

(CONTINUED FROM TENTH PAGE.)

tell me that you are one of them!"

He turned from her almost with a groan, and for a little while strode up and down the tree-shaded walk, while, standing a little apart, she kept her eyes upon the silver stream, because she dare not trust herself to look into his dear face again.

The silence seemed a very long one; the river murmured and splashed among its rushes and lily leaves, the light wind whispered through the tangled boughs, but all else was still, save for the dull throbs of the girl's tortured heart, that seemed deafening to her own ears.

Suddenly Hugh stopped in front of her, so that his shadow was thrown to her feet. "Tell me what I am to do, Esme," he said, "for upon my honor, I cannot decide for myself. You have just said that my story seems like that of a bad man, and you are right, for I never knew what it was to be ashamed of myself before. I love you my darling, I love you with all my heart, but by every tie of honor I am bound to marry Flora."

She put up her hand to her brow with a little trembling gesture and pushed the loose curls of her hair away as she slowly echoed the last words.

"You are bound in honor!"

"Yes," he said bitterly; "that is truth, and I may as well face it plainly now. Our parents arranged the marriage when we were both little more than babies; and only the other day, when I spoke of the future to Flora, I discovered that she was willing to fulfil the old contract. Absolutely I cannot break away, and yet—yet—oh, how I wish that some sudden turn of Fortune's wheel would make me very poor!"

"Why?" she asked. "How would poverty help you?"

"It would cut the Gordian knot, and solve the difficulty. Flora likes me very well, but she is too sensible to be in love, and I know that she will only marry me for the sake of my money. Now if I suddenly became poor, she would jilt me there and then, so that I should be free. Only, unfortunately, there is no possibility of that, and so I am desperate. I cannot think what I ought to do."

She was the braver and stronger of the two then, weak woman though she was. She found courage to bid him farewell—to send him from her for the sake of right, though her heart was almost broken.

"You must be true to your troth," she said, and she raised her head so that her blue eyes looked into his face, "true to your given word. Your future belongs to her, not to me! You and I must part forever, and in your loyalty to her you must forget me!"

"You can tell me to go?" he cried fiercely, for his pain made him unjust even to her. "Esme, I thought you loved me?"

"You are cruel to ask me that," she answered, and there was a sudden quiver in her voice. "Go—go back to that other girl who has the right to your love—go, and forget me!"

"I can only obey you," he said bitterly; and then he strode away, the horse following closely at his heels.

His whole soul seemed in chaos then, his thoughts were not coherent, and, man like, his pain made him angry—anger which, in the first moment, he vented upon Esme herself.

He strode along the river path, telling himself that this love of hers was but a shadow of the great passion of which he had dreamed, that it was unworthy the sacrifice he would have made for it.

He would leave her—he would fulfil his troth by marrying Flora Fanshaw, and would teach himself to forget this other love, with its sweet, sad whisper of "what might have been," which thus had crossed his path.

He left the river bank, and reached the grounds of the Towers, where he let the horse find its way, alone to the stables.

He did not attempt to enter the house; instead, he strode up and down under the giant boughs of the horse chestnut trees which fringed the emerald lawn; and always afterwards the heavy fragrance of the spiral blossoms brought to his mind again the memory of those moments when his heart was torn between his love and all the world besides, and it was love that conquered.

"I have been unjust to her," he muttered at last. "I see now that she loves me—loves me with a better, nobler love than I have given in return. Heaven bless her! she would have been my good angel. She has shown me the way to go."

He knew then that he loved her—poor, nameless, almost friendless as she was—with the best and greatest love that it would ever be in his power to bestow.

Yet for honor's sake that love was worse than vain.

They two must part for ever, for he must be loyal to the vows he would give to Flora.

"I must teach myself to forget," he muttered miserably. "Fortunately, Flora herself cares nothing for sentiment. Whether my heart is living or dead will be naught to her, so long as she is mistress of the Towers."

The thought was a cruel injustice to Flora, though he honestly believed it was the truth.

On a sudden impulse he retraced his steps, hurrying back to the riverside, where he and Esme had parted.

