

"They drove from the station to the 'Manions.' They mounted the stairs to the first floor.
"Let me come in with you, Leonard," she said. "I want to say something. It had better be said to-day and at once. Else it will become impossible."

He observed that she was embarrassed in her manner; that she spoke with some constraint, and that she was blushing. A presentiment seized him. Presentiment is as certain as coincidence. He, too, changed colour. But he waited. They remained standing face to face.

"Tell me first," she said, "is the Possession of your mind wholly gone? Are you quite free from the dreadful thing?"

"Happily, yes. I am quite free. My mind is completely clear again. There is plenty to think about—one is not likely to forget the last few weeks—but I can think as I please. My will is my own once more."

"I also am quite free. The first thing that I want to say is this. What are we to do with our knowledge?"

"You are the person to decide. If you wish, it shall be proclaimed abroad."

"I do not possibly wish that."
"Or—if you wish—a history of the case shall be written out and shown to every member of the family, and placed with the other documents of our people, so that those who follow shall be able to read and understand the history."

"No. I want the story absolutely closed so that it can never again be re-opened. In a few years the memory of the event itself will have vanished from the village; your cousins of the Commercial Road will certainly not keep the story alive; besides, they know nothing. There remains only the Book of Extracts. Let us burn the Book of Extracts."

Leonard produced the volume. Constance tore out the leaves one by one, rolled them up, laid them neatly in the grate, put the cover on the top, and set light to the whole. In one minute the dreadful story was destroyed; there was no more any evidence, except in the piles of old newspapers which are slowly mouldering in the vaults of the British Museum.

"Never again!" she said. "Never again will we speak of it. Nobody shall know what we discovered. It is our secret—yours and mine. Whose secret should it be but yours and mine?"

"If it were a burden to you, I would it were all mine."

"It is no burden henceforth. Why should that be a burden which has been forgiven? It is our secret, too, that the suffering was laid upon us, so that we might be led to the discovery of the truth."

"Were we led? You would make me believe, Constance, even me, in supernatural guidance? But it seems natural, somehow, that you should believe that we were, as you say, led."

"You, who believe nothing but what you see, will not understand. Oh! It is so plain to me, so very plain. You have been fooled—compelled against your will—to investigate the case. Who compelled you? I know not; but since the same force made me follow you, I think it was that murdered man himself. Confess you were forced; you said so yourself."

"It is true that I have been absorbed in the case."

"Who sent your cousin from the East End? Who fired your imagination with half-told tales of trouble? Who sent you the book? How do you explain the absorbing interest of a case so old, so long forgotten?"

"Is it not natural?"

"No, it is not natural that a man of your will power should become the slave of a research so hopeless—as it seemed. Who was it, after we had mastered every detail and tried every theory and examined every scrap of evidence, and after you had examined the ground and talked to the surviving witness—I say, after the way had been prepared—who was it that sent the two voices from the grave: the one which made it quite certain that those two were the only persons that wood and the other which showed that they were quarrelling, and the one who was unguessed in his wrath? Can you explain that, Leonard?"

"You believe that we were led by unseen hands, step by step, towards the discovery, for the purpose of those who led."

"There were two purposes. One for the consolation of that old man, and the other for yourself."

"How for myself?"
"Look back only a month. Are you the same or are you changed? I told you then that you were outside all other men, and because you had everything—wealth sufficient, pride of ancestry, intellectual success, and no contact with the lower world, the vulgar and the common, or the criminal or the disreputable world. You remember? Yes—are you changed?"

"If to possess all these undesirable things can change one, I am changed."

"If to lose the things which separate you from the world, and to receive the things which bring you nearer to the world, do change a man, then you are changed. You will change more and more; because more and more you will feel that you belong to the world of men and women—not of caste and books. When all is gone there still remains yourself—alone before the world."

