

## BROTHER, OR LOVER.

IN TWO INSTALMENTS—PART II.

She insisted on giving the policeman five pounds out of her hundred and he went away well content.

## CHAPTER IV.

It was destined to be a day of pleasant surprises.

On his way to the fictitious office in the city where he had led Donsa to suppose he was employed, Maxwell was able to render a service to a man, who in gratitude for the kindness shown him by a stranger, offered him the very occupation he desired.

This man—who introduced himself as George Lighton, editor and proprietor of the *Scrutiner*—was taken ill on the tram car and might have fallen off but for Maxwell's promptly offered assistance.

He was giddy and faint, but insisted on going into the city in preference to returning home.

Charlie went with him, saw him comfortably installed at the office of the *Scrutiner* and was about to leave him when he fainted outright.

On coming to himself, he repeated what the dismayed clerks—summoned by Maxwell's shouts for assistance—had already told him, viz. that he had been suffering from a severe attack of influenza, and ought not to have ventured out for some time to come.

'But there was no one here to take my place,' explained the unfortunate journalist. 'I had a note this morning to say my lead er-writer is ill, and so I decided to buckle to myself, and see if I could knock off an article of some sort for this evening's issue.'

'The article is much more likely to knock you off,' said Maxwell, speaking on a sudden resolve. 'Look here, Mr. Lighton, I am in want of work, and I can scribble a bit. Give me a subject, and you keep still while I see what I can make of it.'

'The editor smiled doubtfully, but was weak to object. He began to look over the pile of correspondence awaiting attention on his table, while Maxwell tackled a one-column article on the war.'

He had friends of his careless boyhood who were now fighting in South Africa. One cousin was locked up in Ladysmith, and another in Mafeking.

He had studied all the war news with an avidity which represented his sole interest in life.

He put heart, as well as brains, into the article, which, when finished, he handed to Mr. Lighton.

The experienced man of letters read it with equal appreciation of his talent for composition and his grip of his subject.

'Very good English, Mr. Maxwell, and very good sense and feeling. Could you keep on at this sort of thing, or have you written yourself out?'

'I don't think I have done that. I feel stirred up to give expression to my thoughts each time I see a newspaper.'

'You have been in South Africa?'

'Yes; I know the Transvaal pretty well.'

'And the Boer?'

'Yes.'

'Well, write me another article, will you? Not necessarily for publication, but to give me an idea of the extent of your private knowledge—gained by experience—of the country and the men. Try to forget all you have read; state merely what you have seen. Let me have it by and by.'

'I might as well do it at once, if you will allow me to stay here.'

By the time the two men went to lunch together, Charlie Maxwell was engaged as temporary sub-editor of the *Scrutiner*, with a promise of regular work if he continued to give satisfaction.

He went home to dinner that first evening with the satisfying consciousness that his old life was gone for ever.

An iron door had closed on it; a door he had no wish ever to see opened again, and he must look to it that his own weakness did not ruin his home prospects; from that quarter danger still threatened him, and might swamp his career at any moment, unless he kept strict guard over himself.

But he found it difficult to repress the words of admiration and delight which rushed to his lips when he found the little table in the backroom of the Brixton lodgings laid for dinner as tastefully as if an army of trained servants were at his lady's command, while Donsa awaited his return, looking a picture of happy content in one of the black dinner dresses with which she had provided herself, in spite of Edith's assurance that they would be useless to a girl living alone in London with her daily bread to earn.

'This is an unexpected pleasure,' observed Maxwell, when, hurried into the dress-suit he found ready on his bed, he rejoined Donsa, and seated himself opposite her at the table arranged by her clever fingers. 'I really must say I like the little refinements of life.'

'So do I. They help one to maintain one's self-respect. I am sorry there are only two courses, Charlie; Mrs. Dudden stuck at more. I had hard work to make her turn out decent table linen and a liberal supply of glasses. She is a strict utilitarian, and cannot see the sense of putting on the table anything that is not actually necessary. But now tell me what you have been doing all day.'

