

NOW FIRST PUBLISHED.

# A Winning Hazard,

BY MRS. ALEXANDER.

Author of "Her Dearest foe," "The Wooing O't," "A Crooked Path," &c., &c.

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CHAPTER XII.

The rain prospered by Travers began as the little party sat down to dinner. The table was set in a window which commanded a fine view, but this became gradually enveloped in the dull leaden mist of small thickly enduring rain, which increased in density as evening closed in.

The dinner, however, was gay and festive. For the moment Tulloch seemed to have cast the cold counsels of prudence to the winds, Carey was always at his best on such occasions. Travers, too, seemed determined to enjoy himself, while Kate's gay recklessness of speech and sentiment, and her risqué quiet appreciation of the other's pleasantries completed the ingredients of an unusually agreeable party.

As the rain continued to come down with increased heaviness they agreed to give up the idea of staying for the fireworks, and get away before the rush for town began. Travers proposed that they should all take tea in his room, which was agreed to readily, and they set forth by the underground passage to the high level station.

A train had just started as they reached the platform, and there was no other for half an hour, so they strolled up and down, read the edifying tracts, and looked at the books and papers on the book stands at the usual fashion of unfortunates who have missed their train. Carey, his eldest daughter, and Travers were lingering over some caricatures in "Aly Slopers," while Kate and Tulloch walked to and fro somewhat silently.

"Have you noticed that lady in black who is sitting at the end of the platform, huddled up in a despairing way?" asked Kate, suddenly. "No," said Tulloch; then looking closer as they passed the motionless figure, he added, "I don't think she is a lady, she is some old servant out of place."

"Well, I think she is a lady," insisted Kate. "Her clothes look rusty, but she has a refined look. Clothes alone don't constitute a gentleman, Jamie, though you may not have learned the fact in India. Somehow, that I do not like to seem a stranger to me; I do not like to stare at her too much. Alas, dear," stepping beside her sister, "I want to know if you recognize that lady in black sitting under the board with third-class written on it. Come with me?"

The two girls passed her again, and for the first time the woman in black raised her head, and looked at them with dull despairing eyes. Then Tulloch and Travers, to their great surprise, saw Kate run to her and take her hand in both her own, and even kiss her sorrow cheek. After a moment's hesitation Alicia also greeted her. They could not hear Kate's exclamation, "Madame la Rose! It must be dear Madame la Rose! Don't you remember Kate Carey?"—Kate, your naughty pupil—long ago in Dublin?"

A look of pleased recognition lit up the dull dark eyes and faded face. "Mon Dieu! Can this be little Kate, and Alicia? What has brought you here, to this cruel town, my children?" "I may say unfortunate," returned Kate. "I must call papa, he will be so pleased to see you."

"I doubt that," said Madame la Rose. "I am too unfortunate to be welcome to anyone."

"That is no fault in papa's eyes," said Alicia, with her quiet smile. "I know! I know how good he has ever been," cried the poor French woman. "Ah! my evil fortune has been too much for me. Here Mr. Carey, with Kate on his arm, came up radiant, charmed to have an opportunity of doing some small kindness to an old acquaintance and protégé. His bow was elegant and chivalrously deferential.

"This is indeed a great and unexpected pleasure. I thought you had returned to your own beautiful country. I hope you are staying for a while in London that we may have the pleasure of renewing our old friendship."

Madame la Rose did not reply; her heart was too full for utterance, and she strove silently to gain composure. I did return to France," she said at length, "and then unfortunately left it. I have a sad story to tell, but I need not trouble you at this moment; my immediate misfortune is that on reaching the station more than an hour ago to return to town, I found a large number of persons waiting; the train came in at the same time, and I was in the rush for places, succeeded in finding one. I am weak, having been ill. When the train was gone, putting my handkerchief back in my pocket, I missed my purse; some pocket-pocket had taken it. My ticket was in it, and all my money. With the last word her voice broke, and it was evident she had sustained a great disaster.

