

vain; his practice dwindled away. He went to India to begin afresh there, but in a few months he died. Aileen was left to my care, and has been with me ever since, not knowing her parents' story. You will excuse me from enlarging on it. In the lapse of so many years it has died out of public remembrance, but it is not impossible that it may be revived, and now it is only just that you and your son should be made aware of it.

'Pardon my saying that you ought to have told Aileen the truth long ago. You would thus have saved her and others a great deal of pain, Miss O'Connor.'

'I admit my own moral cowardice,' answered Barbara. 'I deceived myself into thinking that my silence was to save Aileen pain, whereas I realise that it has been to spare myself the agony of casting a slur upon my beloved brother's memory. May he rest in eternal peace! And that he truly does I, for one, do not doubt.'

'I am very sorry,' said Mrs. Blake (her eyelids were smarting). 'Of course this ends everything between Terence and Aileen. If you still wish the truth to be hidden from her, no doubt we can find some plausible excuse for not sanctioning the engagement.'

Miss O'Connor merely bent her head as a matter of fact, she was past speaking, and Mrs. Blake retired, her heart aching for the pain she must inflict upon Terry. How would he, whose life hitherto had been like a white sail on a sunny river, endure this downfall of his tender hopes? And poor little Aileen, so unconscious of the blot on her name, of the suffering in store for her whether the secret were kept or not—who would not pity her?

As Mrs. Blake had expected, Terry was awaiting her return in the highest possible spirits.

'My poor boy, I am so sorry for you!' she whispered, tears gathering as she surveyed him in his youth and happiness.

'Mother dear, what has happened?' Is Aileen ill?

'No, but as surely separated from you as if she were dead.'

And then, without further preface, she briefly repeated the story told her by Miss O'Connor.

'Thank heaven Aileen does not know and need not know!' were his first words.

Mrs. Blake said, less enthusiastically, 'No, if we can find some other reason sufficient for your dissociating yourself from her.'

'But why must I do that?' She is not responsible for her father's guilt, if guilty he were.

'My dear Terry, pray do not allow yourself to be carried away by foolish sentiment. Your course is clear. I pity the girl deeply and sincerely, but she is not the only one who must be considered. How can you marry the daughter of a suspected man?'

'I can't consider anything but the guileless girl who has never cherished an unkind or selfish thought, who loves me, believes me, trusts me. Why should I betray her trust? Can't I, can't you give her father the benefit of the doubt?'

'The question is not whether the man was really guilty or not. We need not discuss the matter for your course is clear. I will be candid with you, and tell you that you must choose between her and me. If you marry her, I will not receive her, nor will I receive or regard you as my son. If you persist in this, you forfeit every claim on me, and I shall leave all my money to my sister's children.' And with burning cheeks she left the room.

A fortnight passed without Aileen seeing her lover, though token of his existence had come, stating that he had been summoned unexpectedly to Belfast on business, which he would explain when they met. Aunt

Barbara had developed a strange despondency and melancholy, and, to crown all, the girl had met Mrs. Blake driving to Killowen, and, instead of receiving the usual gracious smile and bow, had been startled with a passing glance of uninterested non-recognition. What did it all mean?

It was a day of driving wind and rain, the waves breaking with a long, vicious swish on the shore, and shreds of mist floating over the mountains. Miss O'Connor sat knitting, whilst Aileen read the following note, which had just been received with a large square parcel.—Miss Aileen O'Connor.

Dear Madam,—Accept, please, this present, which I made for you myself. When it reaches you I shall be gone. Good-bye. Gratefully yours,

Ellen Pace

P.S.—The lining will be useful. 'I suppose she is a little mad,' said Aunt Barbara, when the present was displayed and proved to be a hat of many colors, lined with pink satin and rampant with wings and flowers. Further criticism was prevented by the clashing of the garden gate which sent a shower of calceolaria blossoms over the wet grass. Aunt Barbara caught her breath as she looked through the window.

'It is Terry Blake, Aileen. What is there to blush for?'

'O Auntie! I—he—' stammered the poor girl.

'I know,' said Miss Barbara, sadly.

