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## DR. RUMSEY'S PATIENT:

A VERY STRANGE STORY.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

The next day Vincent got up early. It was his wont to rise betimes. Small as his farm was he managed it well, superintending everything that went on it, and did, when possible, the greater part of the work himself. He rose now from the side of his sleeping wife, looked for a moment at her fair, flower-like face, clenched his fist at a memory which came over him, and then stole softly out of the room.

The morning was a lovely one, warm for the time of year, balmy with the full promise of spring. The trees were clothed in their tenderest green; there was a faint blue mist near the horizon which would pass into positive heat later on.

Vincent strode along with his hands deep in his pockets. He looked like a man who was struggling under a heavy weight. In truth he was; he was unaccustomed to thought, and he now had plenty of that commodity to worry him. What was the matter with Hetty? What was her secret? Did Mrs. Everett's queer words mean anything or nothing? Why did Hetty want to see the Squire? Was it possible that the Squire—? The man dashed one of his hands suddenly into space.

"Drat it," he muttered, "if I thought it, I'd kill 'im."

At this moment the sound of footsteps approaching caused him to raise his head; he had drawn up close to a five-barred gate. He saw a woman's bonnet above the hedgerow—a woman dressed in black was coming in his direction—she turned the corner and he recognised Mrs. Everett. He stared at her for a full moment without opening his lips. He felt he did not know her; a queer sensation of possible danger stirred at his heart. What was she doing at this hour? Vincent knew nothing of the ways of women of quality; but surely they had no right to be out at this hour in the morning.

The moment Mrs. Everett saw him she quickened her footsteps. No smile played round her lips, but there was a look of welcome and of grateful longing in her keen, dark eyes.

"I had a presentiment that I should find you," she said. "I wanted to have a talk with you when no one was by. Here you are, and here am I."

"Mornin' ma'am," said Vincent, awkwardly.

"Good morning," answered Mrs. Everett. "The day is a beautiful one," she continued; "it will be hot by and by."

Vincent did not think it necessary to reply to this.

"I'm due in the five acre field," he said, after a long pause. "I beg pardon, ma'am, but I must be attending to my duties."

"If you wish to cross that field," said Mrs. Everett, "I have not the least objection to accompanying you."

Vincent hesitated. He glanced at the five-barred gate as if he meant to vault over it, then he looked at the lady; she was standing perfectly motionless, her arms hanging straight at her sides; she came a step or two nearer to him.

"Look you here," he said then, suddenly. "I'm a plain body—a man, so to speak, of one idea. There are the men yonder waitin' to fall to with the spring turnips, and 'ere am I waitin' to give 'em orders, and 'ere are you, ma'am, waitin' to say summat. Now I can't attend to the men and to you at the same time, so p'raps you'll speak out, ma'am, and go."

"I quite understand your position," said Mrs. Everett. "I would much rather speak out. I have come here to say something about your wife."

"Ay," said Vincent, folding his arms, "it's mighty queer what you should 'ave to say 'bout Hetty."

"Not at all, for I happen to know something about her."

"And what may that be?"

"I'll tell you if you will give me time to speak. I told you last night who I am—I am Mrs. Everett, the mother of a man who has been falsely accused of murder."

"Falsely!" echoed Vincent, an incredulous expression playing round his lips.

"Yes, falsely. Don't interrupt me, please. Your wife witnessed that murder."

"That's true enough, and it blackened her life, poor girl."

"I'm coming to that point in a minute. You witnessed the murder. She was very young at the time. It was well-known that the murdered man wanted to make her his wife. It was supposed, quite falsely, but it was the universal supposition, that his son was also one of her lovers. This was not the case. But it is just possible that she had another lover—she was a very pretty girl, the sort of a girl who would attract men in a station above her own."

Vincent's face grew black as night.

"I have my reason," continued Mrs. Everett, "for believing it possible that your wife had another lover. There is, at least, not the slightest doubt that the man who killed Mr. Squire did so in a fit of jealousy."

