Sweet Violet.

IN TWO NSTALMENTS—PART II.

CHAPTER I.

Alas ! for the rarity
Of Christian c arity
Under the sun !
Oh ! it was pitiful,
Near a whole city full
Home she had none !—HOOD.

The ponderous bell of 'Big Ben' had slowly and solemnly pealed out the hour of midnight, and the Great City was wrapped in slumber.

It had beon snowing off and on for two or three days or more, and now the snow lay piled up like miniature mountains on either side of the pavements.

The night of which we write was a cold and particularly wild one The wind groaned and howled through the streets, and catching up the loose snow sent it flying in every direction.

It was a night when not even a dog should have been a broad, let alone a human being. But, alas ! even in this great and wealthy city, it is not all of us who are blessed with homes. No matter what the weather is, someone—some 'poor unfortunate'—has to face it.

It was so on this particular night. The last notes of 'Big Ben' had hardly died away when a woman, leading by the hand a little child of about nine years of age, passed wearily round by the Houses of Parliament, now silent and deserted, and walked in the direction of Victoria street.

More than one policeman paused on his beat, and looked curiously into the face of the woman—more than one of them muttered,

'Poor unfortunate creature! how ill she looks—and that little child—ugh!' And then they thought of their wives and children, so comfortable at home.

And, oh, merciful father! how awful was the look upon that woman's face! By no means. It was a face which at one time had evidently been very beautiful; but trouble, misery, and want had changed it into that gaunt, haggard look which is the result of actual starvation.

Her attire and that of her child was of the poorest description; yet a close inspection would reveal the fact that every hole had been carefully patched, and that every part was perfectly clean.

Her steps were very slow, and more than once she paused and placed her hand upon her aching head.

'Mamma,' said the child, as her mother paused, as if uncertain as to the direction she was to take, 'are we near it now?'

'Yes, my child, yes. Very near it now. Oh, God! grant me but the strength to reach him, if only for the sake of you, my sweet Violet!'

'And you, too, mamma. You, too. Look how ill you are; and your poor hands tremble so—and you are so hungry. Oh, mamma, I do so wish you and I were in the snug bed we had before papa died don't you, mamma?'

Yes, yes my love,' replied the woman, as the tears rolled down her wasted cheeks I do, indeed. But it is not to be, Violet, because your mother is unfortunate.'

'No, no. It is because grandpa is such a—'

'Hush, Violet. You must not say a word against him. He is my father, you know.'

Arriving at the end of Victoria street, the woman turned into Chester-square, and eventually paused before a magnificent stone mansion, the brilliant brass plates on the pillars of which made it known to all that it was 'Chester House.'

The house was very quiet, and it seemed certain that everyone in it had retired to rest. It was very evident that no one had been up the broad steps for a very long time, for the snow lay upon them perfectly smooth.

The child looked up at the house in wonder, and her handsome blue eyes opened to their fullest extent as she said:

'Is this the house, mamma?'

'Yes, my love.'

'Oh, how grand! How nice everything must be in there. And you lived there once, mamma, did you not?'

'Yes—once—a long time ago. Come, my child.'

And the woman mounted the steps.

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Sir Archibald Blackmore, the proprietor of the Chester House, the owner of immense estates in the country, sat on this night in his study. It was his habit to sit up, after all in the house had retired, and go over his accounts, and to persue the various items of important news he had marked during the day.

A fine, noble specimen of an English man was Sir Archibald, but his features were stamped—ay, in bold relief—with an air of determination.

He was a man with an iron will, a man to rule with an iron hand, and, withal, a man who would never forgive an injury.

The hall porter was the only person awake in the house besides Sir Archibald and that worthy's astonishment may be imagined when he suddenly heard a low tap at the street door.

For some moments he could not believe his ears, and so he remained in his great chair, until, the knock being repeated, he was assured that someone was actually at the door, then he dragged himself to his feet, and cautiously opened it.

'My good woman,' he said, 'what on earth do you want? Surely you have come to the wrong house.'

'No, I have not. This is the residence of Sir Archibald Blackmore, is it not?'

'Yes, that is quite right,' replied the porter, struck by the sound of the voice.

The woman came closer to him and stood on the threshold of the door, so that the lamp in the hall fell upon her features.

