frequent visits. Carey, returning home in the evening, is much excited over a new railway scheme of his own. Kate receives a communication from Winks, asking for her presence at her house next evening.

CHAPTER IV.—Kate keeps her appointment, and is received by Mr. and Mrs. Winks—by the latter rather coldly. Her free and easy manners do not meet Winks' approval. She leaves with a law degree to copy out. On Sunday Dick comes to dinner, and a few family matters are explained. Kate again sees Mr. Winks, who shows himself pleased with her progress and gives her further work, which this time will be paid for. Miss Winks is more cordial than before, and promises to give Kate lessons in knitting.

CHAPTER V.—Mr. Carey gets promotion and an increase of salary. Mr. Winks becomes ill and Kate offers her services to read to him, which are accepted. Miss Winks' comments, both with and without grace, Winks' recovery and his return become more jealous. Winks offers Kate a present, and she selects a book. Dick Travers arrives and calls on the Careys. He speaks of James Tulloch, a rich friend of his, living in London. Kate and Travers take a walk.

CHAPTER VI.—Travers gets a note from James Tulloch, who has been in Scotland, announcing his return to London. They meet, for the first time in four years. Tulloch inquires about the Careys and learns of their reverses in fortune. He promises to call on them and do so on the following Sunday in company with Travers. They are made welcome. Tulloch, who has not seen Kate since she was a little girl, conceives a great admiration for her, and tells Travers of it. Mr. Carey is not at home when they called, but he writes a note inviting them both to dinner on the following Wednesday.

CHAPTER VII.—Travers and Tulloch go to dinner at Carey's. Mr. Carey tells of his good luck in being about to go to Ireland on a special mission for Mr. Winks. Mr. Carey has a scheme for establishing an Irish branch for Boucher and Winks, and Tulloch hints that he would advance some capital to enable him to enter the firm. Tulloch becomes more in love with Kate and Travers seem annoyed. On the way home Tulloch learns that Carey is not married, and tells Travers he is not seeking a penniless bride. Mr. Carey departs on his mission to Ireland.

CHAPTER VIII.—Travers invites Alicia and Kate to the theatre. Alicia being away for the evening Kate goes alone. On the way home a shaft of the carriage breaks, and Kate's shoulder is hurt, and in his excitement Travers loses his attention to his own. Kate goes to see Winks and has a confidential chat with him. On her return she finds James Tulloch in the drawing room and Alicia making tea for him.

CHAPTER IX.—CONTINUED.

"So you've missed Travers!" exclaimed that gentleman, starting up to greet her. "He's gone to look for you. He would you miss him?"

"The evening was so fine I came back earlier and a longer way," returned Kate, sinking into a chair with a sense of not being able to bear much more.

"Very foolish of you!" cried Alicia, "when you know you have been suffering all day with that shoulder. Have a cup of tea! It is nearly three hours since we had ours!"

"What's wrong with your shoulder?" asked Tulloch. Whereupon Alicia gave full account of the accident, while Kate drank her tea in silence.

"Well!" exclaimed Tulloch, "I flatter myself I would have taken better care of you than that, I thought Travers too keen and quick a chap not to have saved you from so nasty a bruise!"

"How could he?" said Kate, rather indignantly. "We both pitched forward before we knew where we were, and then, as the seat was unusually high, or that iron thing loomed, I came against it! The brute is not so bad. The pain is much better." "I hope Dick will not wait about too long."

"On of course, Dick Travers is always in the right," returned Tulloch, with a laugh. "Yes, very often, at least," said Kate, defiantly.

"At any rate, in your eyes," added Tulloch.

"We expect papa on Saturday," she remarked, to change the subject. It will be delightful to have him at home again, and then, Jamie, we must have that expedition to the Crystal Palace."

"Yes we must," agreed Tulloch. He paused, contemplating Kate earnestly with a slight knitting of the brows. "I say," he continued, "you are looking white, and bad enough."

