

Hempstead's modest home. The housekeeper, a peculiar-looking woman, evidently simple-minded, recognised him. 'Yes, I know you are the doctor—but Miss Elizabeth says that no one—no one—is to see Mr. Hempstead, unless she is here. And now Miss Elizabeth is not here.'

'But Miss Elizabeth sent me,' he said.

'Sent you?' she asked.

'Sent me, of course—I am to examine Mr. Hempstead now. It is all right,' he said, assuming a masterful manner. 'I must hurry—I have no time to waste.'

She broke out into further and voluble speech, but he brushed her aside without listening and went up the stairs to John Hempstead's room.

The dark eyes of the sick man met his glance stolidly.

'How are you feeling?' asked the physician. 'I was passing this way and thought I would drop in. Miss Wing is evidently bent on taking good care of you.'

'She is here?' asked John Hempstead, in a weak voice.

'No,' answered the doctor, 'she is not here.'

He was amazed at the expression that shot across the sick man's countenance. He put one trembling hand upon his arm.

'You are sure she is not here? Look, oh, look!'

To satisfy him the young man did so, first propping him up with pillows. When he approached the bedside again, the dying man clutched at him.

'Oh, in the name of God, and His blessed Mother, bring me a priest! Do not let me die in my sins. It is not too late to redeem myself, and to do justice to those who have been wronged.'

'But why—' began the young man, bewildered.

'She will not permit it. The woman below stairs is my jailer; I have seen no one but her and Elizabeth Wing for the last five years, and I have not been to confession in over eight—not once since Benjamin Wing, her father, died.'

Dr. Burton stared at him, wondering if the nearness of death had made him distraught. But there was something convincing about his appearance—the light in his eyes, the expression of his face were those of a sane man.

'You will have time to make your peace with God,' he said gravely; 'that much I promise you. But we are not likely to have this chance to be alone again—I shall go for a priest as soon as I leave here and bring him back with me.'

'But you must listen first—I was Benjamin Wing's servant—he had a wife and a second daughter, Laura. I know that he had made a will leaving them the bulk of his property and Miss Elizabeth very little, as she had inherited some from his first wife, her mother. I know that the will was hidden away—'

His eyes grew wide with fear, his fingers clung wildly to the physician's arm.

'I myself, saw Benjamin Wing conceal that will, sir, but to save my very soul I cannot remember where. She does not know this—I have kept her in ignorance of my ignorance, for I was old and needed some one to look after me. So I promised her that I would tell her on my deathbed where the will is. That is the reason why she is so constant in her attendance and urges and keeps urging me and worries out my heart and brain with questions which I cannot answer.'

'But where are the other two—where are the wife and the other daughter?'

'God only knows, sir; she turned them from the house. An old will which left everything to her was probated, and because Mrs. Wing did not contest it, it was carried out. She was kind enough to them, until the law decided in her favor, and then she showed her true hatred.'

'But why did you not say something—why have you concealed—'

'I might be believed, sir, if I could tell where the real will was, but how could I make any claim like that with nothing to prove it? I told her of this other document, and she promised me all sorts of things if I would give it to her, and then I saw the chance to take things easy for the rest of my life and I did it. I did it, that's all, and blackened my own soul, and now I see the wickedness of it.'

'Even now, the fact that there is a will, will not help matters unless you can recollect its hiding-place,' said Dr. Burton.

'I'm hoping and praying that after I am reconciled to God, He will bring back my memory,' said the old man fervently.

'Then you shall see the priest at once,' said Dr. Burtoo. 'I will go for him this moment.'

He had forgotten his fatigue, as he put on hat and coat again and left the room. Some instinct made him tread softly. As he passed the door of the half-opened sitting-room, he glanced in. The housekeeper, in bonnet and cloak, sat nodding over the fire. Dr. Burton paused irresolutely. Either she was waiting for his departure to go to Miss Wing, or had just returned. The former conjecture was probably the correct one. He stole out very softly, pulling the door-mat over so that the door would not close behind him, and lost no time in finding the nearest Catholic church, where one of the Fathers responded at once to the call. As they went along, Dr. Furton told the priest of the possibility of not being able to gain entrance, and that they might have to force one. Fortunately, however, this contingency did not present himself. The door was as Dr. Burton had left it, and the woman still sat cloaked and bonneted and fast asleep. In a few seconds, the priest was at the bedside, and Dr. Burton remained in the hall while the penitent made his confession and received the last rites of his Church—all without interruption.

'You have certainly been accessory to a great crime,' said the priest, 'only prevented from being a greater one by God's divine providence. Ask him now, with all the fervor of your soul, to forgive you and enable you to right this wrong before you die.'

They left a comforted heart behind them this time, Dr. Burton closing the door very softly, for the housekeeper still slept in blissful ignorance of all that had transpired under her roof.

'A marvellous working of the ways of God,' said Father Reade, quietly. 'He told me the story he says he told you, before beginning his confession at all, and you will be astonished, no doubt, to hear that both mother and daughter are members of my parish.'

'Good heavens!' ejaculated Dr. Burton.

'They are poor—very poor. The mother is weak and ailing, the daughter a heroine, with the firmest faith I ever saw in a woman. I cannot tell you how I rejoice at this prospect of a turn in their fortunes.'

And that was the story on which Dr. Burton sat pondering, when he reached his comfortable study—the story of John Hempstead, and the events which had followed. He could not see the outcome, but before he retired that night he offered up a fervent prayer that God would enable the old man to remember.

When he called the following day Elizabeth Wing met him. Her handsome face was quite forbidding in its coldness.

'My woman informs me that you were here last evening,' she said.

'Yes,' said Dr. Burton, with a genial smile; 'in the interests of science. This man's illness is due to a rare combination of diseases, and it is a chance to be able to watch them work out. That woman downstairs nearly took my head off,' he continued in an off-hand manner, 'but I knew you would understand.'

Disarmed by his unaffected demeanor, Miss Wing relaxed.

'I would not want him annoyed unnecessarily,' she said. 'He was a faithful servant to my father, and I feel it my duty to make his last few hours as comfortable as possible.'

Again she stood at Dr. Burton's elbow as he asked questions and ascertained his patient's condition. It was the same during the weeks that followed. Every day saw John Hempstead weaker, Miss Wing more worried, the doctor more anxious.

(To be concluded next week.)

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