"Praps so," said Vincent. "It may be so. I loved Hetty then—I longed to make her my wife then. I'm in her own station—it's best for girls like Hetty to marry in their own station. She told me that the man who was murdered wanted to make her his wife, but she never loved him, that I will say."

"She may have loved the murderer."

"The man who is suffering penal servitude?" cried Vincent. "Your son, ma'am? Then of you think so he'd best stay with re'st."

"I am not talking of my son but of the real murderer," said Mrs. Everett, slowly. "Vincent stated at her. He thought she was slightly off her head."

"I was in court when your son was tried," he said, at last. "Twas a plain case. He killed his man—it was brought in manslaughter, wasn't it? And he didn't swing for it. I don't know what you mean, ma'am, an' I'd like to be away now at my work."

"I have something more to say, and then I'll go. I met your wife about a year ago. We met on Salisbury Plain."

"Ay, she's fond of the Plain, Hetty is."

"I told her then what I now tell you."

She fell on her knees in terror—she clasped my dress, and asked me how I had found out. Then she recovered herself, tried to eat her own words, and left me. Since then she has avoided me. It was the sight of me last night that made her will turn faint. I repeat that she carries a secret. If that secret were known it might clear my son. I want to find it out. If you will help me and if we succeed, I'll give you a thousand pounds."

"Taint to be done, ma'am," said Vincent. "Het is nervous, and a bit given to 'sterics, but she knows no more 'bout that murder than all the rest of this world knows; and what's more, I wouldn't take no money to probe at my wife's heart. Good mornin', ma'am, I must be seoin' to my turnips."

Vincent vaulted the five barred gate as he spoke, and walked across the field.

Mrs. Everett watched him until he was out of sight. Then she turned slowly, and went back to the Court. She entered the grounds a little before the breakfast hour. Ann, now Mrs. Hennessey, was out in the avenue gathering daffodils, which grew in clumps all along a quiet border. She raised her head when she saw Mrs. Everett approaching.

"You out?" she cried. "I thought I was the only early bird. Where have you been?"

"For a walk," replied the widow. "The morning is a lovely one, and I was not sleepy. She did not wait to say anything more to Ann, but went into the house."

The breakfast room at the Court had French windows. The day was so balmy, that early as it was still in the year, these windows stood open. As Mrs. Everett stepped across threshold, she was greeted by Margaret.

"How pale and tired you look," said Mrs. Awdrey, in a compassionate voice.

Mrs. Everett glanced round her, she saw that there was no one else present.

"I am sick at heart, Margaret," she said, fixing her sad eyes on her friend's face.

Margaret went up to her, put her slender hand on her shoulder, and kissed her.

"Why won't you rest?" she said; "you never rest; even at night you scarcely sleep; you will kill yourself if you go on as you have been doing of late, and I then—"

"Why do you stop, Margaret?" said Mrs. Everett.

"When he comes out you won't be there," said Margaret—tears brimming into her eyes. "I often see the meeting between you and him," she continued. "When he comes out; when it is all over; he won't be old, as men go, and he'll want you. Try and think of the very worst that can happen—his innocence never being proved; even at the worst he'll be free some day and then he'll want you sorely."

"He won't have me. I shall be dead long, long before his punishment is over; but I must prove his innocence. I have an indescribable sensation that I am near the truth when I am here, and that is why I came. Margaret, my heart is on fire—the burning of that fire consumes me."

At this moment the Squire entered the room; he looked bright, fresh, alert, and young. He was now a man of rapid movement; he came up to Mrs. Everett and shook hands with her.

"You have your bonnet on," he said. "Yes, I have been out for out for a walk," she replied.

"And she has come in dead tired," said Margaret, glancing at her husband. "Please go to your room now, Mrs. Everett," she continued, "and take off your things. We are just going to breakfast, and I shall insist on your taking a good meal."