"What an unconvincing speech!" she exclaimed, rising to put down her cup, and then moving to the window, where the curtain showed her from the gaslight. As she did so the front door bell rang, and in a minute or two Travers came in.

"I have been unsuccessful," he began, looking round with some anxiety, then perceiving Kate, he came quickly to her. "How did I miss you?" he exclaimed, taking her hand, and placing himself well between her and Tulloch. "You are suffering so much, Alicia tells me?" and he looked eagerly into her eyes, as if he could draw out the secrets of her heart.

Kate, though keeping herself very still and tranquil, felt the quick blood mount to her cheek with a rush, while Tulloch remarked, "She looks as white as a ghost, though," a speech that heightened Kate's feeling of uneasiness.

"I don't think I do, now!" she exclaimed, laughing, to mask her embarrassment. "I feel quite ashamed of making a fuss, and bearing pain so badly, I am really better, so please say no more about it."

"Eh?" cried Tulloch, "But I cannot help saying that a knowing chap like you, Travers would have taken better care of a young lady."

"You must be pretty blind not to see the drift of all her chaff this evening. She wants me up there to teach me, don't you see. I'll tell you she has taught me a goodish bit more than she knows."

"Indeed! Then you are condescending enough to accept her proffered affection?" "Why Travers, I believe you are a bit jealous. That's all folly, man. You couldn't go in for a wife without money, and you shouldn't stand in a girl's light; besides, you see she considers you a friend, and nothing more; to say nothing of your being four or five years older than I am, eh? What do you say; you are not such an ass as to think of marrying, nor such a conceited idiot as to fancy Kate Carey would ever accept you. Maybe you are right; darsay you are; at any rate it is not wise to lose one's heart to a girl that hasn't a penny. But I have always been a fool about a pretty face, and though Kate has no money, she isn't accustomed to luxuries, and seems very economical. After all, money is not everything. Of course, the father and sister are a drawback, but if I ever think seriously of the matter, I'll have it clearly understood that I am not going to marry the whole family."

"I fancy that Kate knows you well enough by this time not to expect any irrational degree of devotion on your part," said Travers, with much gravity.

"That's just it. She is a 'varr' sensible young lady," returned Jamie, who was apt to grow more Scotch as he was irritated to wrath or gentler emotion.

"Probably, but the most sensible girls are 'kittle cattle,' at least so people who profess to know them say—don't make too sure."

"Ah! that's just what I am not—I mean—I am not that sure of myself. You see there's nothing I'd like better than to make the Bonnie Bird my wife—but there's the business! It's hard when all expenses come out of one purse, and for a while I'll need all the capital I can get hold of to push the house. Eh, man! I see my way to a big thing, and I am loath to lose it. So you see I'm just torn two ways. It's grand to have a wife like fellow like yourself to talk over things, with as good a friend to you as to me—and then a steady settled chap of your sort isn't given to fancy himself in love or anything of that kind!"

"Much obliged for your high opinion. If, however, you are so sure of Kate's 'tendresse' for you, don't you think that you may 'break her heart entirely,' as her compatriots say, if you decide not to 'elevate her to the exalted position of Mrs. James Tulloch'?"

"There's an odd smirking way with you, Travers, at times that I can't say I like," exclaimed Tulloch. "No girl has a right to break her heart about a man who has never asked her downright to marry him."

"What a splendid definition of men's right! Here! hi! hi! hi! Sorry to leave you so abruptly. I know you like a 'bus'—there's one coming up—good night," and the next moment Tulloch was standing alone and thinking. "He might have given me a lift morn'—it wouldn't have cost him a penny! I hate selfishness and meanness!"

CHAPTER X.—THE WANDERER'S RETURN.

The sisters metaphorically killed the fatted calf (or rather, translated him into a boiled chicken, with white sauce and sausages), to welcome their parent home. Warm indeed was the welcome which he received, while his joyous youthful aspect completed the satisfaction of the meeting.