At least, he thought, he must see her again, to do her justice and tell her that now he understood why she had sent him from her, and that he loved her the better for her truth.

But when he reached the river walk it was deserted.

The slender form which his tortured heart was yearning, was nowhere to be seen; and, muttering that perhaps it was better so, he turned upon his heel to stride back to the Towers, resolute to crush down the love that was part of his life—to forget the dear blue eyes which had looked with such sweet trustfulness into his.

Had he but known it, Esme was still very near the spot where they had parted.

When he had left her, she had turned away to go towards the Vicarage, striving to be calm, trying to face life's duties unfalteringly still, though the mist of pain before her eyes had made her almost blind.

Yet she went only a little way, for then her strength failed her.

She crept from the path to where the tall foxglove and giant fern united to make a rustic screen, and there she flung herself down upon her face, her eyes suffused with scalding tears, and on her lips a bitter prayer that she, who was so young and fair, might soon die, since life to her was but a dreary desert, because of the love that was lost.

CHAPTER III. FROM OUT THE PAST.

"It's very hard that he should want to go away, and very likely to get killed, just when I had such great hopes of his doing well in England. I don't wish to blame you, Esme, but you must have seen how anxious I was for you to marry Stephen, and I really do think you ought to have exerted yourself to make him fall in love with you."

That was the gist of Mrs. Mayfield's complaints almost every hour of the day, and Esme was forced to bear all uncomplainingly, though the injustice of the words stung her with a new sense of pain.

But her gratitude to Mrs. Mayfield for all her kindness in the past was intensified now by her pity.

The poor lady was, indeed, almost out of her mind with anxiety, for the Reverend Stephen, her only son, had announced his intention of giving up the Strathmore living, which had been his father's before him, and volunteering as a missionary to the most unhealthy part of Africa.

The resolution had been come to suddenly, but there was no doubt the little clergyman was very much in earnest, though no one at Strathmore could guess his reason.

He was known to be anything but robust, and everyone who was best fitted to judge decided that for him to go to the Gold Coast would be little better than suicide.

But to go, nevertheless, Stephen Mayfield was determined, and there was much weeping at the Vicarage in consequence.

Mrs. Mayfield, always an invalid and rather fretful, became more trying than ever, especially as she had somehow got into her head the idea that it was Esme's fault.

That her son should marry her protégée had always been her pet scheme, and when Stephen declared that he meant to go to Africa, she was quite certain, in the face of all remonstrance, that Esme could have prevented him if she only would.

Esme's life was very hard in those days, for Mrs. Mayfield's complaints and up-braidings never ceased.

Stephen, too, who had generally been her friend in a frank, brotherly way, had become suddenly engrossed with his own affairs, so that he left her quite alone, and in addition to the troubles of home life, she had always in her heart the aching consciousness of her love for Hugh, which in vain she tried to conquer.

She became pale and really ill under the constant strain, a strange listlessness seized her, and she seemed only the ghost of her own bright self.

More than a week passed away, a weary week for Esme, and then through the village there began to run excited rumors that soon the great house—as the local people called the Towers—would be en fête, since the wedding of Hugh Strathmore and Flora Fanshaw would be celebrated there.

Esme heard the rumor on every hand, and was brave enough to give no sign of the pain it gave her.

Yet when at last she could escape from the curious eyes which watched her, she made her way mechanically back to the river side, to stand with her eyes fixed upon the shining stream, her slender form leaning against the trunk of a willow.

She was not crying.

It seemed to her as if long ago all her tears were shed, as though never through all the years to come could she know great joy or pain again, since henceforth all to her would be one grey monotone.

The very murmur of the stream seemed to mock her.

Only a little while before, its music had brought to her lips that "song of the heart's delight," which Hugh had heard her singing and now its splash and ripple spoke to her only of another song which she had sometimes sung, though never had she fully understood its dreary pathos until now—

And Heaven is kind to the faithful heart
And if we are patient, and brave, and calm,
Our fruits will last though our flowers depart.
Some day when I sleep with folded palm,
No longer fair, no longer young,
Life may not seem so bitter long.

So she dreamed, thinking of Hugh still, and wondering if, when she was old, and bent, and grey, this passion of sorrow would cease its gnawing pain.