He gave her a truthful, if not complete, account of his experiences, to which she listened with flattering interest, putting

several questions, to which he found some difficulty in replying.

When dinner was over he announced that he was going to work.

This was in order to fortify himself against the temptation to repeat the dangerous programme he had indulged in on the previous evening.

Notwithstanding which virtuous resolve, he was certainly disappointed when Donsa seemed not only content but pleased.

'She, too, worked diligently for a couple of hours, and then, having ascertained that music would not disturb him, she seated herself at the piano and gave him another unexpected pleasure, for she was a skilled musician.

He listened in sort of a trance, laying down his pen directly she began.

There was no real need for his tremendous industry; for the last half hour he had only been pretending to work.

When Donsa was tired of playing, she made some coffee, which Maxwell pronounced to be delicious; and then bade him good night.

He had been looking forward eagerly to that moment, though he hated the thought of parting from her.

'It is only half past ten, Donsa.'

'Early to bed, early to rise; you know the rest. I want to get you into better habits, Charlie. Brain workers need a lot of sleep.'

'But, my dear child, what is the use of going to bed if one can't sleep? I should certainly not get a wink this side of midnight.'

He had her in his arms now, so was ready to welcome a lengthy argument.

'Anybody with a will of their own ought to be able to make themselves sleep,' Donsa retorted. 'You could if you tried. I sleep without trying at all. I have had a busy day and I feel I have earned a good night's rest. So let me go, sir if you please and mind you are not late at breakfast.'

She withdrew herself from his embrace and went to her room feeling very happy.

Certainly brothers were an excellent institution.

She would not have believed that the finding of a hitherto unknown one would have served to so thoroughly complete her life.

That first day was a fair sample of those that followed during the next four weeks.

Maxwell kept himself well in hand, helped to this by having to send a quarterly remittance to the asylum which sheltered his wife.

The remainder of her existence, painful as it was, acted as a healthy check to his growing passion for Donsa.

His greatest fear became not so much lest she should discover the deceit he was practising on her, as lest she should, on discovering it, bid him seek her no more.

He took kindly to work; he was a born journalist, and having found his niche in life, he fitted it to a nicety.

George Lighton began to think that the day he had met Maxwell was a red letter day for him.

His sub-editor turned out to be simply invaluable when he grasped all that was required of him, and began to get used to his work.

And Charlie was a better man for having found a career, a better man, too, for loving a woman he could not hope to win.

He began to see the mistakes and the littleness of his old life of self-indulgence; and he started remodeling his character on a new and more solid basis.

Donsa spoke occasionally of Curtis Lockhart, dwelling on the kindness he had shown her.

Maxwell had not the heart to deceive her though he doubted his wisdom in keeping silent.

Had she really been his sister he would have told her the truth concerning the character of the man she had been disposed to trust; but as it was, he shrank from doing so, little thinking that the day was at hand when he would bitterly repent his reticence.

Instead of converting Charlie into keeping regular hours Donsa herself began to deteriorate in that respect.

He so enjoyed the little concert to which she treated him night, when they had both had finished work for the day, that she was tempted to prolong it.

And then he got into the habit of discussing her performance, which she enjoyed vastly, his criticism being nearly all admiration.

So she lingered to listen, forgetting to notice how rapidly the hands of the clock were travelling towards midnight.

One night she fell asleep in her low chair opposite him.

She had been working hard at an order she had received for designing dresses for a coming fashionable wedding.

Maxwell, as it happened, was extra busy also that evening, and there had been no music, and very little talking, for the first time since they started housekeeping together.

Wondering at her prolonged silence he glanced across at her when at length he laid down his pen.

Then he was content to sit and watch her, his eyes filling gradually with the love he so carefully kept out of them when he was capable of reading their expression.

Pretty as Donsa was when awake, she looked more to real advantage now, with

her thick, dark lashes resting on the somewhat pale cheeks.

Her lips were slightly parted, and she was smiling faintly as though she enjoyed pleasant dreams.