"You look lovely, dear," cried Kate, as she helped him to remove his dust coat, "and don't seem a bit tired after your long journey."

"Tired! Not a bit, faith! How should I be when I knew I was coming home to my darlings; only I thought the engine went slow—far too slow. Alas, my precious, you're a trifle pale. You've not been dragging your heart out trying to drive music in to the heads of these stupid Londoners? Ah! my jewels! If I go on and prosper as I am doing, divil the note you shall teach to mortal man, woman, or child. Well, Kate, how is old Winks?"

"I think he sees now that he got hold of the right man when he sent me to look into matters at Ballykillidoolan. Of all the thieves that scamp of an agent was the worst."

"Oh! I think Mr. Winks is very pleased with you indeed, papa; and he does his best to educate me. But he is neither well nor strong."

"Eh?" putting his hand to his ear. Kate repeated her words.

"Pleased is he? Faith! I hope he'll prove it. Now girls, I'll just go and brush the dust off me, and wash my hands; so call for dinner, I'm as hungry as a hunter."

Dinner was a highly cheerful feast, and highly appreciated by the returned wanderer. He had much to tell; one moment he recounted a droll story, with radiant smiles and the keenest sense of fun, the next he described the sadness of visiting the scenes of his past prosperity and happiness with genuine pathos.

"Faith! I wouldn't go back to live in the old place not for a pension—at least not under five thousand a year. The country is turned upside down; nothing but fapping in the best sense just riding rough shod over the real gentry. It's enough to turn your heart inside out."

"However, the Paptists had a very bad time of it for many a year," said Alicia, but Carey did not hear her.

"I had no end of kind attention paid me," he went on. "I might have dined out every day in Dublin, and I must say I was greatly tempted to give a nice little dinner to all my old friends at Morrisons. I forget what it's called now, but the thoughts of you, my darling girls, stopped me. I said to myself, 'No! I'll bring back my bit of savings to them, and faith, they shall have a new gown apiece! There they are,' pulling out a little leather bag, tied with a diminutive thong, carefully twisted around it, and pouring the contents upon the cloth, with a magnificent air of generosity that gave the effect of a shower of gold and silver."

"I did my best, but I'm afraid I only contrived, with all my endeavors, to scrape six pounds seventeen and fourpence halfpenny together. Alas, you take it, and go away tomorrow, and buy an elegant dress each of you!"

"Oh, thank you, you dear!" cried Kate, while Alicia pressed his hand. "We will not spend a vast sum like that. We must see what we all want most, and distribute the plunder. Oh, dear, it is nice to have you safe back."

"Ah, my heart, it's good for me! Sure no one ever makes me hear so well as my own girls! I must say I'm a good deal deater to an English voice than I am to an Irish one."

When the pleasant little dinner was over, there was a great outpouring of news. Though Carey had been kept well posted up in the occurrences of the last fortnight, there were still many trifling details to be told, all profoundly interesting to the hearer.

"I suppose Travers looked you up, and Tulloch?"

"James was only here once, I think, but Dick was very good," returned Kate. "Yes, Cousin Dick asked us to go to the theatre one evening. I was engaged, so Kate went, and returning the cab broke down. Kate's shoulder was hurt, and it is still stiff and painful," said Alicia.

"Eh? I thought Travers would have taken better care of my little girl."

"Yes, but he did take very good care of me, papa! He could not help the shaft breaking."

"No, no more he could. There isn't a better fellow in the world than Dick Travers. Why didn't you ask him to dine here to-night?"

"I thought of asking him," returned Alicia, "but he was engaged, or something, and we should only give him the trouble of writing to say no."

"I dare say he was right, and now, my darlings, I'll just take forty winks. Three hundred and twenty-four miles in eleven hours is pretty hard going for an old fellow that is nearer seventy than fifty. Then give me a cup of tea, and I'll put a few papers and memoranda in order to be ready to start early in the morning for the office."