And as she stood there, feeling ill and miserable, she heard the trill of silken skirts, and then the clear music of Flora's ringing laugh.

Miss Fanshaw came into sight round a bend in the path, a tall, imposing figure, with flushed face and brightly shining eyes, the verdure of the boughs around throwing into full relief the outlines of her richly clad form.

Flo, though she posed as a strong minded woman who scorned sentiment, was yet feminine enough to like tasteful and becoming dresses.

She wore now a soft Indian silk, whose pale pink folds were adorned with a pattern of forget-me-nots in a way that suggested the rich brocades of many years ago.

A wide brimmed "picture hat," wreathed with the same blue flowers, was on her handsome head, and another bunch nestled in the gleaming links of her silver belt.

She seemed the very ideal of a richly clad, well born Englishwoman, and what wonder was it if poor little Esme's heart felt a throb of jealous pain at the sight of

her rival.

Instinctively she looked at her own reflection in the river, and grew very conscious that her own brown Holland dress utterly wanted the charm of the other's graceful robes, just as her slighter, more ethereal form lacked Flora's stately grace.

"She is more worthy to be his wife than I could ever be," she thought miserably, "and yet—yet—ah! she can never love him one half so well."

Flo was close at hand ere she saw the shrinking little form beneath the drooping tree, and when she did so she paused suddenly.

"All alone and dreaming by the river, Miss Marche?" she said in her rich ringing voice, whose music jarred strangely upon Esme then. "I thought you were one of those delightfully energetic people who are always at work, and I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw you looking down into the river like a modern Undine. You are pale, too; you look quite like a forlorn nymph of the waves."

The words were spoken quite by accident, for Flo did not mean to be unkind; but to poor Esme they seemed not unnatural, a wanton probing of her secret wound.

She certainly no longer deserved Flo's reproach that she was pale, for she flushed crimson; and, hastily, uncertainly, she tried to find any excuse but the real one for her unhappiness.

CONCLUSION NEXT WEEK.

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LONSDALE A GOOD LOSER.

Although he had been up against a Hard Man to Beat, He Didn't Squeal.

Said a Washington man who does a lot of transatlantic voyaging: "No man can pat himself on the back and say to himself that he is too wise to be 'done' by card sharps. I've seen some pretty clever men get theirs' at cards on the ocean liners. One of them was Lord Lonsdale, about as clever an all-around man as ever climbed over the gangway of a ship, and nobody would ever have fancied that he'd prove himself a 'mark' for professional gamblers."

"At the time Lonsdale first came to the United States he was in the full tide of his rapid career. Amid the uproar over his landing in this country the fact did not leak out that Lonsdale was plucked of \$9,000 on the trip over by George Sampson, one of the most notable of the older clique of steamship card sharps—he has since died in Australia, I believe."

"I think Sampson had it in mind to do young Lonsdale when he got aboard at Liverpool. Sampson had been working the steamers for fifteen years, and at this time he was a man of 40 or thereabouts. The two men struck up a friendship from the very first day of the voyage, and it was Lonsdale himself who first suggested—as he afterward acknowledged, for he was a manly young chap—the game of draw. Lonsdale had only recently learned the hands at poker, and he had the poker initiate's enthusiasm for the game to an exaggerated extent. Before going any further, I ought to say that Sampson always maintained afterward that in his play with Lonsdale he was perfectly on the level."

"Lonsdale and Sampson started the game

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on the first day out, and kept it going almost until the steamer ploughed past Sandy Hook. Of course Sampson beat him right along. He made no effort to let young Lonsdale win from him at first. He simply played poker, and raked in the young man's money and checks. A lot of us aboard knew Sampson, and those of us who had met young Lonsdale in England got him aside on the second day out and diplomatically put it to him that he was engaged in a pretty difficult encounter—that in brief, Sampson was a professional player of cards. For our pains we were told that we were too confoundedly officious.

"At any rate when the steamer was drawing near the shore Lonsdale decided that he had enough. Several of us were in the cardroom when the last hand was played. Sampson took the pot and Lonsdale scribbled a check on his American banker for the amount he had lost at the sitting. Then he looked up at Sampson for a moment and said:

"Some of my friends here estimate you a bit unkindly, Mr. Sampson."

