

'Larry, you are neither.'

'I was one or other to all men. My father never openly reproached me or questioned me. Ah, Hilton, I think I could have borne it better if he had. I retired to Carrickdun, and I have tried, God knows, to make the best of things both for him and me. Sometimes I see a look on the old man's face that seems to me to ask for an explanation, and I can give none. I wonder you did not hear of the thing at the time it occurred.'

'When was it?'

Larry mentioned a date.

'Ah! My wife was dying then, abroad,' Mr. Hilton said. 'I was only interested in that fact. And then—things are speedily forgotten. Some new sensation turns up.'

Larry nodded, a deeper shadow overspreading his face.

'I seldom leave home,' he said, after a moment, 'but I had to come here. A piece of land was sold to the railway company. I dreaded meeting any of the set I once knew. I need not have feared—not things alone, but people, are forgotten. You are the first to recognise me.'

Mr. Hilton played nervously with his fork. He had liked Larry O'Neill well in the days long past, and ventured on a question hesitatingly.

'And you— You were engaged, Larry. Did the marriage come off?'

'No—how could it? I released Miss Trevor. She accepted her release.'

'Miss Trevor—Constance Trevor.' Mr. Hilton thought a moment. 'She is unmarried yet. I saw her at some art show not long since—as beautiful as ever. Did she act under compulsion? Her father was rather determined.'

'There was no compulsion. Constance simply thought as the world thought—I was either a traitor or a coward.'

'Strange!'

'To none more so than me,' Larry said. 'How could any one account for what was unaccountable? There was only one person who believed in my honesty and courage.'

'Who was that?'

'Mollie Blake. Miss Trevor's mother was Irish, you know. That's how my acquaintance with the family began. Mrs. Trevor was Mollie's aunt. Poor Mollie! She was an orphan, unprovided for, and exceedingly simple, young, unformed, and quite ignorant of the world, too. Yet her vigorous and foolish championship gave me comfort. I wonder what became of the child?'

Mr. Hilton shook his head.

'Like you, I have not mixed much with my kind.'

There was a long silence. Mr. Hilton was not an adept at the art of making conversation. He tried to think of something to think about, while Larry sat grave and abstracted, his thoughts far back in the past. The host was relieved by a summons from his man-servant, and left the room. When he returned he carried a vase in his hand. Larry had not moved.

'This is my recent purchase,' Mr. Hilton began. 'It belonged to Sir Stephen Mereham, once Foreign Secretary. He died a year ago.'

'Yes,' Larry responded. 'I know. A sister of his was married to an officer in my—the regiment. Mrs. Tyson was a pretty, hysterical little woman, but very kind. She was much affected by that unfortunate affair. More than she had the least right to be, seeing that we were the merest acquaintances.'

Mr. Hilton had no desire to go back to the unsatisfactory subject. He began divesting the vase of its inner wrappings.

Just look at this, Larry,' he said; 'even if you aren't an art critic, the vase will appeal—'

There was a loud crash. The precious vase had slipped from its owner's hands and fallen on the side of the brass fender.

'Oh!' Larry ejaculated. Mr. Hilton was gazing at the fragments in consternation.

'What a pity!' Larry said. 'And the thing is shattered, I fear. No patching of it up?'

'No, no.' Mr. Hilton stooped over the pieces and lifted a couple of sheets of paper. Half mechanically he began reading them.

'God bless me! God bless me!' he cried. 'How on earth—what on earth!' He dropped into a chair, and went on reading while Larry retreated to the windows and looked out. When he turned from his momentary contemplation of the opposite houses, Mr. Hilton was still reading with distended eyes the thin, crumpled sheets of paper.

'Larry, Larry! Do you know what this is! It is most marvellous, most wonderful. How fortunate I am to find it! God bless me!' Mr. Hilton ejaculated excitedly.

'What is the matter, Hilton?' Larry inquired.

'And you here! Why, it is simply astonishing, dramatic!' Mr. Hilton tried to compose himself, and held forth the sheets. 'This is a letter from Mrs. Tyson to her brother, Sir Stephen. He must have stuck it in the vase.'

'Indeed!' Larry observed.

'And forgotten about it. He was absent-minded, it is said, or perhaps he compromised with his action.' One doesn't know, can never know,' Mr. Hilton said. 'Read the letter, Larry.'

'Why should I read what was not intended for my eyes?'

'Nor for mine,' Mr. Hilton laughed; then added solemnly: 'Why, Larry, it is your justification. It was Mrs. Tyson had you—drugged.'

'Drugged!'

'Yes. She was nervous about her husband going into action, into danger—a poor, foolish goose of a woman she was, I should judge. She obtained some powerful native drug from an Indian servant, which she determined to administer to her husband when the hour of danger arrived. The dose was warranted to produce a form of illness that would render the person taking it quite unconscious. The illness was to resemble an attack of heart trouble that would even deceive medical men. Well, the woman placed the powder in a cup of coffee, and in the confusion of the moment you drank it, and not Tyson.'

Larry raised his hand to his head.

'Wait a moment, please. I remember the coffee. It tasted queer, and I did not finish it.'

'Consequently you missed the full dose.'

'Tyson got all the credit out of the rising. He is General Tyson now,' Larry said. 'He was a brave soldier.'

'His wife was not a fit wife for him, evidently. She did not confess anything till your ruin was accomplished. Then she wrote to her brother, telling him all.'

'I cannot believe it.'

'There it is in black and white. What are you going to do, Larry?'

'Larry made no reply.'

'Look here,' said Hilton; 'let me interview Mrs. Tyson. I know her. She is a society woman and capable of denying the affair altogether if she is allowed. Let me tackle her. She might suspect you and be prepared.'

Thus it was that Mr. Hilton journeyed into fashionable quarters that same afternoon and was fortunate enough to find Mrs. Tyson alone in her drawing-room. He told the story of the interview to Larry O'Neill at dinner.

'She's a poor, weak creature, and capitulated almost at once. She was simply bewildered into doing so. The lapse of time had left her almost forgetful of India. What will you do, Larry?'

'Nothing, I think. So many years have passed, and I have grown accustomed to the present state of things. My father, of course, shall know.'

Hilton determined differently.

'Oh, well, perhaps you are right,' he commented, in non-committal tones; but next day he sought and obtained an interview with an important personage in the Foreign Service. He also called on Miss Trevor. As a result of these two calls Larry received a couple of invitations. The interview with the important man did not last long. Larry was determined to leave the past alone, and perhaps the Foreign Office individual was not altogether sorry. His interview with Constance Trevor was longer. The passing years had touched the lady but lightly. She was fully as beautiful, perhaps more so, than when Larry had seen her last; nevertheless, he greeted her, much to his own surprise, without a quickened pulse.

'No, don't apologise, Constance,' Larry said. 'I may call you Constance, may I not? You could do nothing but follow the example of all the world. Nobody kept belief in me—well, except little Mollie Blake. By-the-bye, has she married yet?'

'No. She developed modern independent notions after my mother's death, and is a hospital nurse. Just at present she is spending part of her annual holiday with me. She will be down in a moment or two. Won't you take a cup of tea—Larry?'

Not only on that afternoon, but on several subsequent ones, did Larry partake of tea in Miss Trevor's drawing-room. Constance was never deceived. It was not for her sake he lingered in London when even his business at the lawyers had been accomplished. Four months later Hilton was induced to visit Carrickdun, and one September evening he and Larry's father, the latter younger in looks and spirit than for years back—sat smoking by an open window while Larry and his wife strolled about the gathering dusk.

'Mollie is just the wife for him,' Mr. O'Neill commented. 'She says she would have married him at that unfortunate time