Mrs. Everett turned towards the door. When she had left the room Margaret approached her husband's side.

"I do believe she is right," she cried suddenly; "I believe her grief will kill her in the end."

"Whose grief, Robert? Don't you know? Mrs. Everett's grief. Can't you see for yourself how she frets, how she wastes away? Have you no eyes for her? In your own marvellous resurrection ought you, ought either of us, to forget one who suffers so sorely?"

"I never forget," said Awdrey. He spoke abruptly; he had turned his back on his wife; a picture which was hanging slightly awry needed straightening; he went up to it. Ann came in at the open window.

"What possesses all you women to be out at cockcrow in this fashion?" said her brother, submitting to her embrace rather than returning it.

Ann laughed, gleefully.

"It is close on nine o'clock," she replied; "here are some daffodils for you, Margaret"—she laid a great bunch by Mrs. Awdrey's plate. "You have quite forgotten your country manners, Robert; in the old days breakfast was long over at nine o'clock."

"Well, let us come to table now," said the Squire.

The rest of the party came in by degrees. Mrs. Everett was the last to appear. Awdrey pulled out a chair near himself; she dropped into it. He began to attend to her wants; then entered into conversation with her. He talked well, like the man of keen intelligence and education he really was. As he spoke the widow kept watching him with her bright, restless eyes. He never avoided her glance. His own eyes, steady and calm in their expression, met hers constantly. Towards the end of breakfast the two pairs of eyes seemed to challenge each other. Mrs. Everett grew fuller than ever of puzzled enquiry; Awdrey's of a queer defiance. In the end she looked away with a sigh. He was stronger than she was; her spirit recognized this fact; it also began to be dimly aware of the truth that he was her enemy.

The Squire rose suddenly from his seat and addressed his wife.

"I've just seen Griffiths pass the window," he said. "I am going out now; don't expect me to lunch."

## CHAPTER XX.

About an hour after her husband had left her, Hetty Vincent awoke. She sud-

denly bed her eyes, sat up in bed, and after moment's reflection began to dress. She was down stairs, bustling about as usual, just as the eight-day clock struck seven. Hetty attended to the household work herself, but there was a maid to help her with the dairy, to milk the cows and undertake the heavy part of the work. The girl's name was Susan. Hetty and she went into the dairy as usual now and began to perform their morning duties.

There were several cows kept on the farm, and the Vincents largely lived on the dairy produce. Their milk and butter and cream were famous in the district. The great pails of foaming milk were now being brought in by Susan and the man Dan, and the different pans were quickly filled.

The morning's milk being set, Hetty began to skim the pans which were ready for the previous night. As she did so she put the cream at once into the churn, and Susan prepared to make the butter.

"Hold a bit, ma'am," she said, suddenly, "we never scalded this churn properly, and the last butter had a queer taste, don't you remember?"

"Of course I do," said Hetty, "how provoking; all that cream is wasted then."

"I don't think so," answered Susan. "If we pour it out at once it won't get the taste. Please hold that basin for me, ma'am, and I'll empty the cream straight into it." Hetty did so.

Susan set the churn down again on the floor.

"If you'll give me that stuff in the bottle, ma'am," she said. "I'll mix some of it with boiling water and wash out the churn; it will be as sweet as a nut immediately."

"The water is already boiling in the copper," said Hetty.

The girl went off to fill a large pail with some, and Hetty unlocked the cupboard from which she had taken the bottle of laudanum the night before. This chemical preparation required for sweetening the churn should have stood close to the laudanum bottle. It was not there, and Susan who was anxious to begin her work, fetched a step-ladder and mounting it began to search through the contents of the cupboard.

"I can't find the bottle," she cried, "but for ma'am, what is this black stuff? It looks summat like treacle."

"No, it is not; let it alone," said Hetty in alarm.