"How's that?" inquired Sampson coolly—he was a man who never betrayed surprise.

"Well," said Lonsdale they maintain that your skill at cards affords you something better than a livelihood."

"I never denied that," replied Sampson calmly.

"In playing with me on this voyage you have employed skill alone?" inquired Lonsdale, courteously.

"At your suggestion," replied Sampson, with careful emphasis. "I have played draw poker with you for seven days. I understand the game of draw poker, and I have \$9,000 of your money. Do you want it back?"

"That was a magnificent bluff on Sampson's part, you perceive. The young chap, he well knew, would not squeal."

"Oh! if you elect to be insulting," said Lonsdale, flushing hotly, and he rose from the card table and left the room."

"Well, a couple of elderly Englishmen on board who knew Lonsdale and his father before him went to the young fellow and told him that it would be perfectly proper and right for him to stop payment on the checks he had given Sampson, who, they told him in so many words, was nothing better than a swindler."

"You will be good enough to mind your own d—d business," replied the hotspur; "I'll do nothing of the sort." And that was the end of it."

ENGLAND'S OLD WARSHIPS.

The Admiralty Again Considering the Question of Weeding Them Out.

The question of naval defence is again seriously occupying the attention of the British Admiralty, and the complete reorganization of the First Reserve Squadron will, it is stated in the service papers, be made next month. The more antiquated ships are to be weeded out and their places to be taken by vessels of more modern build and armament. At present the First Reserve Squadron is composed in part of the ships doing guard duty at the coast ports, some of them having been launched as far back as 1875. They number nine in all, five battleships and four cruisers. In addition to these there are the port guard ships and two cruisers used as drill ships for our Naval Reserve. The port guard vessels are battleships, five in number, making the whole squadron consist of ten battleships and six cruisers, representing very different types and belonging to varying periods in naval progress. Four of the battleships belong to the "Admiral" class, while two of the remainder are so nearly like them so to be looked on as similar ships. None of the unemployed vessels is of a type immediately to replace the others and add to the strength of the squadron, but as the newest ships take their places in the Mediterranean and Channel squadrons, those ships displaced will be used to form the First Reserve, the older vessels being put out of commission, and some of them broken up or sold out of the service.

As a consequence of the recent manoeuvres, the formation of a Second Reserve

squadron is under consideration for independent service. This would really mean that there will be three distinct squadrons in British waters, one to serve as a squadron of reinforcement for the Mediterranean fleet; the Channel squadron proper with its base at Portland on the Dorsetshire coast, and the third squadron for service in the North Sea. At present there is a long list of vessels in the British navy that are of no practical use in modern war, on which it would be a waste of material to place modern weapons, and crews which would be better employed on other ships now undermanned. The only use of these antiquated craft is to make a fleet look formidable on paper, and to absorb resources in men and material that would be more useful if concentrated on newer vessels.

The Belleisle experiments, although not entirely satisfactory, proved that the older ships are practically useless, against vessels armed with guns using shells charged with high explosives. Their retention in the category of effective warships therefore only tends to nourish illusions based on numbers rather than confidence founded on the quality of the vessels composing the navy; while it cannot deceive a possible enemy.

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The Cause,

Uncle Hank—"This here paper says that the money market is gittin' looser an' that the amount of currency in circulation was greater than it had been for some time."

Uncle Silas—"Don't doubt it at all. Last week was the week of our country fair."

Could not Deceive Him.

What is this?" asked a pale, dyspeptic guest at a hotel restaurant, looking critically at the dish the waiter had brought him.

"Just what you ordered, sir," replied the waiter; "breast of veal braised."

"You quite mistake," rejoined the guest, removing with his knife and fork a bone from the meat and inspecting it. "This bone is a portion of the left tibia, near its junction with the inner malleolus. In other words, you have brought me a piece of the shank. Take it back and bring what I ordered!"

There was no disputing with a man to whom any part of the anatomy of a calf was as an open book, and the waiter did as he was ordered.

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