

(CONTINUED FROM TENTH PAGE.)

others, to have you?"

"I am never very fond of London," I answered, coldly, "especially in a fog, and I am very fond indeed of Scotland."

A look of pleased surprise brightened Sir Robert's face.

"I am very glad," he said. "I suppose I may hope, then, that you found Ardnach to your taste?"

"Ardnach is very beautiful and interesting," I answered; and then, after a pause: "So is Currachmore."

A quick, but furtive, glance of the small grey eyes in my direction, and then they fixed themselves on the carpet at his feet.

"Yes," he said; "Currachmore has a certain beauty of its own, though it is only bare rocks and caves."

"I was speaking of the house," I said, coldly, and a slight surprise showed itself in my companion's colorless face.

"I did not know that you had seen the house," he said, a little irritably.

"Yes," I replied; "I have seen something of it, and heard its history from Mary Fae."

"Oh! you have made acquaintance with her, have you?" he asked, in a voice of cold displeasure, which I noted carefully.

"Yes," I said, "we became great friends, and she told me a great deal about Ardnach and the neighborhood that was extremely interesting."

"She probably told you a string of lies!" Sir Robert burst out, suddenly, with unmistakable ill-temper, and I smiled a little maliciously to myself.

"Indeed! why should you suspect her of telling me lies on that or any other subject?" I asked.

"Oh! well, never mind Mary and her stories now, Miss Freers," said Sir Robert, in a different tone. "You surely know that I didn't come here to discuss her, but something much more important."

He got up from his chair and came nearer to me, while a slight flush crept into his face.

"It is more than three months, Miss Freers, since I asked you to be my wife, and you, of course, meant your answer as final; but Agatha, I cannot let you go so easily, it means such a lot to me—my whole life's happiness, in fact—and even at the risk of offending you, I must ask you to think of it again."

"You don't know—I can never tell you, dear—what you are to me, or what I would not do to win your love. I am not a good man, Agatha, and, until I knew you, I never cared much about being one; but what little good there is in me—seems, somehow, to spring into life in your presence, and I began to long for a higher and better life than the one I have led."

He paused for a moment, and then came suddenly up to me with hands outstretched.

"You could do it, Agatha—with your love you could make me what you would," he said, in a low voice, and I knew that he was in earnest.

I tried to speak, but the words would not come, and he went on, after a pause, very wistfully.

"Have I made you angry, dear?" If you knew how hard it was to let you go before, you would forgive me for speaking again."

"I am not angry," I managed to say feeling that the task I had set myself to do became only harder with delay; but still the words would not come readily, and I paused a moment while Sir Robert scanned my face eagerly.

"Is it true?" I asked, at last; "is it true that you would, as you say, do a great deal to win my love?"

A gleam of hope came into his face that touched me in spite of myself.

"Yes," he said, "it is true. It is, perhaps, not much use to repeat things like that; but, if you know of any proof that I can give you, I wish you would tell me of it."

I summoned all my courage, and, going a step nearer to him, fixed my eyes on his, that grew a little wide with wonder.

"I believe you are in earnest," I said, gently; "but, Sir Robert, you said just now that you had not been a good man—had not led quite a blameless life. I ask you now to tell me, has there been anything in that life which, if I knew it, would make your proposal seem an insult to me?"

The eyes on which my own were fixed grew rigid, their wonder merged into fear, shame, despair, and their owner drew slowly back from me.

I had no longer any doubt, and my task was now straightforward, but, oh, how hard!

He did not speak for a moment, then suddenly pulled himself together, and made a ghastly attempt to smile.

"Miss Freers—Agatha!" he stammered. "What a turn you give a fellow with those

great solemn eyes of yours! What in the world do you suspect me of? Of course, I know I am not half worthy of you, and never shall be; and—well, yes—there are lots of things I am ashamed of in my past life—gambling and that kind of thing, you know; but I haven't touched a card now for more than a year, and never will again if you insist; and as I said before, it is in your power to make me what you will."