"Oh, never mind," cried Carey, blushing upon her. Faith, that can be soon remedied. You shall come back with us, and I'll see you to your place myself."

"Oh, mon sieur, that would be too much. I live far away—near the High Street, St. John's Wood."

"Never mind, I'll see you home for old acquaintance sake; and we'll settle some day when you can spend it with the girls. You would not know Kate; I'll go bail; she has grown up a fine slip of a girl."

Her sweet face came back to me as soon as she spoke. "Here's our train; take my arm, madame. It's like a bit of the pleasant times come back to me, to see you again. Madame la Rose was very white and tremulous, as Carey handed her carefully into a first class carriage. "But the ticket," she murmured. "Don't trouble yourself," he returned. "I can pay the ticket collector when he comes—better than mounting those high stairs."

promised to call on a friend from Edinburgh who is staying at the Royal Hotel in Blackfriars Road, and I shouldn't like to disappoint him. Good night, Mr. Carey; good night, Kate. See you tomorrow or next day, Travers. And he was gone. Travers laughed. "Poor Tulloch!" he said. "You tried him too severely, Mr. Carey. Such a wild proposition was more than he could stand."

"What is it to him?" asked Kate. "What indeed," echoed Alicia. "Come along, it's all hours," exclaimed her father. "Travers, my boy, a thousand thanks for a delightful day, also to Jamie Tulloch. Tell him from me. He's a queer creature. When will you be coming up our way? To-morrow? No. Never mind; come when you can. Always glad to see you."

"Are you?" said Travers, in a low tone, as his eyes sought Kate's, and found their answer there. His guests gone, Travers threw himself into an arm chair and gave himself up to thought. He had several invitations for that evening, but none that compelled his presence.

"No, I shall not want anything more," he said to his ex-servant, and present landlord, who presented himself as soon as the table was cleared, "I shall soon turn in. Good night!" He lit a cigar, and began to muse over the day. It had not been all pleasure—in fact, it had had many disagreeable moments, but a few sweet ones also. "I am an awful fool—an unmitigated ass," was his sentence on himself. "After all these years of quiet comfort and common sense, to lose my head—ay, and that indefinite thing, my heart, about a young creature who was not born till I had nearly attained manhood! It is positively despicable! Is it, though? Is it a delusion of the love fever, or a reality, that there's something irresistible about Kate? To me at all events she is attractive both to sense and intellect. Intensely human, with a dash of nobility; not easy to win, I fancy; but if she once gave herself she would give utterly. It is positively pathetic to see how she lives and works for her father—ready to brave anything and everything for those she loves, without counting the cost. What an infernally cruel turn of destiny to rob me of powder and shot before I had a chance of bringing down so grand a quarry! But have I? Perhaps—only perhaps. Kate is no mere timid blushing girl, ready to crouch and come to heel at a few tender complimentary words. Her keen sense of humour forbids that. She is splendidly brave too, yet a delicious coward. Would she have lain so confidently still against Tulloch, had he been her escort that night when the cab broke down? I feel the throb of her heart still. No, she has never idealised Jamie. She knows him through and through. Did she mean to warn me of her readiness to barter herself in order to provide for her father's old age when we talked on the balcony to day? I believe her sound judgment would forbid that sort of insane devotion. But if she did, she would pay the price, to the uttermost farthing. What is best for me and for them—for Kate—am I strong enough to see her often, and let neither tongue nor eyes betray what I feel, or hamper our friendship with the desperate tangle of passion? I hope so—and would the pleasure counter-balance the pain?"