"I don't want to touch it, I'm sure," replied Susan. It has a good big 'poison' marked on it and I'm awful frightened of that sort of thing."

"It's toothache cure," said Hetty. "If you swallowed a good lot of it it'll kill you, but it's a splendid thing to put on cotton wool and stuff into your tooth if it aches badly. Just you step down from the ladder, and I'll have a look for the bottle myself, Susan."

The bottle was nowhere to be found in the cupboard but was presently discovered in another corner of the dairy; the morning's work then went on without a hitch.

At his accustomed hour Vincent came in to breakfast. He looked moody and depressed. As he ate he glanced many times at Hetty, but did not vouch a single word to her.

She was in the mood to be agreeable to him and she put on her most fascinating airs for his benefit. Once as she passed his chair she laid her small hand with a caressing movement on his shoulder. The man longed indescribably to seize the little hand and press it to his hungry heart, but he restrained himself. Mrs. Everett's words were ringing in his ears—

"Your wife holds a secret."

He presently sat down opposite to him. The sunshine was now streaming full into the cheerful farm kitchen, and some of its rays fell across her face. What a lovely face it was; pale, it is true, and somewhat worn, but what pathetic eyes, so dark, so lvelly; what a dear rosebud mouth, what an arch and yet sad expression!

"She beats every other woman holler," muttered the man to himself. "It's my belief that if it weren't for that secret she'd love me. Yes, it must be true, she holds a secret, and it's a killing of her. She ain't what we wor when we married. I'll get that secret out o'er; but not for no thousand pounds, 'andy as it 'ud be."

"Hetty," he said, suddenly. "What in the world is the matter with you, George? You do look moody," said Hetty.

"Well, now, I may as well return the compliment," he replied, "so do you."

"Oh, I'm all right," she answered with a pert toss of her head. "Maybe, George, she continued, "you're bilious; you ate summat that disagreed w' you last night."

"Yes, I did," he replied fiercely. "I swallowed a powerful lot of ' jealousy, and it's bad food and hard to digest."

"Jealousy?" she answered, bridling, and her cheeks growing a deep rose. "Now what should make you jealous?"

"You make me jealous, my girl," he answered.

"I! what in the world did I do?"

"You talked to Squire—you wor mad to see 'im, Het, you've got a secret, and you may as well wot w' it."

The imminence of the danger made Hetty quite cool and almost brave. She uttered a light laugh, and bent forward to help herself to some more butter.

"You must be crazy to have thoughts of that sort, George," she said. "Ain't I been your wife for five years, and isn't it likely that I had a secret you'd have discovered it, sharp feller as you are? No, I was pleased to see Squire. I was always fond o' 'im; an' I ain't got no secret except the pain in my side."

She turned very pale as she uttered the last words and pressed her hand to the neighbourhood of her heart.

Vincent was at once all tenderness and concern.

"I'm a brute to worry you, my little girl," he said. "Secret or no secret you're all I have got. It's just this way, Het; of you'd love me a bit, I wouldn't mind if you had fifty secrets, but it's the feeling that you don't love me, mad as I be about you, that drives me stark, staring wild at times."

"I'll try hard to love you if you wish it, George," she said.

He left his seat and came towards her. The next moment he had folded her in his arms. She shivered under his embrace, but submitted.

"Now that's better," he said. "Tryin' means succeedin', 'ordring to my way o' thinkin' of it. But you don't look a bit well, Het; you change color too often—red one minute, white the next—you musn't do no more



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o' work this morning. You jest put your feet up this minute on the settle and I'll fetch that novel you're so took up with. You like readin', don't yer lass?"

"At times I do," said Hetty, "but I ain't in the mood to read today, and there's a heap to be done."

"You're not to do it, Susan will manage." "George she can't; she's got the dairy."

"Dan shall manage the dairy. He's worth two Susans, and Susan can attend to the housework. Now you lie still where I've put you and read your novel. I'll be in to dinner at twelve o'clock, as usual, and if you don't look more spry by then I'll go and fetch Dr. Martin, that I will."