'James,' she said sadly. 'I see that you cannot remember me.'

The porter started back with a cry of amazement.

'Miss Vio——' he commenced.

'Hush!' replied the woman, raising her hand warningly. 'Yes, James, it is indeed me.'

The hall porter, a very old servant of the family, placed his hands upon his eyes and seemed to wish to shut out the sight.

'Oh,' he said in trembling tones, 'what would your poor mother say if she saw you like this? And her last words were for her pretty violet. Oh, cruel Sir Archibald. May God help you and your poor child, for his heart is as stony as ever.'

'James,' ssid the woman,' I have come to see him. I have written to him scores of times, but he has never replied to me. I must see him. Not for my sake, but for this poor child.'

'If I go to him and say you are here, he will tell me— Oh, what shall I do? He is in his study as usual; you go there and knock. He will think it is me, and will tell you to come in. Go, and may Heaven melt his heart.'

The woman did as desired, heaving many a deep sigh as she passed down the hall she knew so well.

Arrived at the study door, she knocked gently, and a voice—a voice she had not heard for years, replied, 'Come in.'

Only one second did she pause and raise her eyes, as if imploring Heaven's assistance, then she turned the handle and entered.

Sir Archibald looked up as the door opened, and his eyes rested upon the wan face of the woman before him. Then the pen he held in his hand dropped to the floor. He seemed to look upon the woman as one risen from the dead.

For some few moments neither of them spoke, they only looked at each other—father and daughter.

Then his eyes wandered from his daughter to the child by her side, whose pretty blue eyes looked so imploringly into his face, and he heaved a deep sigh.

'What do you want here?' he asked in stern tones of his daughter.

'Father—'

'Stay! I am no father of yours!'

'Have pity upon me and this poor helpless child!' she cried, raising her hands in supplication. 'Oh, let me call you father; let me ask you to give me shelter for a little while—only a little while—for I am not long for this world—'

'Mamma! mamma!' cried the child; 'do not say so. Oh, do not say so!'

'I know that I disobeyed you years ago. But, oh, you did not know how I loved him! He is dead now—'

'Dead?'

'Yes,' bursting into tears, 'he is dead and buried, and what little home we had has been seized for rent. We are homeless, penniless! Father, for the sake of my dear dead mother, I implore you to give me some shelter for a time. Think, I am your own daughter, your own flesh and blood. Think of that, father, and have mercy upon me!'

And Sir Archibald Blackmore's unhappy daughter fell upon her knees before the stern parent.

Sir Archibald made no reply for a moment, but presently he left his seat, and standing by the fireplace, said:

'Listen to me. Ten years ago you, in defiance of me, married Edmund Loveridge, a man, I admit, of good education, but of no fortune. His income, which you knew well enough would cease with his death, was not enough to enable you to dress respectably, let alone to live. I dared you to marry him, and of what use were my threats? I might as well have spoken to a stone wall. No doubt he, and you too, thought that after a time I should forgive you and welcome you with open arms. You were mistaken. When I make up my mind to do a thing, I do it, as you know. Your conduct broke your mother's heart, and sent her to her grave. When you married Edmund Loveridge, I swore that you should no longer be a daughter of mine. I have kept my word, and I intend so to do. This is all I have to say to you. Go, and I need not tell you that I have no desire to see you again!'

'Mercy,' again pleaded the kneeling supplisnt, 'if not on me, at least on my innocent child!'

And her eyes turned with loving anguish on the wondering girl beside her.

'No,' was the hard rejoinder. 'You have flown in the face of duty, and you have no claim upon me. I have no daughter now.'

A low wailing cry of despair escaped her lips.

But Sir Archibald was inexorable. His face never relaxed its sternness, nor his eyes their unforgiving gaze.

The unfortunate daughter rose to her feet, and, taking her child by the hand, passed blindly from the room into the hall. The porter met her, and the look upon her face told him that her errand had been fruitless.

'What will you do?' he asked in a hoarse voice. 'Oh, what a cruel father! But Miss Vio—I mean Mrs Loveridge—times will change perhaps. See, I have been up and got a little money, which I beg you will take as a loan. It is only a few pounds, but——'

'No, James; I thank you for your kindness, but I don't need it—indeed. I do not. Good-bye, James. Come, Violet.'