Maxwell watched until his heart was on fire with love and he felt he could not for many minutes longer repress the desire to take her in his arms and kiss her back to consciousness.

With a savage laugh at his mental forecast of the result of such madness, he seized the poker and let it fall with a crash into the fender.

Donsa woke with a start.

He was immediately all apologies and regret for his clumsiness; but he was careful to avoid looking at her until she rose from her chair and coming close to him raised her lips for a good-night kiss.

'I am too tired to play tonight, Charlie; besides, it's too late. You also look tired; you are quite pale.'

'I feel a bit tired,' he replied, giving her a kiss, of which she highly disapproved, on account of its lack of quality.

'I am not going to be put off with such a miserable peck as that,' she said. 'I believe you are afraid of injuring your precious moustache. I will cast the evil eye on it, and stunt its growth, if you don't kiss me properly at once!'

For a second he lost his head, crushing her against him with a fierceness which must have alarmed her had she not thought it assumed.

Her laughing protest recalled him to his senses, and he laughed, too, in a queer catchy sort of way as he released her and bade her begone.

That embrace dwelt vividly in the memory of both in the long dark days of separation which were so near at hand.

## CHAPTER V.

Curtis Lockhart was not the kind of man to give up anything he had set his heart on possessing; neither was he a safe man to make an enemy of.

The suspicion—almost amounting to actual knowledge—that Maxwell had read his despicable intentions with regard to the girl whom he was pretending to serve, roused in him a keen determination to be revenged on the man who had foiled him in putting those intentions into practice.

Inquiries in clubland elicited the fact that two Charles Maxwells were known in social circles.

One of these had for many years danced attendance on an elderly aunt, a Miss Grant, who had died early in last autumn, bequeathing to this dutiful nephew all her worldly possessions, on condition that he was known in future as Charles Maxwell Grant.

Apparently he did little credit to any bringing up he may have received, for according to Lockhart's informant, though he had 'people' somewhere in Devonshire, he left England without communicating with them, announcing that he felt like giving his cramped wings a prolonged stretch in other lands.

Later it became known to the acquaintances left behind in London—the man appeared to have made no friends—that he had volunteered for service in South Africa.

And this was the last that had been heard of him.

The other Charles Maxwell was the younger son of a baronet, and had inherited a handsome fortune from his mother.

He did well at college; but on leaving Oxford, settled down to the aimless life of a man about town, and ended by marrying a girl, of whom nobody knew much, except that she proved a charming hostess until the unhappy day when the terrible discovery was made that she was hopelessly insane.

She was sent to a private asylum, and her husband lingered on here, now there, within society's ken, until he suddenly disappeared, and it was more than suspected that he had made away with himself.

At which erroneous conclusion Mr. Lockhart smiled to himself, preparatory to taking a journey to the south-west of England.

During the next fortnight Edith Maxwell made frequent mention in her letters to her sister of a Mr. Curtis, who had come to Penreach for sketching purposes.

In spite of the unreasonable weather this Mr. Curtis industriously sketched the vicarage from all points of view, succeeding not only in producing fairly successful pictures, but also in attaining the object of his visit to the quaint little village.

The vicar, glad of a stranger to talk to, entered into conversation with him, found they had mutual acquaintances, and asked him to lunch.

The vicar's wife made much of him, and Edith aroused herself from her growing languor to smile sweetly on him while she listened to his easy chatter of art life in Paris.

It was not long before he drew from her a mention of her sister and brother, who lived in rooms at Brixton.

He was shown Donsa's photograph, and recognized it at once.

But Charlie's was not forthcoming.

Then he retailed the information he had received concerning two Charles Maxwells, who were known to friends of his.

Could either of them be, by any chance, Miss Maxwell's brother?

At the mention of Aunt Grant, Edith pricked up her ears.

'That must be my brother!' she exclaimed excitedly.

'But I thought you said he was living in London?' observed Curtis.

'So he is.'