"I wouldn't see him for the world," said Hetty in alarm. "Well, I'll stay quiet if you wish me to."

The rest of the morning passed quickly. Until her husband was quite out of sight Hetty remained on the settle in the cosy kitchen, then she went up to her room, and taking a hat out of the cupboard began to pull it about and to re-arrange the trimming. She put it on once or twice to see it became her. It was a pretty hat, made of white straw with a broad low brim. It was trimmed simply with a broad band of colored ribbon. On Hetty's charming head it had a rustic effect, and suited her particular form of beauty.

"It don't matter what I wear," she murmured to herself. "Taint looks 'im a-thing of no use, but I may as well look my best when I go to him. Once he thought me pretty. That awful evening down by the brook when I gathered the forget-me-nots—I saw his thought in his eyes then—he thought well of me then. Maybe he'll again this evening. Anyhow I'll wear the hat."

At dinner Hetty once more resumed the role of an invalid, and Vincent was charmed to find her reclining on the settle and pretending to read the yellow-backed novel.

"Here's a brace of young pigeons," he said. "I shot 'em an hour ago. You shall have 'em cooked up tasty for supper. You want fattening and coaxing a bit. Ah, dinner ready; just what I like, corned beef and cabbage. I am hungry and no mistake."

Susan had now left the house to return to her ordinary duties, and the husband and wife were alone. Hetty declared herself much better; in fact, quite well. She drew her chair close to Vincent, and talked to him while he ate.

"Now I call this real cosy," he said. "If you try a bit harder you'll soon do the real thing, Het; you'll love me for myself."

"Seems like it," answered Hetty. "George, you don't mind me going down to see aunt this afternoon, do you?"

She brought out her words coolly, but Vincent's suspicions were instantly aroused.

"Turn round and look at me," he said. She did so, bravely.

"You don't go outside the farm today, and that's flat, he said. 'We won't argue on that point any more; you stop at home to-day. El you're a good girl and try to please me I'll harness the horse to the gig this evening, and take yer for a bit of a drive."

"I'd like that," answered Hetty, submissively. She bent down as she spoke to pick up a piece of bread. She knew perfectly well that Vincent would not allow her to keep her appointment with the Squire. But that appointment must be kept; it in no other way by gule.

Hetty thought and thought. She was too excited to do little more than pick her food, and Vincent showered attentions and affectionate words upon her. At last he rose from his seat.

"Well, I've 'ad a heavy meal," he cried. "I'll be in again about four o'clock; you might have a cup o' tea ready for me."

"No, I won't," said Hetty; "tea is bad for you; you're up so early, and you're dead for sleep, an' it's sleep you ought to have. You come home about four, and I'll give you a glass o' stout."

"Stout?" said the farmer—he was particularly partial to that beverage—I didn't know there was any stout in the house," he continued.

"Yes," she replied, laughing gaily. "The little cask which we didn't open at Christmas; it's in the pantry, and you shall have a foaming glass when you come in at four; go off now, George, and I'll have it ready for you."

"All right," he said; "why, you're turning into a model wife; quite anxious about me—at least, it seems like it. Well, I'll turn up for my stout, more particular if you'll give me a kiss along w' it."

He went away, and Hetty watched him as he crossed the farmyard; her cheeks were flushed, and her heart beat high. She had made up her mind. She would drug the stout.

Vincent was neither a lazy nor a sleepy

man; he worked hard from early morning until late night, indulging in no excesses of any kind, and preferring tea as a rule to any other beverage; but stout, good stout, such as Hetty had in the little cask, was his one weakness; he did like a big draught of that.