"It is hard to say," he rose and took two letters from a drawer of his bureau. One was a business-looking epistle, on bluish paper; the other bore an elaborate monogram on its thick cream lid note. He read over the first, and laid it down. It was from the organizer of the exploring expedition before mentioned. "It is a good offer," mused Travers, "but will it lead to independence—to something of a decent home, even though in the wilds of an infant colony? Would it be best to venture in order to have? and leave poor Carey to take care of himself and the girls, or hold on to London, and be a sort of guardian, though a poor one, to these shorn sheep? Carey has done better than I hoped, but I can see that his position with Wincks is very precarious. I must wait. I need not decide immediately. He folds the letter lengthways, ready to be placed in the "to be answered" packet, and slowly tore up the envelope. Then he read the other. It was very brief. "Dear Dick, I only arrived this morning. Come and lunch with me tomorrow. All news when we meet. Are you going to Gertrude's moonlight garden party? I only hope the moon will be so obliging as to shine.—Yours always, Frances Hume."

This bore the address "Long's Hotel." While Travers mused on "love and money," Kate lay very still, though wide-awake, on her little white bed, watching the luminous darkness of a summer's night, and living the past day over again. It was too bad to have been obliged to give so much of it to Jamie Tulloch, when she might have had so many opportunities of delightful tete-a-tete talk with Dick. She never could talk so easily, or she fancied, so well to anyone as to Dick. "Jamie is not bad though, and I like him," she thought. "Anyhow, he is a nice fellow. He must know that I love him, and even though he felt inclined to love me, which is not likely, it would only make him miserable. No, he must be ambitious. Men ought to be ambitious, and marry a rich woman, as Jamie says he could if he liked. Good night, dear Dick, and good-bye. God bless you!" If a few tears moistened her pillow, why "the mist of night was on her face," and the nature within her had all the weakness of its strength.

CHAPTER XIII.—AN INTERLUDE.

To a friend, even an old friend, into the intimacy of every day life, to share one's roof, and the unavoidable revelations of existence in common, to a bold and frequently a disastrous attempt. Irish and French natures, however, are favorable to such an experiment, being sympathetic and gregarious. Kate, who had occasional glimpses of common sense, in spite of her impulsiveness, and Alicia, in whom the same light shone more steadily, were both conscious that in asking their old governess to share their narrow home Mr. Carey had committed an imprudence. Yet they were pleased to receive her, and really glad that "Papa" had thrown discretion to the winds.

It was like old times to have Madame la Rose with them again; to hear her well-remembered voice, her exceedingly French pronunciation of her fairly fluent English; she brought back the bright, and also the sad, days of their more prosperous time, and at once fell into the routine of their quiet lives with a full and grateful heart.

As she had paid up her rent when she gave warning a week before, she was able to leave her rooms next day and remove to Oakeley Villa.

What pen could describe the trembling gratitude, the overpowering sense of relief which almost unnerved her as she found herself installed in a favored guest with her old pupils and their kindly generous father. Once more she had a breathing space, a chance of finding employment. She had gone down to Norwood to rally an engagement which she considered cast in, and on which she expected to enter immediately, when, to her dismay, she found the lady who had engaged her had been summoned back to India by her husband, and she had decided on leaving her children at school. Then came the loss of her purse containing her all, and leaving her with ten shillings in a corner of her workbox to carry her on through the long doubtful search for pupils.

Now, for the moment, she again hoped, and her weary heart revived. Alicia and Kate were quite busy making her tiny room as comfortable as their means would allow, and gave her a warm welcome on her arrival. Then they sat down and talked immensely over that delightful incentive to conversation, a cup of tea. Madame la Rose was profoundly grieved to hear of her good friends' reverses, of which she had gathered but a faint idea from Mr. Carey's account, and realized how generous and self-forgetting was the hospitality offered to herself. The hand which held her cup trembled as she eagerly consulted the girls respecting her chances of finding work.

Alicia was encouraging. The school in which she gave music lessons had not long been opened, and was on a small scale, too small to accommodate more than one governess in addition to the mistress and scholars. This put the owner in some difficulty as to teachers and obliged her to engage outsiders. Thus Alicia found an opening, and this suggested to her that Mme. la Rose might be accepted also, as she had heard a rumour that the present French teacher was looking out for a resident position.

