

"I shall not incommode you soon again, Miss Harman—I am going away," was the pleasantest remark he could find to make.

"Indeed!" she said sharply. "I dare say it is only others who have a right to be concerned about that."

There was something in her face, and in the sudden inundation of the cup of tea she was pouring out, which caused him to start violently.

"By heavens! there is not a woman in the whole world, except my foolish old mother, who will give me a tear with her adieu," he cried, eagerly.

"I do wish you would not swear," she said, in a gentle voice.

"Even if I swore that I would go to the ends of the earth to win your love?" said the unconscionable scamp, drawing his chair nearer, and capturing one of her hands. Pity 'tis, 'tis true; but stranger even than the fact that the young adventurer, who, ten minutes before, had no more notion of making love to Miss Deborah Harman than of marrying a stone figure on a monument, was now ready to drop at her feet, with a whole hive of honey vows if needful; stranger still is the fact that so shrewd a young woman as Miss Deborah never once thought of casting up her keen eyes to see if the young rascal was humbugging her. And, strangest of all, when she pushed him away in a flurry and said, "You really mustn't," he found that the freak which he began in mere wantonness was fastened upon him in deadly earnest.

"I should have thought you preferred duets at the Castle," she said, rallying her bitterness, when the rest of her grim, heavy-armed virtues seemed to fly to her.

I really cannot report what the bottle of Pommery see and the bottle of St. Estephe dictated to him to say in way of reply. The imprisoned damsels who echoed his furnace-vows of love at the foot of Mullagh would have submitted to an additional century of penances in the interest of their sex for having given currency to divers oaths so perfidious. But Jack was now fully, recklessly, under the influence of the potion. Miss Westropp he still saw shining as an angel, as a star, worlds above the level at which he was at present grovelling; but the empyrean heavens had given him up, and he had given up the empyrean heavens. The tag of French philosophy which says, "When one cannot have what one loves, it is necessary to love what one has, occurred to him as suiting his own case excellently well; and if Miss Deborah was to be had, he began to see a hundred excellent philosophic reasons for loving her. Even in the matter of personal attractions, her bright eyes, and face reblossoming under his gaze like a rose that was but lightly visited by an untimely frost, showed wonderfully fair, especially in the glowing medium which French wines diffuse about our visions. He recaptured the hand, he advanced with a dash to the waist, he sighed, and whispered, and glowed, and "inshort" (as old Humphrey Dargan would say), he conquered the simple lady's heart, beyond the power of all the eloquence of the Church Mission pulpits, and all the irrefragable logic of their tracts to ransom it.

"And do you—really—really"—she cried, almost sobbing with joy and fear—shrinking even from completing the sentence. But he, of course, completed it for her by taking her in his arms unresistingly and kissing her. Every woman is beautiful when she avows her love; and, when he saw this stray spirit so helplessly under his spell, and saw her face raised to his own, swimming, as it were, in a golden sea of joyous wonder, he might very easily have persuaded himself that it was not vanity, but genuine love; not love of the lost empyrean sort, of course, but still of a highly respectable and interesting character—that shone in his returning gaze, and burned in his answering kisses. The plain English of all which is—that he took Miss Deborah's heart, as he took the ninety pounds a year in the Pipe Roll Office, as the best price he could get for tarnished affections and unprincipled wits.

"But you are going:—is it possible you are going—and to-morrow?" she cried in a sudden spasm of terror.

"To-morrow—but I will return—when you will—at your summons," he said. "And I will get the summons, *n'est ce pas?*"

"Hush, it is Hans!" she whispered; and the agent returned into the room, with the telegram still in his hand,

looking so worried, for all his jaunty attempts to hide it, that young Harold at once said the desirability of securing his letter of introduction to the Attorney-General and making his adieux.

When he got into the outer air, it was with a stifling sensation that the whole drama of Hans Harman's singular offer, and his sister's more singular surrender, must have been a drunken dream, the work of the bright treacherous spirits he had taken in, of which nothing now remained except the headache which was beginning to rack his brain. But the letter of introduction in his breast pocket was there to assure him that it was all as real as anything in this spectral and absurd world could be; and the more he thought of it, the more gaily he hummed to himself, in a sort of impromptu operatic recitative that, if he had sold himself (as what man must not in the inevitable hour when *il faut se ranger?*) at least there might be worse bargains for a little frivolous marmoset like himself than a cosy official career in the metropolis and the sister of the most influential agent in the county for a partner. Nevertheless, he crept upstairs without the least crinkle of his usual boisterous comings and goings, passing Father Phil's door on tiptoe, as if he had just been picking his purse, and was afraid he might awake and raise the cry of "Stop thief!" and when two hours afterwards his poor old mother, under the influence of one of those mysterious monitors which seem to be vouchsafed to mothers' hearts alone, came into his room wrapt in an old shawl, to imprint a kiss upon her darling's forehead, thinking he was asleep and dreaming sweetly, he felt that kiss burn into his very brain, as if nothing beautiful and pure could touch him for the future without turning to torture; and the hours chimed one after the other till the ghostly dawn crept in without his being able to satisfy himself, out of all the brilliant saws of all the rollicking philosophers of La Mere Medecine, that this feeling was altogether due to the headache and the last of Hans Harman's St. Estephe not being up to the mark.

"What is it, Hans?" said Miss Deborah, more softly than usual, when her brother and she were left alone.

"It's—the devil," said he, striding up and down the room. "It's a telegram from Lord Drumshaughlin to say he's coming home. It's an upset to all our arrangements. And when I send for that old idiot, Dargan, to countermand his visit to Wrixon, I find that he's gone and the harm's done. Damn Drumshaughlin for coming! Damn old Dargan for going! Damn most people I know in this infernal world!"

"Lord Drumshaughlin coming home!" cried Miss Deborah, with a burst of delight. "Then my letter to Lady Drumshaughlin telling her of Mabel's doings, has had its effect."

"Your letter!" he cried, stopping in his stride. "Then it's you that have brought him over?"

"Well, you know, brother, that girl's conduct was becoming really unbearable, and I thought a slight hint to her mother—"

"Hell's fire and demons! woman, what business had you thinking anything?" he screamed, turning upon her as if the spirits he had just invoked were leaping in forked flames from his eyes and mouth. "Get out of this, to bed, or to the devil!" and, as if his hand itched to deface something, he flung a sugar-bowl furiously at a console-glass over her head, and brought the fragments crashing about her.

For the first time in the sombre records of domestic encounters at Stone Hall, that strong-willed woman answered only with tears; which unlooked-for event so softened the agent that he laid his hand penitently on her shoulder and said: "Don't. I was damnably annoyed—damnably. But you and I mustn't fall out, Debby." As-tute a man as Hans Harman was, he little suspected the real secret of the warm, forgiving pressure of the hand, with which she answered him, or that the tears she shed then and for hours after she found herself safe in her bedroom were tears of ecstasy and wonderment, which had no more relation to Lord Drumshaughlin's coming home or the broken console-glass than the song of the lark has to the price of turkeys. Miss Deborah did feel as light as Shelley's lark—such is the power of love, even in Stone Hall!

(To be continued.)

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