

'Oh!' she said impetuously. 'If only I had been more yielding. She would surely have grown to care for me. Roger—please—may I see her?'

'It will not hurt her,' he answered.

'Roger, Roger! Why did you not send for me?'

She could think of nothing else to say, so great was her self-reproach, her self-blame. When they reached the bedroom door, she stopped him.

'Let me go in alone,' she said. 'She is conscious?'

'Oh, yes; she has never lost consciousness.'

'Then I will go in, Roger—just for a few minutes, dear.'

He stood aside to let her pass. Adele, in the softened light of the room, could barely make out the features of the woman lying on the pillow. But the woman recognised her and was watching her as she drew near with hesitating steps. At the foot of the bed the girl paused, not knowing if she slept.

'Well?' asked Roger Jameson's mother, in a hollow tone. 'What do you want?'

Adele could not answer—the sharp question embarrassed her. Then, obeying a sudden impulse, she moved around and fell on her knees at the bedside. There was a timid, pleading expression on her sweet face and her eyes were humid.

'I have come to wish you a merry Christmas,' she said slowly. 'I did not hear of your illness until this morning—at Mass—and I came at once. Please, please, be friends with me,' she went on, her breath catching in a little sob. 'I am so sorry you are ill, so truly sorry. Try to believe me and be friends with me.'

Mrs. Jameson, who had resigned herself into the hands of her Maker, preparing, at the doctor's verdict, which she insisted on hearing, to give up all hope of recovery, felt new invigoration run through her tired body. This was not the haughty, self-assured young woman who would estrange her boy from her, the proud girl who would set her aside, close her out of Roger's life forever. This was a little childish creature, with tear-filled eyes and soft red lips supplicating her favor. She looked at her, and an affection as strange as it was sudden seemed to spring up in her bosom.

'You see,' went on Adele, in a tender, humble tone, 'I've never had a mother, and I'm so ignorant, and I've made Roger so miserable. I love Roger dearly, and if you will but love me, too, for his sake, I shall be so happy—'

Mrs. Jameson raised her hand slowly and held it out to her.

'Poor little child! I've been a wicked woman, dear. I thought you cold-hearted and indifferent, and I could not bear to see Roger drift away from me altogether. I am older than you. I should have had more sense.'

'No, no, no!' said Adele fervently. 'Oh, no! Only say that you forgive me.'

'Where is Roger? Call him.'

The young man entered almost as she said the words, and a glad light sprang to his tired face when he saw his mother's arm about his sweetheart's shoulders.

'Here's your little girl,' said the mother, looking up at him, 'come to wish me a merry Christmas. Be good to her, Roger.'

'I am sorry I was so harsh,' said Adele, 'and I have asked your mother to pardon me. And you,' with a sweet smile into the old, worn countenance, 'you are not going away from us—now.'

Mrs. Jameson smiled faintly.

'Perhaps not,' she said. 'I should like to live a little while—if only to see you both married.'

'I am sure you will,' declared Adele, in her hopeful young voice. 'Roger, do you remember what you said to me a week ago—Christmas is such a good time to begin being happy in? Roger, let the three of us begin to be happy now.'

For answer he raised the hand nearest him to his lips. The unrest and disquiet had left his mother's face.

'The three of us,' she repeated, 'from now on—the three of us. God willing, we shall not be separated yet. A merry Christmas, daughter.'

'A merry Christmas, mother!' said Adele, and kissed her.—*Benziger's Magazine.*

G.



R.

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