Mr. Carey was accordingly settled in the least uneasy chair, a cushion placed judiciously under his head, a footstool under his feet, and the blind drawn down to shade the westerling sunlight. Then the girls went softly away to unpack the dear dad's duds, to put them in their places, and to ascertain what damage had been sustained at the hands of strange laundresses, an occupation which was sufficiently absorbing. They had nearly accomplished their task, and daylight was fading when the "gull" knocked ponderously at the door.

"Please, Miss, Mr. Travers is down stairs."

"How nice and kind of him!" exclaimed Alicia. "Papa will be so pleased. I am so sorry we did not ask him to dinner. This is a slightly reproachful tone to Kate, who only said, "Run down then, Alicia! I shall just finish putting away these shirts, and follow you directly."

Alicia found her father, his abundant grey locks a little dishevelled, standing in conversation with Travers, his blue eyes still beaming welcome on his favourite guest. Travers greeted Alicia, while his glance still rested on the door with an expected look.

"And tell him you have returned, papa! I darsay he will come out tomorrow evening to see you."

"I fear not," said Travers. "I met Tulloch this afternoon. He was in a great state of glorification, as he is to dine with some magnate, being invited suddenly, but he is highly pleased at being admitted anyhow into the holy of holies in Mammon's sanctuary."

"Why, Dick, you are really ill-natured," cried Kate, opening her big eyes.

Travers burst into a frank hearty laugh. "Yes," he said, "I confess I am. I had better cry peccavi, and throw myself on your cruel mercy, Kate; you have been developing on a fresh line lately. At your age, it is impossible to foresee your future mental condition."

"Well, Dick, I am not a baby."

"Yes, a charming, fascinating baby," he repeated.

Kate flushed up, and a fiery gleam sparkled in her eyes, but she exclaimed, with a quiet nod. "If I am charming and fascinating, I don't mind being a baby."

"Ah! you smooth-tongued flatterer," said her father, laughing; "don't bring your fine drawn compliments here."

"I hope, Dick, you will not let Jamie Tulloch escape our projected excursion to the Crystal Palace. I long for some hours among grass and trees; the gardens are lovely."

At this remote period of history the Palace on Sydenham Hill was looked upon by holiday makers as an earthly paradise. "I don't fancy he wants to escape. He was talking of it the other day; all we wait for is Mr. Carey's appointment of the day."

"Well, my dear boy, I can say nothing till I have seen Winks. I'll have a good lot of business to transact and matters to arrange before I can fix any time. I can tell you, Travers, I expect that my management of this affair will put me in an excellent position, and Kate thinks so too, don't you, my jewel?"

But Kate had slipped from the room, and did not return till Alicia called her.

"I see you don't forgive me for taking such an indifferent care of you," said Travers, with malice prepense, "though you speak me fair, with that deep-dyed hypocrisy which, with other vile qualities are making a settlement in your virgin soul."

"Don't say such disagreeable things, Dick," she exclaimed, more earnestly than she thought. "You know I don't blame you a bit."

"No, I know nothing of the kind; you won't come down to see me until you are compelled, and you run away as soon as you can. You must behave differently if you wish to efface the terrible impression you have made."

"I am a goose to mind you," she said; "you are only talking nonsense. I see you are laughing at me."

"I am nearer weeping than you think," said Travers; and, though he laughed too, there was a curious touch of earnestness in his voice as he pressed her hand tightly. "God-night, sweetest cos—is it not to be war to the knife between us?"

"Really Cousin Dick was almost in a bad temper to-night," said Alicia, when he had closed the front door.

"Yes, he is a little odd," returned Kate, thoughtfully.