Mme. la Rose caught at the idea, and they discussed the question fully. Then their new inmate fastened to make herself useful. She had the genius for needlework, the indefatigable industry of the table, and she confided (temporarily) all the unmade garments in the little commonwealth and put them all in sound working order. She rummaged all the bits of good old lace held in abeyance in the uttermost ends of drawers and boxes by both girls for want of time to wash and sort them, and performed miracles of mending and clear starching. Above all she managed to conclude an honorable and durable peace with Mrs. Silter, the landlady, by which she acquired the "freedom of the kitchen" and permission to cook "dainty dishes" and instruct its mistress to do likewise. Then she played backgammon and piquet with the head of the family unwearily, and even managed an accompaniment to Kate's ballads, and made the sisters try one.

"Can't you come up to dinner on Saturday?" said Mr. Carey to Tulloch, whom he encountered near the Bank about a week after their excursion to the Crystal Palace. "It's a month of Sundays since we saw either you or Travers. We have an uncommon agreeable French lady staying with us. You remember her—the same that had her pocket picked. We have joined forces for a bit. I'll promise you one or two good dishes, begged. Madame is a regular 'Cordon blue,' if you know what that is. The girls were wondering what had become of you. Hope you are not engaged to any Czesas of your acquaintance, Jamie, my boy! Come and let us have a pleasant evening; if you will take sound pale ale instead of shabby champagne, for it's not every one knows the real thing."

Tulloch hesitated, and then said he would be very happy. "All right," said Carey. "I must not loiter. I'm just up to the neck in work. Poor Wincks is no great thing—hasn't the strength of a fly! And I see he wants me more and more. In fact, I am his right hand man."

"Hope he won't die," ejaculated Tulloch. "It would be a blue look out for you, I suspect."

"And why should I? I am pretty essential to the firm, I can tell you."

"Well, I hope so," returned Tulloch, and they parted.

"I hate croakers," said Carey to himself as he made his way down Moorgate Street. "Men think themselves so mighty wise when they prophesy misfortune! Sure I've had enough to last a lifetime."

Wincks had been sitting since the hot weather set in, and though he stuck to his office work he did not seem equal to give Kate any directions about her, though he occasionally asked her to stay and read aloud when she called to inquire for him or return books which she had borrowed. He sometimes asked Mr. Carey to call of an evening, and planned the morrow's business in the cool quiet of his own parlor. Miss Wincks, too, about this time became entangled in the clerical mesh of the rector's scheme for a bazaar in aid of his schools, and Alicia, Kate and Madame went diligently to work to supply her stall, so the friendly returned relations between employer and employed were intensified.

This, however, is anticipating. Of Travers they had heard little. Only one letter asking if they would like to go to the Haymarket, to see the last performance of the most popular actor of that season, before his departure for America.

To this Kate made Alicia reply declining the offer, on the plea of work to be done at home. "Why won't you go, Kate?" asked her sister. "You love the theatre so much." "Oh! well—because I won't," said Kate, and Alicia asked no more.

Jamie Tulloch was a little late, and looked rather serious, though he cheered up at the cordial greeting of his host when he came to dinner. "This is a relative of mine," said Carey, with a graceful and gracious wave of his hand. "Mr. Tulloch, my respected friend, Madame la Rose. Mr. Tulloch, has resided in India for a considerable time, and seen a great deal of life at home and abroad, so I have no doubt you'll have much in common."

Tulloch, in spite of himself, felt considerably impressed. Could it be possible that this lady-like looking woman in black silk, with a pretty old-fashioned lace fichu, and her abundant grey hair elegantly pinned at the top of her head, could be the bowed, despairing figure in shabby garments who

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had excited his suspicion a week ago. He little guessed the range of years through which almost religious care had preserved Madame's best black silk.

"And where is Miss Kate?" asked Tulloch, glancing round with a sudden fear that she should be defrauded of her society.

"She will be here directly, she has only just come in. Miss Golding wanted her to choose some things for her party next week, so they went early; but Kate stayed to lunch, and spent the afternoon also."