'Then this fellow cannot be he, for he is in South Africa at the present moment.'

'You must be mistaken, Mr. Curtis.'

'I don't think I am. Of course I will make further inquiries before being positive, but I certainly understood that the nephew and heir of the late Miss Grant of Sandilands, volunteered for service at the outbreak of the war.'

'He would hardly do that without letting us know.'

'So one would think. But if he is the Maxwell I mean, he is not likely to consider other people when gratifying any whim he may have taken into his head. You must pardon me saying this of your brother, Miss Maxwell, but—'

'I am not going to allow that you are speaking of my brother, Mr. Curtis, because if you are, who is my sister living with?'

'Good heavens! I never thought of that!'

Edith fired her question at him so abruptly that it was easy for him to appear taken by surprise.

'My uncle must go to town at once and find out the truth. This is what comes of Donsa's craziness for independence! I might have known—'

'But Miss Maxwell you must remember that I am not at all sure I have not mixed up the two men. If you will take my advice you will not say anything to the vicar until I am more sure of my facts. You correspond with your sister, of course?'

'I heard from her this morning.'

'Did she mention her brother?'

'Yes; she always says something about him. According to her he is a paragon of virtue.'

'Then we may safely leave her in his care, I think for a day or two longer while I make inquiries about him. I will return to town at once, and communicate with you tomorrow.'

'You are exceedingly kind, Mr. Curtis. I ought to feel more reluctant to accept this service from you.'

'I hope you will never feel reluctant to accept any service from me, Miss Maxwell. But I do not promise that I shall not ask for a reward some day—a reward far exceeding my deserts.'

Edith blushed as her eyes fell slowly. Curtis took his hands, satisfied that he had adopted the surest means of moulding her to his will. He was very desirous that she should say nothing to anyone of the doubts he had instilled into her mind.

'Miss Maxwell—Edith, may I dare to hope?'

'I think—I don't know—wait until we know each other better,' stammered Edith.

'So be it he murmured, 'Meanwhile, don't be angry, darling!'

He bent and kissed her lips.

Then he left her without a word of farewell to mar the effect of that well-timed caress.

'A little more spirit—a little less caution—and she would be as worthy of attention as that charming little sister of hers, who, I think, will be far more delightful to make love to, if I am any judge of women. But I must not risk failure by being in too much of a hurry. I must count each step carefully as I advance.'

Delay of any sort, however, was rendered not only unnecessary, but impolitic, by news announced in that evening's papers from the seat of war.

A disaster to the British had been reported the day before, and now amongst the list of killed was the name of Charles Maxwell Grant.

It was possible that many Charles Maxwells were to be found in the Queen's army; but a Charles Maxwell Grant was by no means so likely to have a duplicate.

At any rate this was sufficient for Lockhart to work on for the furtherance of his desires without waiting for verification or contradiction of the report.

His next move was to present himself at the Brixton lodgings, which he did on the following, when he had watched the sub-editor of the *Scrutiner* out of sight on his way to the City.

Donsa was all eagerness when Mr. Lockhart was announced.

She welcomed him with a bright smile, which faded, however, at the sight of his grave face.

'What is the matter?' she asked involuntarily.

He drew last evening's *Globe* from his pocket.

'Did you see last night's paper? It will be in today's also, of course.'

'His tone was full of meaning.'

'What?'

Donsa was not the most patient young woman in the world.

'I hardly know how to tell you—how to explain. It will be a terrible shock—a double shock. Your brother—'

'What of him? Pshaw! he has only just left me. Nothing could have happened.'

'The man who has pretended to be your brother is safe enough for all I know to the contrary, Miss Maxwell. It is of him who was your brother in reality that I must unhappily tell you—'

'Pretended to be my brother! Explain yourself please!'

She faced him now with scared eyes and parted lips.

He pointed to the name in the list of killed—the name of Charles Maxwell Grant—saying quietly—

'Miss Grant of Sandilands, bequeathed all she possessed to her nephew on condition that he added her name to his own. Almost immediately after her death he went to South Africa and volunteered for service.'