Travers went away towards, in a curious state of dissatisfaction with Kate, with Carey, with himself. Was it possible that Kate could be taken up with the animal good looks, the commonplace compliments, the surface self-assertion of Tulloch? But women never understand men, or know how to appraise them; and Kate has seen so little of the world. But what a bright spirited creature she was, though variable, now melting in mist, and now breaking in gleams. Like the glimpses of a saint's face of heaven in his dreams. "Yes Kate had a good deal of heavenly about her; and what eyes—not holy eyes, by any means. At all events he had made a fool of himself. Had he suddenly reached second childhood, or gone back to the first, he had not for gotten habit and training as to let himself speak slightly of Tulloch. He had no patience with such assinine weakness. Rather than risk a repetition of it, he had better accept the proposal made to him a few days ago of Colonising and hunting in Africa, a far rarer project than now. But no. How could he forsake that weak, kind-hearted, amusing, blundering Carey, who was incapable of taking care of himself, much less his two daughters. He must be there to look after the whole party; quixotic as the aspect of his self devotion seemed, he could not leave Carey to his own devices. He was so hopelessly imprudent, so addicted to unexpected follies, that to leave him, the uncontrolled arbiter of Kate's destiny was impossible. Yet he was rather powerless to help his Irishman relatives. How was it that he felt irrevocably linked to their shabby-genteel fortunes? He was really contemptibly weak."

These reflections brought him to the spot on the Bayswater Road, where their cab came to grief a few nights, before, and he pines quickened at the memory of Kate's fright, of the strange, sweet reliance with which she had yielded to the clasp of his arms, and leant unresistingly against him. His lips had touched her hair, perhaps. But he was a double distilled ass to let these thoughts crowd upon him. He must be strong enough to resist the temptation of trying to win her when he had no home, no position to offer. It was much better that they should be friends only—that she should even amuse herself with Tulloch than waste her sweet fancy on a poor fellow who could be of no substantial service to her.

The following Monday evening saw Carey return triumphantly to his temporary domicile. Moreover he carried with him materials for a feast—a small mat basket containing a slice of salmon, some big beautiful strawberries, and a long round parcel under one arm which, when divested of its twine and brown paper, disclosed a bottle of sparkling Moselle.

"Well, my darlings! it's a poor heart that never rejoices," he said as he unbundled himself. "I thought we must have a bit of treat, for I declare that quare fellow, Winks, has turned up trumps. Dry as he is (and no chip ever was dryer) he let me know he was pleased and no mistake with the way I had done my work and then he says: 'as you have proved yourself so useful to the firm I am happy to offer you further engagement of a year from the present time at double your present salary.' What do you say to that? Faith I'll be a member of the firm before a couple more years are out. Of course he said that after

a year they might not have any more Irish business, but that's only the English way of hedging his book. Old Winks is not the sort of man to lose hold of a clever employe, I can tell you. I hope we have seen our worst days, my darlings! Now you go and buy your gowns tomorrow: mind you don't spoil the ship for want of a horth of tar." So Carey's triumphant return was inaugurated, and things soon settled down to their ordinary routine.

Several days past and still Jamie Tulloch made no sign, nor did Travers appear at Notting-hill, but he looked in at the office and exchanged a few friendly words with Carey, who had been promoted to a small den overlooking a melancholy yard, which he generally had to himself, though not strictly "private."

He had written to Alicia, too, and sent the sisters tickets for a private view of some pictures exhibited at one of the big picture dealers.

During the last few months a more intimate acquaintance had developed itself between Miss Golding and her deputy assistant music teacher. She had taken a whim for the quiet lively young woman whose help in her practising she found very useful—a sudden fancy for patronising her and her sister—such as rich pampered girls often indulge in. She was a good natured healthy manly creature, not troubled with sensitiveness or imagination, firmly convinced of the power bestowed by wealth and beauty, both of which she thought she possessed—she had a fair share of good looks, of the "rouge et noir" type, and was a little troubled by a tendency to grow stout. She fancied herself the most generous and warm-hearted of human beings and was quite unaware of the strong strain of selfishness running through all her thoughts and deeds.