He spoke hurriedly and with a note of entreaty in his voice that touched me with half-contemptuous pity.

"You have not answered my question in plain words," I said, "but after all it is not necessary, and I will speak quite plainly to you. Sir Robert—my heart was beating madly, and I hesitated before pronouncing the fatal words—I have said that I do not love you, and it is true; but nevertheless, I am willing to become your wife if—if you will give up Ardnach."

"Give up—Ardnach?"

The words came slowly, as if from parched lips, and a slight moisture broke out on his forehead.

He wiped it away unconsciously, and moistened his lips before going on.

"Why should I give it up?" Miss Freers, what can you mean?"

"Just what I said," I answered. "I will be your wife, and I will do all I can to make you happy—on that condition."

"And to whom should I give it up?"

"To its rightful owner—Ian Macquoid."

"Our rights were equal, or rather mine was greater, being the son of the oldest sister."

"Until the will was made," I said quietly. "The will was lost, if it ever existed."

"It might be found again," I suggested. "Found! I don't see what you mean."

"Need I repeat it?" I asked. "It is that I cannot be your wife, except on that condition."

"But Agatha, why?"

"Because my husband must, at least be honest."

"I accept your condition," he said, after a moment. "I love you too much to refuse you anything, however unreasonable. I will make over Ardnach, by deed of gift to Ian Macquoid."

"He would not accept it as a gift," I said. "It must be restored to him as his right."

"How?"

"You must find the will," I answered, steadily.

For a moment his eyes searched mine despairingly.

Then he almost staggered backward, threw himself on a chair beside the table, and laid his head down on his arms with a sound very like a sob. Presently I went up to him quietly and laid my hand on his shoulder.

He shivered a little, but did not raise his shame-struck face.

"Don't touch me," he whispered. "I am not worthy of it."

"You are more worthy of my respect now than before," I said, gently.

Presently he got up, and made an effort to calm himself.

The sight of shame and misery in the drawn, white face touched me deeply.

I took his cold hands in mine, and they trembled at my touch.

"I am sorry," I said, gently; "believe me I am sorry for your suffering, and, if you agree to do what I ask, I will try all my life to make up to you for it."

He turned aside for a moment, while a spasm of pain passed over his face, and when he spoke, his voice, was hoarse and quite strange to me.

"Agatha, you know all this and yet you would give yourself to me?"

"Yes," I said, "if you will do what I ask of you."

"And yet you do not love me. Then Agatha, why is it?"

"Because I wish that justice should be done to Ian Macquoid," I said.

"Forgive me, I don't want to catechise you, Agatha; but just tell me this—would you have done this if the person wronged had not been Ian Macquoid?"

"Ian Macquoid has done me great kindnesses. I am sorry for him, and I would help him if I could."

"Agatha, you told me three months ago that, though you did not love me, there was no one else. Don't be angry, dear. Can you tell me the same now?"

"Yes," I said, steadily; "and I will tell you even more. It is only poverty that prevents Ian Macquoid from marrying a woman whom he loves; if Ardnach is restored to him, he will be able to do so at once."

"And you will be my wife, Agatha?"

"Yes," I answered; "I have said it."

"I will go to Ardnach to-morrow; it will be all settled in a week, I hope; then I will come back here at once, and we will arrange about the marriage."

"Yes," I said; "we will arrange then."

"You will never guess, dear, how grateful I am to you—yes, even in spite of all this, and I would go through it all again, twice over, for the same reward; and with your help, dear, I shall be a better man than I have been before."

"Ah, dearest," he went on, "what a brute you must think me! I know I ought not to let you make this sacrifice—a better, stronger man than I would do what you stipulate, and leave you free; but I cannot do that—I cannot, Agatha! You are all I care for in the world, and I can't let you go!"

It was four days after this that, as we were all assembled at the breakfast-table, our attention divided between the meal and the packet of letters that had just been brought in, my stepmother startled us all by giving a sudden cry of surprise and dismay.