'James was too full for words, his cheeks were wet with tears, and as his master's only child crossed the threshold and tottered down the snow-covered steps, he moaned:

'Ah, Sir Archibald, you will have to answer before the Almighty for what you have done this night.'

'Mamma,' said the child, after they had proceeded a few yards, 'have we no home to go to to-night?'

'None, child, none.'

'And I am so very, very tired, mamma; so tired and sleepy. Are you not tired, mamma?'

Yes, my pet, very tired—very tired;' and she muttered, 'tired of my life.'

'How cruel grandpa spoke to you.'

'Yes, very cruel, Violet—very cruel. But," and here she stopped and clutched a railing for support, 'I can go no further yet. Let us sit down awhile, my child; my limbs ache so."

She scraped the snow from off the steps of a large house, and sitting down, took her child—her pretty blue eyed Violet—in her arms, and covered her tender form with her shawl:

'Rest yourself, my child,' she said, 'and then we can go on again.'

'I sha'n't go to sleep, mamma,' said the child, 'because I wan't to talk to you.

And talk she did, but only for a few moments, for the warmth of the shawl invited sleep. Her pretty prattle became less and less; and at last pressed tightly to her mother's breast, she slept calmly and peacefully.

For over an hour did Mrs Loveridge sit upon that step, thinking and watching the starlit skies, but at last exhausted nature gave way, and leaning her back against the railings, she too fell into a sound sleep.

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Three hours paased away. It was a strange thing, but it was a fact, that the policeman on duty here arrived at the spot where Mrs. Loveridge sat with her child for the first time.

He walked slowly round, trying the doors on his way, until at last he stopped short.

'Hem!' he muttered, 'this looks well. Why she's fast asleep,' he said, turning on his bull's-eye, 'and—yes, so it is—a child as well, Poor things! In this awful weather, too. I say, my good woman, touching her on the shoulder, 'you will catch your death if you stay here.'

No answer, no movement.

'I say, my good woman, 'he cried in louder tones, 'wake up!'

No answer from the woman, but the child started from her sleep, crying out, 'Mamma—mamma!'

Alas! the loved voice was not answered.

'Good God!' exclaimed the policeman, 'what is this?' taking her hand and looking into her face. 'It is death!'

'No, no!' cried the child; 'she is asleep. Mamma, mamma! Oh, do speak to your own Violet. Do open your eyes, dearest mamma.' And as she said this she took her mother's pale face between her little hands, and burst into a flood of tears. 'Oh, mamma, do not leave me all alone. Speak to me.'

But no, never more would those lips part to utter words of endearment to that pretty child; never more would those wasted hands clasp her 'sweet Violet' to her breast. A merciful God had stilled her broken heart, and had called her to himself; but what of the child!

Alas, sweet Violet, who knows what troubles are in store for thee.

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Two days after this the newspapers contained reports of this terrible case, and it came to the knowledge of Sir Archibald Blackmore.

Now Sir Archibald was well known as a man who gave away a large amount of money to charity, and therefore, when he offered to defray the funeral expenses of 'this poor unfortunate creature,' as the newspapers put it, and also offered to adopt the child, every one was loud in their praises of his benevolence.

The inquest upon the body was duly held, and a verdict of 'death from exposure to the cold and want of proper nourishment' was returned.

The next day the body which had been placed in a splendid oak coffin, was taken to the undertaker's, and from there it departed on its journey to its last resting-place; and in the coach sat two mourners—Violet, and James, the hall-porter, whom Sir Archibald had sent to take care of her.

Poor little Violet! Her very heart seemed bursting.

And James was almost as bad. He remembered his master's unfortunate daughter 'in the days of her youth,' when he had romped with her for hours together.

And now! oh, it seemed almost impossible!

James, previous to his setting out to take care of Violet, had been spoken seriously to by Sir Archibald.

'James,' he said, 'no one knows that she came here but you and I. Beware you say nothing of it, for so sure as you do—but you know what I mean.'

And James bowed his head in silence. He had received instructions from Sir Archibald that, after the funeral, he was to bring Violet back with him, and bring her into the study, where he would await her, as he had something to tell her.

This he did, although it was a long time before he could persuade Violet to enter the room.