Tulloch was not particularly pleased by this speech. He did not like the intimacy which was growing up between Miss Golding and his cousin; they might even compare notes, which would never do. While he talked between two attractions, and hesitated to which he should throw the handkerchief—while he thought, Madame la Rose was speaking. "Mademoiselle will be ready soon; she asked if Mr. Tulloch had arrived directly she entered." Here the door opened to admit the missing member, who smiled brilliantly on Tulloch, and gave him a message from Miss Golding.

"When she heard you were to dine with us, Jamie, she said she was sure you'd like to come early on the 30th; he might help me in many ways."

"Then they have been chattering about me," he thought, while he observed aloud, "I'm sure I shall be very happy to be of any use to her."

"No doubt," returned Kate with an arch glance, which sent a thrill of pride and pleasure through his veins. "She's allous; he hangs if he isn't," was his self-flattering conclusion.

Here dinner appeared, and they sat down in high good humour. Carey helping Madame first with the most polite attention and drawing attention to the excellence of the "sole au gratin," which is only a piece of beef, though you would never know."

"It's uncommon good," said Tulloch, who was by no means superior to the pleasures of the table, and he gazed with increased respect at Madame la Rose as the "author of this good thing."

His mood was a little mixed. The present was delightful and gratifying to his self-love; but the future—that must not be lost sight of. There was much lively talk during the repast, and by the time strawberries and cream were put on the table the little party had settled down into a pleasant degree of familiarity.

"I am sorry you are not going to Miss Golding's ball," said Tulloch, who took it for granted there was no admission for such humble Paris as Alicia and Kate, through the golden gates of the Westbourne Terrace Paradise. "I'd like to have a dance with you. I care say you would make a famous partner."

"No doubt I should," returned Kate, with a little nod and smile. "But I told Miss Golding Alcie and I never went to Paris. It was no use attempting them. She was very nice and kind, and was evidently disposed to offer us ball dresses on the spot. But I have brought her into training. She does not attempt to offer presents now."

"No, faith! Kindness and civility as you like, and hearty thanks for them; but we don't want any crumbs from the tables of other people," said Carey. "Oh, my darling! Any way, Miss Golding seems a brick, and she is a pretty girl into the bargain. Begad, good looks fortune together is too much luck. I suppose nothing short of a peer of the realm will do for her."

"Whoever may be her husband, I earnestly hope she may find a really good one. She is a kind warm-hearted girl as ever lived," exclaimed Alicia.

Now Tulloch pondered these speeches, while Madame la Rose was saying, "It is always well to have an evening toilette. One may lose much by staying at home. I think with that Indian muslin of yours, some ribbon, and little foliage, a charming costume de bal might be arranged. Let us plan it to-morrow," said Madame la Rose.

"Willingly," cried Kate. "You are wonderful, dear madame."

"Sen Travers lately?" asked Tulloch, helping himself to cream. "Haven't had a glimpse of him since our grand day at the Palace," returned Carey. "I had a note asking us to go to the theatre. But we could not manage it," said Kate.

"He is a great chap for the theatres," resumed Tulloch. "I went to the Opera on Wednesday with Mrs. McClaren, of Bombay, and her daughter, who are over here just now, and doing the shows, and I saw Travers with a grand swell lady in the stage-box. Some young fellows who came to speak to Mrs. McClaren said she was the Honourable Mrs. Douglas Hume. Anyhow they seemed very thick, looking round the house with their glasses, and laughing together as if the whole world was a source of fun. I'm told she is a rich widow, so maybe Travers is on the road to fortune. She is a fine, handsome woman, nearer forty than thirty, I fancy. They went away together."

"A rich handsome widow!" cried Kate, with a bright glance at the speaker. "If she is good, too; I hope the will marry cousin Dick. He deserves to be happy, and I am sure he will make a nice pleasant husband."

"That is high praise," said Madame la Rose, "a pleasant husband is even more rare than a good one."

"Why, Katie dear, you are a fortune in yourself," cried her father. "Your health, my jewel! and he raised a glass of very thin claret to his lips."