"It is a great shame!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "Such things ought not to be allowed!"

"What things? What has happened?" asked several voices at once.

"My dear Agatha," she said, "I am so sorry for you, and for poor Sir Robert—of course, he has told you all about it, for I see you have a letter from him, too?"

"Yes, I know," I said, mechanically. But Isabelle did not know, and demand-

ed, sharply, to be told what 'all the fuss was about.'

"It is really most unfortunate," explained her mother. "It appears that, at one time the eccentric old man to whom Ardnach belonged, the uncle of Sir Robert had made a most unjust will, leaving the estate and almost everything else he possessed to another nephew, Ian Macquoid."

You remember, Isabelle, that odd, rough looking person who brought Agatha home from Currachmore that night."

"He appears to have lived with the old man, and induced him by some means, to make a will in his favor; but the poor gentleman evidently regretted having done so, and must have meant to destroy the will, for, at his death, it could not be found, and Sir Robert received the property, as it was right that he should; but now he writes to tell me that, in examining a curious old desk of his uncle's he discovered the will that was lost seven years ago, and which he obliged him to put this wretched man in possession of the whole estate."

"It is most unjust, and, if Sir Robert were any other than the noble, generous creature he is, he would have said nothing to anyone of having found the will and would have kept what is justly his in spite of it. As it is, I am afraid it will be a terrible loss to him."

The anxiety in my step-mother's eyes said plainly, "And perhaps, to us, too," and Isabelle's thin lips curled in a malicious smile.

"Dear me, how very unfortunate!" she said to me; "just as you promised to marry him, too! But perhaps you may not think it worth while to do so now that your beloved Ardnach is no longer his?"

"It will make no difference," I answered coolly; and she raised her eyebrows incredulously.

"That is strange," she said. "I was under the impression that his having that estate had induced you to accept him."

"I should not care to go there again now," I said, still more coldly, as I rose from the table and left them to discuss my misfortune together.

My wedding was fixed for a day only two months hence, and my stepmother and Isabelle busied themselves eagerly with spending for me the small sum left by my father, for providing the necessary trousseau.

It was a subject of great indifference to me, but it seemed to interest them keenly, though my step-mother lamented loudly the fact that her efforts were almost wasted on my small, slight form, insignificant face, and dark-bronze hair, and declared that it required a tall and graceful girl, such as Isabelle, to look to advantage in white satin.

They two were out, one raw January afternoon, intent on some business connected with the marriage, which they seemed to think very important, but which I had not found sufficiently interesting to tempt me away from the fire in the library, where I sat trying hard to fix my attention on the book I held, rather than indulge in useless memories of the past, or still more painful anticipations of the future.

The daylight faded as I read on determinedly.

I did not ring for lights, however, but slid down upon the hearthrug, and went on reading by the firelight.

Presently a servant came in and announced a visitor, whose name I did not bear; but the tall, broad form and fair bronzed head that towered above the servant in the doorway could belong only to one man, and I recognized him at once, though the Highland dress had been changed for an ordinary morning suit; and I got up to meet him, full of surprise and pleasure, and a little thrill of something that was like fear of I knew not what.

"I am, perhaps, doing a very unusual thing," he said, "in coming to you suddenly like this, without giving you the chance of refusing to see me; but I think you will know that I do not mean any disrespect to you, and will forgive me."

"Yes; I forgive you," I answered, "for I am very pleased to see you."

"You are very good to me," he said, with a light of pleasure in his face. "Will you tell me if you have heard any news from Ardnach lately?"

"Yes," I said, my color rising in spite of me; "I have heard that the will has been found, and I want to congratulate you. I am very glad of it."

"Thank you," he said. "I am glad, too—more so than you can think, for it means a great deal more than the property to me. It means that I can do now what I never could have hoped to do without it. Can you think what that is, Miss Freers?"