'Close the door,' said Sir Archibald as Violet timidly entered, 'and then come and stand here,' pointing to the opposite side of the fireplace.

And there she stood, looking into his face with his large tearful eyes—so earnestly did she look, so reproachfully, that Sir Archibald turned hastily away.

'Your name is Violet?' he said.

'Yes, grandpa'

'Who taught you to say grandpa?'

'Mamma and papa,' replied Violet simply

'Hem! Well, mark this—you are old enough to understand: you must never call me 'grandpa'—never say I am your grandpa to a living soul. If you do you will incur my displeasure. Do you understand?'

'Yes—gra—yes.'

'You must call me 'sir.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Very good. Having understood thus far, listen to the next. I have adopted you and my intention is to give you a good education. For that purpose you will go to a boarding-school, and to morrow.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Till then you will be under the care of the housekeeper. That is all; be careful you do not say that I am your grandpa. Now go, and tell the porter outside to take you to the housekeeper.

Violet turned to go, but recollecting something, she came back and approached the table at which Sir Archibald was sitting.

'What do you want?' he asked.

'Mamma said that one day you would love me like she did, and that you would kiss me. I have no one to kiss me now but you. Won't you kiss me?'

Sir Archibald looked into the sweet earnest face, and as he looked the face of his child—she now lying peacefully under the cold ground—rose up before him, and for one instant a tear trembled in his eyes.

'No, no,' he cried hastily; 'I never kiss anyone. Yet stay—come here. I will kiss you, but you must not tell anyone.'

'No, sir.'

Sir Archibald pressed a kiss upon the red lips, left his seat, opened the door, and Violet passed out.

She had looked her last upon her grandfather for many years to come.

And no sooner had the door closed behind her than Sir Archibald flung himself into his chair and buried his face in his hands, and in that position he remained for hours.

CHAPTER II.

Seven years have passed since Violet Loveridge was sent to boarding school.

Seven years—and during that time she made wonderful progress.

She had been sent to a good school, and had been well looked after. The governess had grown to love her like her own child, and no wonder, for Violet was a very affectionate girl.

And besides that, she was not like other girls. When the holidays came round she did not leave school, like the others, and go to a home where parents, brothers, and sisters were awaiting her.

No. So far as all that was concerned, her life was a bitter blank. She could only stand at the window, and with a full heart watch the preparations going on for the departure of her schoolfellows.

She had no relatives, and with the exception of her governess and schoolfellows, no friends.

Once a quarter, when her fees were paid and her pocket money was sent by Sir Archibald, the letter contained a short note to this effect:

'I am glad to hear you are obeying my instructions. Do not alter that line of conduct. Learn all you can.'

This was all.

But Violet—'sweet Violet,' as she was called, even by her schoolfellows—was not doomed to go unloved for long. No, no. Her beautiful face, expressive blue eyes, and golden hair had attracted the attention of more than one young fellow in the immediate neighborhood.

The governess was not aware of this; neither was anyone else, so far as Violet knew.

We say she had attracted the atteniton of more than one. But did she favor anyone?

That she certainly did.

It may be asked how she obtained the opportunity of speaking to anyone of the male species; but when you come to consider that every holiday time she was left alone, and that the governess allowed her to take an occasional quiet walk, you will say that it was not to be wondered at.

Her 'quiet walk' was always to one particular spot. A very secluded spot indeed, and that was to the long disused Bayeuth Abbey, a picturesque structure, built in the early English style, but fast falling into rack and ruin.

It was here where Violet had always met the young gentleman whom she had learned to love with all the strength of her young heart. And it was no wonder either, for young Ronald Radstock was indeed a fine speciman of English manhood.

He had been on a visit to a friend at Harton Court, a noble structure situated about two miles from the abbey. Twelve months ago he came there, his intention being to remain for 'a month or so.' But he had met Violet. It was indeed a case of love at first sight on both sides, and instead of his visit lasting a month it extended to twelve.

One fine summer's evening Violet was seated in the schoolroom. Four days previous the girls had left for their homes, and Violet, as usual, was doomed to amuse herself as best she could.

She had taken a book and seated herself near the open window that looked upon the green fields, and from whence she could see the tower of the Abbey rising in the distance. She attempted to read, but it was a failure. Her eyes were not fixed upon her book, they were directed to the Abbey.