"He shall have a sleep," said Hetty to herself. "It will do him a power of good. The first time I swallowed a few drops of aunt's toothache cure I slept for eight hours without moving. Lor! how bad I felt afore I went off, and how nice and soothed when I awoke. Seemed as if I couldn't be cross for ever so long. George shall sleep while I'm away. I'll put some of the nice black stuff in his stout—the stuff that gives dreams—he'll have a long rest, and I can go and return and he'll never know nothing about it."

She made all her preparations with promptitude and cunning. First, she opened the cask, and threw away the first glass she drew from it. She then tasted the beverage, which turned out, as she expected to be of excellent quality. Hetty saw in imagination her husband draining off one or two glasses. Presently she heard his step in the passage, and ran quickly to the pantry where the stout was kept, concealing the little bottle of laudanum in her pocket. She poured what she thought a small but safe dose into the jug, and then filled it up with stout. Her face was flushed, and her eyes very bright, when she appeared in the kitchen with her jug and glass on a tray. Vincent was hot and dead tired.

"Here you are, little woman," he cried. "Why, if you ain't a sort o' ministering angel, I don't know who is. Well, I'm quite ready for that ere drink o' yourn."

Hetty filled the glass to the brim. It frothed slightly, and looked, as Vincent expressed it, prime. He raised it to his lips, drained it to the dregs, and returned it to her. She filled it again.

"Come, come," he said, smiling, and half winking at her, and then casting a longing glance at the stout, ain't two glasses o'er much?"

"Not a bit of it," she answered. "You're to go to sleep, you know."

"Well, p'raps I can spare an hour, and I am a bit drowsy."

"You're to lie right down on the settle, and go off to sleep. I'll wake you when it is time."

He drank off another glass.

"You won't run away to that aunt o' yours while I'm drowein'?" he said.

"No," she replied. "I would not do a shabby sort of trick like that."

He took her hand in his, and a moment later had closed his eyes. Once or twice he opened them to gaze fondly at her, but presently the great, roughly-hewn face settled down into repose. Hetty bent over him, laid her cheek against his, and felt his forehead. He never stirred. Then she listened to his breathing, which was perfectly quiet and light.

"He's gone off like a baby. That's wonderful stuff in aunt's bottle," muttered Hetty. Finally, she threw a shawl of her own over him, drew down the blind of the nearest window, and went on tiptoe out of the kitchen.

"He'll sleep for hours. I did," she said to herself.

She put the little bottle back into its place in the dairy, and moved softly about the house. She was to meet the Squire at six. It was now five o'clock. It would take her the best part of an hour to walk to the Court. She went up to her room, put on her hat, and as she was leaving the house, once again entered the kitchen. Vincent's face was pale now—he was in a dead slumber. She heard his breathing, a little quick and stertorous, but he was always a heavy breather, and she thought nothing about it. She left the house smiling to herself at the clever trick she had played on her husband. She was going to meet the Squire now. Her heart beat with rapture.

(To be continued.)

Sore on the Wheel.

"I see by the papers that they have the bicycle ambulance now," said Miss Grumpey at the dinner table.

"There ought to be a law requiring an ambulance to go with every wheel," muttered old Grumpey, who is marked for life because of his one attempt to master the silent steed.

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## PASSING OF THE BIRTHDAY.

Why It Is Lost From the Lives of Unmarried Women.

Constance Conrail, writing on "Forgotten Anniversaries" in the September Ladies' Home Companion, says:—

"First of all there are the birthdays of unmarried women. I know they do not have any. I have heard them say so many times, sometimes with a chery laugh, but often with a half regretful intonation. The generally accepted belief is that when an unmarried woman has passed the years of youthful freshness, she prefers to have her added years ignored. There may be some reason for this belief in individual cases, but a little thought may lead us to a different view for the different majority. When did these women cease to have birthdays? The year they ceased was in most cases, just one year later than the one which had been celebrated in some happy fashion. If we could know some of the unwritten histories, we would find one woman's stopped the year after her young lover died—that changed everything in life for her; another's when she started out alone to earn her