"I think it will keep my secret and, if it should leak out, I shall be so far away away that I shall not mind much what is said. I wish I had had courage to do this earlier, dear; being so late it may cause you some annoyance; but, darling, forgive me, and remember only that I love you—love you so well that I can bear to give you up, and pray that you may be happy with a better man than—"

"Your devoted friend, 'ROBERT CRAWFORD.'"

One year later, the bells were ringing gaily at Ardnach, and old Dougald led the pipers, with a look of pride and triumph in his dim old eyes which was reflected from many a kindly, sun-tanned face that smiled a thousand welcomes to their own dear master and the young mistress he had just brought from London.

But of all the greetings and congratulations that met me on that day none touched me more deeply than a cable-message which arrived from West Africa, bearing the simple words, "Good-bless you both; from Cousin Robert," and Ian's voice was very gentle as he read it, and said, earnestly, "God bless him, too."

The builders are at work on Currachmore, setting up the old house again, but carefully preserving its rugged, old-time beauty, for its owner loves the place, and declares it worthy of being preserved, if only for the sake of one fair picture that met his eyes upon its hearth when the mistress first set foot in Currachmore.

And Ian was no true prophet after all, for, though the glories of the old days may be gone for ever, Macquoid is Macquoid of Currachmore still.

NERVES ALL SMASHED.

Indigestion and Dyspepsia are the Arch Destroyers, But South American Nervine Proves the Never-Failing Health Builder.

Mrs. Ellen Butler, 37 Collingwood St., Toronto, suffered from indigestion in a severe form for several years, was unable to eat meat or vegetables, was threatened with nervous prostration as a result of chronic dyspepsia. After many remedies had been tried and failed, she began using the South American Nervine. When she had taken three bottles, to use her own words, "I can eat anything set before me, and enjoy it without any bad after effects. I think it a wonderful remedy for dyspepsia and nervous prostration." Sold by E. C. Brown.

Art and Nature.

The perfect blending of the real and ideal has recently been advertised by Paris milliners, who have come to use oats from the fields to trim the bonnets of their fair customers. The adventure which befell one such bonnet and its wearer is related by a foreign newspaper.

A lady dressed beyond the reach of criticism, was crossing a broad boulevard. A cab bore down upon her and she stepped hastily back and stopped in front of the curbstone, unmindful of a horse and cart standing immediately behind her. The horse quietly sniffed the oats and then, deciding that they were genuine, began to munch.

He was thus engaged when the lady, quite unaware of the pleasure she was affording the hungry animal, started forward. But the horse was far from satisfied and planting his forefeet on the lady's skirt, continued his repast.

The lady supposing the horse about to devour her head, promptly fainted and was removed to a druggist's shop near by, where happily she soon recovered.

The moral of the story is that every field of oats should have a fence about it.

A PHYSICIAN is not always at hand. Guard yourself against sudden coughs and colds by keeping a bottle of Pain-Killer in the house. Avoid substitutes, there is but one Pain-Killer, Perry Davis'. 25c. and 50c.

Valuable Pebbles.

Between the northern point of Long Island and Watch Hill lies a row of little islands, two of which, Plum Island and Goose Island, possess a peculiar form of mineral wealth. It consists in heads of richly colored quartz pebbles, showing red, yellow, purple and other hues, which are locally called agates. They are used in making stained glass windows, and there is a sufficient demand for them in New York to keep the owners of one or two sloops employed in gathering them from the beaches, where the waves continually roll and polish them, bringing out the beauty of their colors.

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"I—how could I guess?" I stammered, not wishing to betray old Mary's confidence in me.

He came a few steps nearer to me, where the glow from the fire showed a light of expectancy in the keen blue eyes.

"It is this, Miss Freers; to ask you to be my wife!"

His wife!

The words rang in my ears with a sound of cruel and bitter mockery.

For a moment my head reeled, and I put my hands to my temples, feeling dazed and stupid.

"Your wife—I?" I repeated, slowly; but he came nearer, and gently drew my hands down from my face, and held them close.