"That's true!" said Tulloch, gallantly. "At the same time she is right enough; every thoughtful girl would like to be a help to her husband. It is a little hard on a man when everything comes out of one purse."

"Yes, if the purse be small," remarked Alicia. "Otherwise it must be joy to a man who can afford it to give all possible luxury to the woman he loves."

"To be sure it is, one of the greatest pleasures in his life," exclaimed Mr. Carey. "But when a couple love each other, it does not matter two straws which has the cash."

"Mr. Tulloch does not take the same view of the subject," said Madame la Rose, with a knowing smile. "He is on the side of the married, and no doubt thinks a little gliding improves everything."

"I am as disinterested as my neighbours," retorted Tulloch, who was not in a particularly good temper, "and you have no right to think otherwise, Madame."

"But that is exactly what I do think," she replied, sweetly. "I believe Miss Golding's ball is to be a grand affair," said Alicia, the peace-maker, to change the subject.

"Yes, first rate; she is to have that Indian Maharajah, who has been the lion this season, and dining every evening from Marlborough House to the Palmongers' Hall, and James Sir Peregrine Chumley, with a lot of other big game. The flowers will cost a lot, I believe."

"Quite a small fortune," cried Kate. "I was with Miss Golding in the florists to-day, and enjoyed seeing all the lovely creations. I suppose the Maharajah will wear all his jewels?"

"Yes, of course. 'I should like to see them.' 'Then why will you not go?' 'I am not sufficient; even the jewels are not ample!' bait."

"Le jeu vie vaut pis la chandelle," murmured Madame la Rose, an ordinary expression, which raised the ire of Jamie, who, not understanding French, believed it masked some insult, unexpressed in English.

"You're right," exclaimed Carey, who often surprised his companions by his exposed agreement with their opinions. He hated to seem deaf, and knew that dissension was dangerous. He gathered that Madame and Jamie were opposed to each other, though none of the argument being addressed to him, he chose to escape him. "You never said a truer word. Have a little claret, Madame? That I should ever apply such a title to mere common r like this vintage stuff, Madame declined, and then the bell was rung and the table cleared, while Kate devoted herself to a similar process on Tulloch's temper, not without success.

There was a strong strain of mischief in Kate Carey, and for some reason it amused her to play upon the notes of Jamie's emotional keyboard. She smiled upon him, and chaffed him about Miss Golding, and sang Scotch airs to him, and generally foisted him to the top of his bent; while Alicia looked on it in somewhat grave surprise, and Madame la Rose threw in little remarks from time to time, every one of which, though most innocent, were offensive and irritating to Tulloch, till he sought ignominious safety in flight, retreating to the solitude of his own abode, to fight a distressing battle between prudence and passion, over more than one tumbler of whiskey and water, before mental weariness drove him to bed.

"I really don't quite understand you, Kate," said Alicia, seriously, as they prepared for the night, which was their confidential time. "I dare say you do not, Alicia. I don't understand myself."

"Do you care for Jamie Tulloch?" "Dear Alcie," drawing herself up, and speaking demurely, though there was a gleam of fun in her eyes. "I hope I am too well brought up a young lady to care for any man who does not care for me. In short it is too bold, too audacious for a down-trodden woman to take the initiative in such a game. Of course, it will do and rising individual like Jamie chooses to condescend to a maiden of low degree like myself. I hope I am prepared to show a proper amount of gratitude. But oh, I am so tired—tired of everything. Let us go to bed. I am going to see dear Mr. Wincks to-morrow afternoon; I quite enjoy a talk with him. After papa, I believe he is the dearest man I know, and he tries to be extra hard with me, and all the time I am sure he would give a great deal to have me for a daughter. That poor soul has been only half alive all these years, and he has a heart, though he is rather ashamed of such a weak spot."

Alicia lay awake a little longer, almost envying her sister the rapidity with which sleep folded its balmy wings over her tired eyelids. Little dreaming how long, and with how much sad courage, Kate contemplated the future which confronted her, before her waking stillness was merged into oblivion.

To be Continued.

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