'Donsa stared at the paper, and then at Lockhart, stammering miserably—'

'But—but—my brother—'

'Your brother is dead,' said the man with brutal plainness. 'The Charles Maxwell with whom you have been living all these weeks is an impostor. He is no more your brother than I am.'

The memory of last night's embrace sent the hot blood rushing into Donsa's cheeks. She stood for a moment or two unable to speak or move; then as pallor succeeded that swift blush, a crushing sense of misery smote in on her heart, and a merciful unconsciousness seized her.

He made no attempt to summon assistance.

There was no pity in his heart for the girl he was torturing.

He watched her until she recovered bearing to touch her face with his lips lest her faintness should

fall.

He must not show his hand too soon.

'What am I to do?' whispered Donsa, as full knowledge of her wretchedness returned to her.

'Why not join your sister,' he suggested. 'But she shook her head.'

'I simply cannot go and bury myself in the country now that I have had a taste of city life. I shall wait here until he comes home to dinner. He will tell me what to do.'

'That is not a course I should like my sister to take,' said Lockhart gravely. 'The fellow has deceived you in a base and cowardly manner. You ought—but I presume on our very slight acquaintance; you will of course please yourself. Perhaps it would be as well to make him explain his conduct. There may not be much to blame him for after all. If he has behaved to you in a purely brotherly manner, you will not find it difficult to forgive him; though speaking for myself, I must say I considered it not altogether honorable for married man to deliberately—'

'Married! Is he married?'

'Most certainly he is married. I know his history by heart. Shall I tell it to you?'

The sad little story lost nothing in the telling.

Lockhart magnified Maxwell's weaknesses into vices, and hinted at the young wife's madness being in a measure, the result of his ill-treatment.

Donsa did not altogether believe, but she listened; and as she could not doubt that Charlie was married, she somehow found it hard to forgive him.

And that was how it came about that, when Maxwell returned that evening, he found her flown, with all her belongings, the only explanation of her departure being contained in the briefest of notes, which lay on the dinner-table—

'Mr. Lockhart has told me of your deception, D.'

CHAPTER VI.

Had he received a mortal wound, Maxwell could not have felt more helpless.

Lockhart had been there!

She must be with Lockhart at this moment!

What a fool he had been to withhold the knowledge of the man's true character from her!

He might have guessed that Curtis would not submit to be balked of the prey he had marked down for himself.

Donsa with Lockhart! In his power! At his mercy!

The thought was torture; the more so that Maxwell was unable to move in the matter—powerless to effect her rescue, even if he knew where to find her.

He had placed himself in the wrong by his own mad folly.

Donsa would not dare to trust him again.

She had refrained from any word of accusation in her cruelly short note; but what she had written spoke eloquently of the indignation she felt at finding she had been deceived.

And yet, had he in reality, abused her trust in him?

His worse offence had been those heavenly-sweet caresses which he had not had strength to deny himself.

His pulses tingled even now at the remembrance of them, and her ready response—a response given in ignorance—that he was not the brother she thought him, but a response none the less delightful for all that.

He knew in his heart that his thoughts had never wronged her for a moment.

His love was past denying.

But it was not a selfish love, and it did her no dishonor.

But would she believe this? Would her people believe it?

He told himself 'No,' as far as her friends were concerned.

They did not know him, and they would naturally suspect the worst.

But she knew him.

They had gone through those happy weeks of closest intimacy for nothing.

Just as he had learned her real character, her independent spirit and dislike of all control, her sweetness and unselfishness, womanly love of home and domestic ties, which had shown itself in spite of her determination to work for livelihood—so she too, must have learned to know him in part, at least.

In this thought rested all his comfort, and precious little there were of it; for it would not help Donsa in her present strait to reflect that the deceiver she had flown from was a better man than the one whose protection she had accepted.

But perhaps he was worrying himself unnecessarily.

Instead of being with Curtis Lockhart, Donsa was in all probability with her sister.