'Ah me!' she sighed, 'what a strange life is mine! I wish I had a home to go to—I wish poor mamma was alive. Poor dear mamma! How happy those girls ought to be! And they are very good to ask me to go to their homes. I wonder why it is that Sir Archibald forbids my going? Well, well, I must not complain, for I am receiving a good education—and—and there's Ronald who loves me. I——'

At this moment a servant entered the room.

'Miss Violet,' she said softly, 'you won't tell anyone, will you?'

'What about, Mary?'

'Well—er—as I was coming past Gailey's Farm, a young gentleman stopped me, and he put a sovereign in my hand—'

'A sovereign! For what?'

'If I would take a letter to you.'

'Oh, give it me, quick!' cried Violet, her face turning a tell-tale red.

'You won't say anything, Miss Violet?' asked the servant, as she drew the precious missive from her pocket.

'Me say anything! How stupid I should be. Stay till I read it Mary.'

Violet opened the letter and drew out the contents, a tiny pink note. It ran:

'Sweet Violet, my bright flower, I am here a day before my time, and for a very good reason. I have been summoned home. Meet me in an hour from this at the old Abbey. Kisses ad lib., my sweet Violet, and do not forget to come to your RONALD.'

'Mary,' said Violet, as she flung her book from her and started to her feet, 'run, and bring my parasol and hat, and—if Miss Jones, the governess, should want to know where I am, say I have gone for a short walk.'

'Yes miss,' replied the servant, whose heart had been made glad by the receipt of a sovereign.

She soon procured the desired articles, and off went Violet, happy as a lark. Oh, so very, very happy! So happy indeed, that when she got fairly out in the fields her full heart seemed ready to burst, and presently found vent in a song—a light, joyous song.

Some people say, what is love! Ah, who shall attempt to describe it?

Arrived at the Abbey Violet turned up the grand old entrance and walked rapidly round the churchyard until she came to the usual place of meeting, and that was by one of the old tombstones. Rather a strange place, some people may be inclined to say; but it must be recollected that love requires a secluded spot—always.

Never, until 'far from the maddening crowd,' does the voice of love lend its ears to soft whisperings.

Violet had not stood there ten seconds before her lover, handsome Ronald, came round the Abbey, and in a moment they were in each other's arms.

'Oh, Ronald,' cried Violet, 'do you really mean that you are about to leave me?'

'My dear Violet, I have received a summons from my mother, who desires my immediate attendance. But, come, let us seat ourselves on this old tombstone and talk. There! Now, Violet, you are listening to me?'

'Listening? Why, yes.'

'I have never told you where my residence is.'

'Yes, you have—Harton Court.'

'No, my dear, that is not my residence—it is only the residence of my friends.'

'Yes?'

'My residence is a much larger place than that.'

'Larger? Then it must be an immense place.'

'It is an immense place; and, Violet, before I go there tonight—'

'To-night?' in surprise.

'Yes, I start tonight. Well, before I go, I want to tell you a secret.'

'Oh, I am so anxious—tell me this secret, Ronald.'

'Oh, but I want to be paid for it,' laughed Ronald.

'Paid? Then I have no money.

'Oh, not in money, my sweet Violet, I want to be paid lover's dues.'

'What are lover's dues, Ronald?'

'Kisses, my love; and my secret is valued at four.

'Is it really worth it?' laughed Violet.

'It is, indeed. You will give me four kisses for my secret, will you not, Violet?' and as he said this he drew her pretty face to his.

'Yes,' smiled Violet.

'And if you don't consider the secret worth it' laughed Ronald, 'well, then—in that case I will return them.'

'Very well.'

The penalty having been paid, Ronald said: 'Violet, I have often told you how well and truly I loved you, and you have as often told me how you returned it; and that being so, I am sure you will forgive me when I tell you that for twelve months I have been deceiving you.'

'Deceiving me!' cried Violet, starting from her seat.

But Ronald gently drew her back.

'Yes,' he said, 'deceiving you. I am not, as you have been led to believe, simply Ronald Radstock. My real name is Lord Ronald Radstock. That is my secret.'

Violet was silent for some few moments and tears stood in her eyes.

'What is the matter, Violet? My de-

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