Calling on Miss Carey one afternoon, she was introduced to Kate, to whom she took an immense fancy, which Kate had not very ardently reciprocated. Her refusal, in a very sweet and courteous manner of sundry invitations, conveyed rather in the style of Royal commands, only whetted Miss Golding's appetite for Kate's society, and her usual strong determination to get what-ever she wanted urged her on. So one fine afternoon a week after Mr. Carey's return, she suddenly presented herself at Oakley Villas, double Victoria, championing horses, coachman, footman—all complete.

Both sisters were at home—not a common occurrence—when Miss Golding, gorgeously attired, broke in upon them.

"Well, this is nice, I scarcely hoped to find both of you. Saturday afternoon, I suppose. I have had a horrid disappointment. I was going down to such a smart 'Saturday to Monday' party, at the Lorrimer's—you know the Lorrimer's—the big shipowner people; they have a sweet place near Ewell, and if one of their horrid children hasn't developed measles! I had a telegram last night, every one put off. So I have come for consolation. Go now and dress yourself in your best, I'll take you a nice drive round the park, there certainly won't be many fashionable people today, and we'll eat some ices at Ginter's or go into the country round by Finchley, Eh?"

"Thank you very much," said Alicia quietly.

"Oh! the country would be delightful. You are very kind, Mr. Golding," cried Kate, starting up and beginning to put away her work. "Saturday afternoon was generally given to stitching of the reno-vating order."

"That's right, I like people that can enjoy themselves. Now don't be long dears; my horses get out of temper when they are kept waiting."

Alicia and Kate went "off" with much rapidity, and Miss Golding walked to the window and surveyed the unknown grass, the tangled shrubs, and untrimmed trees beneath.

"It might be made pretty enough," she thought, "but law! what's the good of capabilities when people have no money to develop them? What's this, on a miniature," opening a faded morocco case which stood on the chiffonier with a few bits of china and other ornaments. "What a pretty woman! The youngest girl is like her! Why she might be a duchess! Dear, dear, how strange it is that these elegant sort of people never seem able to keep their money! It is an awful price to pay for elegance! Anyhow, nature is kind to some people as well as to fortune! This is the papa, I suppose. He's a good looking too! He might be a cavalry man, instead of a miserable solicitor's clerk."

Here her researches and conjectures were interrupted. The door opened and Tulloch walked in. He was as usual well dressed, but his brow was slightly clouded, and eyes troubled. A look of startled astonishment came into the face of each.

"Why, Mr. Tulloch," cried Miss Golding, who was the first to recover, "I had no idea I should meet you here!"

"Nor I, that I should have that pleasure! I was not aware that my cousins had the honor of knowing you."

"Your cousins? Do you mean to say these Carey girls are related to you?"

"Yes," he returned, not too eagerly, "they are cousins on my great grandmother's side."

"Great grandmother's side," repeated Miss Golding. "Trust Irish and Scotch people for tracing out distant connections—counting cousins don't you call it? That is a sort of compound family interest I don't see any good in, for my part."

"I am surprised Kate has not mentioned her acquaintance with you," resumed Tulloch, with a tinge of disapprobation in his tone, as if Kate had concealed something which was greatly to her credit.

"Oh! she is not my friend," returned Miss Golding, "though I like her immensely. She is so bright and amusing. But the eldest is my practising mistress—the sort of thing an accompanist is, since I have taken to singing she accompanies me."

Dismissed silence fell upon James Tulloch. He was aware that both his cousins worked together to increase the store of family bread, and in the natural and unadulterated condition of his heart and mind he admired and approved their industry. But in the face of the gorgeous, potent, elegant Miss Golding, with her laughing blue eyes and her contempt for poverty and failure, it was—well, not exactly a connection to be proud of. He would have preferred Alicia and Kate having another Victoria—one of their own standing beside Miss G's, in which they might race neck and neck. However, to do him justice, he was too much a man to show the white feather.

"Ah! yes, I know Alicia did something in music somewhere. I'm glad she works