

thrown on the world terrified her. Where would she go? Where turn for shelter in this dark, unfriendly city? She had an idea that if Mrs. Quinlan were to dismiss her she would go back to Ardmore. She knew it was not sold yet. She would obtain admittance somehow into the empty house. She would see it once more, and then she would creep away and die on her mother's grave.

She did make the effort Mrs. Quinlan desired. If she had no great mental attainments she had clever fingers, and the fingers worked mechanically of themselves. She added the role of seamstress to that of nurse and governess. She sat up at nights to get the work done. She rose in the dark of the cold, dark mornings, and worked in a fireless room till her fingers were benumbed beyond working any more. Mrs. Quinlan was pleased with her. The only thing was that she looked so ill. It would be too bad if she were to fall ill and have to go to hospital now that she had begun to make an effort.

Things were more miserable as the days turned round towards Christmas. The short days, the long darkness in the airless, melancholy house, the spells of weakness and faintness that came more and more frequently, the drowsy intervals of semi-consciousness in which Ardmore and its memories haunted her with increasing persistency, made her lot heavier. She dreaded Christmas and its memories. No one would think of her. The children talked of presents and festivities and pantomimes; but there would be nobody in all the world to remember her with even the kindness of a letter. She was utterly bereft and desolate—she who had had such love. For the thousandth time she cried on her hard bed to her mother to take her to be with her.

That night she dreamt of Anthony La Touche, in the garden at Ardmore, he and she walking together, he debonaire as she remembered him, she young and light-hearted, not the sad, pale, heart-broken girl she had come to be. It was no infrequent thing for her to dream of Anthony La Touche. She had dreamt of him often of late, and had ascribed it to her longing that the La Touches should be back again at Ardmore. With La Touches there the house would be no longer desolate. The thought of it need not wake her up at night.

The next day, returning from an errand to a draper's shop, which she had undertaken for Mrs. Quinlan—there was a deal of sewing to be done to the new garments for the Christmas festivities—she came face to face with Anthony La Touche. He had seen her as she passed under the great electric globe outside his hotel, which he was just leaving. A quick step or two brought him to her side.

'Miss Langford' he said, holding her hand in a warm, friendly clasp. 'We have only just arrived, Aunt Matilda and I. We have been talking of you, of your dear, delightful mother. But . . . what is the matter? You poor child!'

He took the big parcel she had been carrying, and, gently compelling, led her back into the hotel. On the second floor he opened a door and led her within a warm, fire-lit room. As they came in Miss Matilda La Touche looked up from her book.

'Here, Aunt Matilda,' said her nephew, 'I have brought you this poor child. You remember Miss Langford. We have talked of her often enough. There is something terribly wrong. You will help her, if anyone can.'

Then Pamela found herself sitting in a chair before the fire, having her cold hands chafed between Miss Matilda's warm ones. Captain La Touche had retired into the background, where he listened quietly while she faltered out the story of all her sorrows. No one could have believed that Miss La Touche could have been so tenderly sympathetic. Her commiseration, her soft expressions of pity and regret seemed to draw the arrow from the wound in poor Pamela's breast. As her tears flowed it was as though the blood had begun to flow cleanly from a wound where an arrow had lain threatening mortification.

Captain Anthony sat so quietly in the background that he need hardly have been present. He sat staring before him and twisting his moustache. Yet somewhere at the back of his sorrow for the girl, and the personal grief which touched him that one so kind and warm as Mrs. Langford should be dead, there was a quick joy in the presence of Pamela Langford crushed and stricken as she was, but yet the girl who had revisited his thoughts again and again during those years since he had met.

If he had found her happy—in the dear, beautiful old house, in the warmth and love of her home—the feeling which now sprang to life full-grown in his heart might have been of slower growth. As it was, the extremity of his pity moved him to sudden passion. Now and again he glanced towards Pamela's fair, bent head, where the lamplight made a cloudy glitter about it; he listened to her low voice broken by sobs. If his aunt had not been present nothing could have prevented him from comforting Pamela in his arms.

The clock struck six with a little silvery tinkle, and Pamela sprang to her feet with a cry of dismay.

'I must go,' she said; 'I must go. What will Mrs. Quinlan think of me? I ought to be putting the children to bed.'

She mopped at her wet eyes, turning away the disorder of her face from Captain Anthony, who had come forward impulsively.

'I am coming with you,' he said. 'Do you suppose I am going to allow you to load yourself with that parcel? Something, even more than the natural grief, has been killing you. You look tired to death. Aunt Matilda—'

'My dear boy, let me speak. You will come to us, Pamela. For the matter of that I need a companion quite as much as your present employer needs a governess. My dear, there is an affinity of affection between us. When I think of that dear woman, your mother. We loved her, Anthony and I. And I can never forget how she respected the traditions of the La Touches at Ardmore. The spirit was the same. A little modernisation, to be sure; an introduction of the conveniences which have come with the years. For the rest, everything the same. Ah, child, what a mother you have lost! What a woman the world has lost! What a friend, that rose of woman-kind!'

Miss La Touche would have held Pamela there and then; would have confronted Mrs. Quinlan with the amazing intelligence that her governess had been seized upon by the La Touches, and that there was positively no one, unless it might be Mrs. Quinlan herself, to put the children to bed. But Pamela pleaded that for this one evening things should be as they had been. She must have time to prepare Mrs. Quinlan's mind.

She was conscious of a strange singing in her ears and giddiness as she bathed the children. In fact it took all the will-power she could summon up to enable her to get through with the task. She looked so white and tottering as she told Mrs. Quinlan she was about to leave her that the indignation died in the lady's heart and on her lips. If Miss Langford was going to be ill it was better she should be ill with the La Touches than with her.

'Of course, it's an inconvenience,' she said, 'and I'm disappointed about the blouses. I don't know where I'm going to get anyone to finish them.'

'If you would let me take them,' Pamela said humbly, 'I will try to get them done by Christmas.'

That night for the first time she dreamt of Ardmore under its old aspect of unclouded happiness. The rooms were warm and bright as of old; the gardens in full fruitage and flowering time. She was there, and she was happy. She did not see her mother indeed, but she had all the time an ineffable blessed sense of her presence. She woke from her happy dream to the murky dawn looking through the sooty windows. Sparrows chirped in the black boughs outside. To-day the La Touches were to claim her; but it was characteristic of her that in her bewildering new happiness she looked around at the little beds and their sleeping occupants, and was sorry to leave the children, who had been fond of her.

After all, the illness which threatened her was averted. It was so easy to turn back on that dark way with all the petting and comfort which surrounded her. She lay on the sofa, or she was taken for a drive by Miss La Touche—the December weather was like May—and the love and comfort were as though she had been frozen nearly to death, cast out homeless, shelterless, and suddenly had been caught back into the light and warmth.

Captain La Touche was out a great deal those days, but he was always in in the evenings, and Pamela used to lie on her sofa drawn close to the lamplight, working at Mrs. Quinlan's blouses, while he and Miss La Touche talked in low tones, and Pamela listened in a dreamy happiness. Her mother had won those hearts for her; this haven of peace and ease was a direct gift from the beloved mother in Heaven.

Even a week did a deal to bring back the color to her cheek and the light to her eye. The thin places began to fill out; there was an elasticity in her step; she grew impatient of lying any longer on her sofa.

(To be concluded.)

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