Instead of indulging in cynicism, she drew the girl to her side, bidding her remember that, whatever happened, she had still her Aunt Barbara, and that the sharpest sorrows lose their sting in time. With these mysterious words she quietly withdrew, and Terry entered, still the fond and radiant lover. After a brief interlude, Aileen went straight to the point.

'Terry, is there any reason why your mother should cut me? Have I offended her in any way?'

He grew deeply, darkly, beautifully red.

'She has refused to consent to our engagement, love. I am of an age to judge and decide for myself with whom I shall spend my life. In time she may relent. I am sure you will esteem me none the less because I am suddenly thrown on my own resources.'

O Terry, what do you mean?

'That I shall soon find work to do, and be all the better a man for it. I have been negotiating the sale of my yacht and horses and other luxuries, they will fetch a good price—enough for us to begin house-keeping on, if you are willing to take me in my altered circumstances. Are you?'

'To that there could be but one reply, and Aileen wept, moved by his perfect unselfishness, his prompt sacrifice of his own pleasures to provide for her though she was far from realising the depth of his love and the height of his chivalry. They whispered to each other comfort and encouragement, until a sound outside brought them back to common existence, and Terry's eyes fell on the millinery monstrosity.

'What on earth is that?' he cried.

'A hat with a history,' said she, handing him the note, which he read.

'Look here, Aileen, there is more in that hat than meets the eye. That postscript means something. Your attention is pointedly directed to the lining. I sent a romance. The old lady was a miser, and she has bequeathed all her wealth to you. Into that lining she has stitched her will or, perhaps, a few thousand-pound bank-notes, or shares in a company paying 70 per cent. Hasn't it come at a good time?'

'They manage these things better in fiction,' said Aileen; but the next

moment she exclaimed: 'O Terry, there really is something under the lining! I can feel a paper. What can it be?'

A few strokes of the scissors revealed a couple of sheets of paper closely written and addressed to Miss Aileen O'Connor.

'The will, of course!' laughed Terry. 'To how many millions are you heiress? Or is it possible that she has left her business to you?'

But Aileen's eyes were fixed on the papers on which were traced the words tearing away the veil from the tragedy of her father's life.

Miss Aileen,—My name is not Ellen Pace but Agnes Watson. I was formerly in your dear mother's service, and am unhappily responsible for her death. Others will tell you the full story, and how circumstantial evidence seemed to condemn your father. I solemnly declare his innocence. It was I who during his absence that fatal night accidentally gave your mother the wrong medicine. I discovered the error too late and was afraid to confess the truth. I feared that such gross carelessness, if known, would ruin all my prospects in life, and in my cowardice allowed another to bear the shame and blame.

Nothing prospered with me after. I lived in constant dread of the truth becoming known. I changed my name, but ever and ever the struggle grew harder. I was at the last extremity of want and despair when you found me. Before I heard your name I recognised you by your likeness to your father. Now you will understand some of my questions. I have always been a coward and I am so yet. So, while conscience and your angelic goodness to me force me to make this confession, I hide it where it may not be found until I am beyond your just reproaches. I scarcely dare hope that you will pardon me. But I earnestly implore you to say, 'May God forgive her!'

Agnes Watson

The letter fell from Aileen's trembling hands, and she turned to her lover in an agony of entreaty. And from him she heard all the sad story, understood the meaning of his mother's anger, of Aunt Barbara's warnings and endeavors to preach the instability of human affection, and, clearer, brighter, better than all, saw the nobleness of the man she loved.

'O Terry, Terry!' she sobbed, 'I can think of nothing but how I am to outdo you in love and kindness!'

'It appears that Aileen does not wish that wretched woman to be sought after, said Mrs. Blake as she sat with Aunt Barbara in her garden. Above them shook a single star through depths of melting twilight—the lough was ruddy as wine with sunset's last splendor, the soft swish of waves added to rather than disturbed the stillness.

'That is so. She has forgiven Agnes Watson. It is not Aileen's nature to do anything else.'

'Even I can forgive her,' said Mrs. Blake, 'when I remember that but for her tardy atonement I might have been estranged from—my children.'

And in the glance she cast at Aileen and Terry strolling to and fro through dewy darkness dear as day of the tall flowering bushes, there was nothing but kindness and love—'Ave Maria.'

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