He made no reply.
"Where is now your pride of birth? It is gone. Where is your contempt for things common and unclean? You have had the vision of St. Peter. If there are things common and unclean they belong to you as well as to the meaner sorts—for to that kind you also belong."

"Something of this I have understood."

"And then there was the other purpose. While with blow after blow it is destroyed, you are led on and on with this mystery; voices from the dead are brought to you till at last the whole mystery is made plain and stands out confessed—and with it, I am moved and compelled to follow you, till at the end I am taken to see the dying man, and to deliver to him the forgiveness of the man he saw. Oh, Leonard, believe me; if it is true that the soul survives the death of the body, if it is possible for the soul still to see what goes on among the living, then have you and I been moved and directed and led."

Again he made no reply. But he was moved beyond the power of speech.

"Forgiveness came long since. Oh! I am sure of that, long since. That which followed—was it Consequence or Punishment?—lasted for seventy years. Oh, what a life! Oh, what a long, long agony. Always to dwell in one moment; day after day, night after night, with never a change and no end; to whirl the heavy branch upon the head of the brother, to see him fall back, dead, to know that he was a murderer. Leonard! Leonard! Think of it!"

"I do think of it, Constance. But you must not go on thinking of it."

"No, no—this is the last time. Forgiveness, yes—he would forgive. God's sweet souls cannot but forgive. But Justice must prevail, with the condemnation of self-reproach, till Forgiveness overcomes—until, in some mysterious way, the sinner can forgive himself."

She sat down and buried her face in her hands.

"You say that we have been led—perhaps, I neither deny nor accept. But whatever has been done for that old man whom we buried this morning, whatever has been done for the endowment of myself with cousins and people—well, of the more common sort—one thing more it has accomplished. Between you and me, Constance, there flows a stream of blood."

She lifted her head; she rose from the chair she stepped closer to him; she stood before him face to face, her hands clasped, her face pale, the tears yet lying on her cheek, her eyes soft and full of a strange tender light.

"You asked me, three or four weeks ago," she said, "to marry you. I refused. I told you that I did not know the meaning of Love or the necessity for Love. I now understand that it means, above all, the perfect sympathy and the necessity for sympathy. I now understand, besides, that you did not then know, any more than I myself, the necessity for sympathy. You were a lonely man, content to be lonely, and sufficient for yourself. You were a proud man—proud through and through, belonging to a caste separated from the people by a long line of ancestry and a record full of honour. You had no occasion to earn your daily bread; you were already distinguished; there was no man of your age in the whole country more fortunate than you, or more self-centred. I was able to esteem you—but you could not move my heart. Are you following me, Leonard?"

"I am trying to follow you."

"Many things have happened to you since then. You have joined the vast company of those who suffer from the sins of their own people; you have known shame and humiliation."

"And between us flows that stream."
Even for a strong and resolute woman, who is not afraid of misunderstanding and does not obey conventions, there are some things very hard to say.

"There is one thing, and only one thing, Leonard, that can dry that stream."

His face changed. He understood what she meant.

"Is there anything? Think, Constance, Langley Holms was your ancestor. He was done to death by mine."

"Yes, there is one way. Oh, Leonard, in this time of trouble and anxiety I have watched you, day by day. I have found the man beneath the scholar. If I had accepted your offer

three weeks ago it would have been out of respect for the scholar. But a woman can only love a man—not a scholar, believe me, nor a student—nor a poet, nor an artist, nor anything except a man."

"Constance! It is impossible! You are his daughter!"

"It is fortunate that I am, as you say, the daughter of the man who was killed. He suffered less than the other. The suffering was but a pang; but the other's—oh, it was a lifelong agony! If I marry the son of the man who did the wrong it is because the message I carried to the dying man was a sign that all was forgiven—to the third and fourth generation."

"Tell me, Constance, is this pity, or—?"

"Oh, Leonard, I know not what flowers there are which grow out of pity and sympathy, but—"

She said no more, because there was no need.

[THE END.]

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