"Have I startled you, dear?" he asked, gently. "I have been too rough and abrupt. Forgive me, Agatha! You cannot think what it has been to keep silence all this time—ever since that day when I first saw you—and to think that I should never have the right to say I love you—love you, Agatha, more than you will ever know!"

"You love me?" I stammered, dazedly. "Mary said—"

"and the thought of my foolish blindness, and of what I had done, struck me with all its bitter irony."

"Oh! it is too cruel!" I cried, drawing my hands away suddenly, and Ian drew back.

"What is it dear?" he asked gently. "Have I angered you? What does it mean?"

"It means," I answered, "that I have promised to marry Sir Robert Crawford!"

He did not answer and there was a deep silence while I watched the light die out of the dark blue eyes and the bronzed face grow rigid; and it seemed to me that in that moment I bade farewell to all the joy and happiness this world could hold for me.

At last I could bear the silence no longer, and broke it in a faltering whisper—"Ian, speak to me—forgive me!"

He roused himself at once, and spoke, gravely and quietly—"It is I who should ask forgiveness," he said. "I have been rash and foolish, but I thought—I felt sure—at Mull that you were heart-free. I have been repaid for my presumption."

"Don't! I pleaded, miserably, and he looked at me so keenly, for a moment, that I turned aside.

"I have no right to ask, perhaps," he said, quickly, "but will you tell me one thing. Is this your wish? Is it of your own will that you have made that promise?"

"It is my own will," I answered very low, and with the feeling of signing my own death warrant.

"Thank you," he said gently, "I am glad to know that, and I hope my cousin will make you as happy as I would have done."

But I could not speak, and dared not look up to meet the brave blue eyes that I knew were full of pain.

"Good-bye, forgive me," was all my trembling lips could say a few minutes later, when, with a grave and quiet farewell, he left me.

"Ian, Ian!" I cried as the door closed after him, but he was gone, and, with a sob of despair, I threw myself down on my knees beside the table, hid my face in my arms, and gave way to the bitterest tears I had ever known, for I knew that, with all my heart and for all my life, I loved him.

The preparations for my wedding went on merrily in spite of my inability to take the proper amount of interest in them, 'or anything else,' as my stepmother remarked, with growing impatience of my indifference and languor.

There were other eyes beside hers that watched me keenly during those few weeks of misery, and the look of wistful anxiety in Sir Robert's face as he noted the growing pallor in mine touched me with pity and remorse, and I tried, at least in his presence, to throw off the kind of despairing lethargy that seemed to have taken possession of me and appear a little more cheerful.

The time went on thus until within three weeks of the day fixed for the marriage, when Sir Robert left town to make final arrangements at his house in Devonshire, and I was half ashamed to confess even to myself what a relief his absence was.

But two days after his departure a letter came from him that set my heart beating madly with joy and gratitude.

The letter ran thus—"Agatha, my dearest, try to think a little better of me now that I have left you, for we shall not meet again. I told you once that I was not strong enough to let you free; I can bear to do it now—can bear anything, rather than see the look of misery in your wan little face, that you so bravely try to hide."

"I am not such a brute as I have been, dear, and I give you your freedom now, only thanking you with all my heart for your goodness and gentleness to me. And Agatha, I think I can guess now why you did all that you have done, and I have written a letter to Ian Macquoid explaining everything to him,

REIGN AND SHINE?

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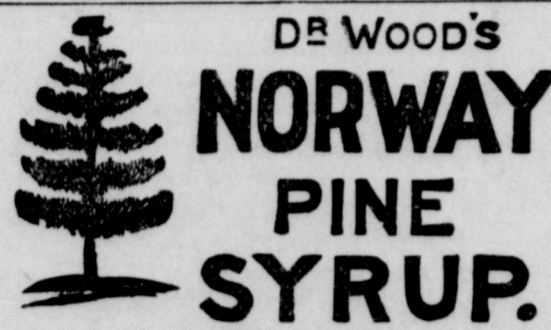
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