

that the Cure became weary, and sat down to rest. He fell asleep, and in his sleep the giver of the rose tree appeared to him and bade him keep the plant. "You shall not it to grow," he said, "against the wall of the hospital, and it shall feed the hungry and heal the sick long after you are dead and gone."

"But the Bishop, the Bishop—you did not hear what he said of me!" groaned the poor priest, and the vision replied that there is One higher than all the bishops, who would bless the rose and its work. "Water it this day at three in the afternoon," with which words the vision ended.

So the priest tottered home, utterly wearied out, and planted the rose without delay against the wall of his cottage hospital. It was already nearly three o'clock, and there was no baptismal water. "I was a fool and sinful besides to listen to dreams," sighed the father; "now I have killed the rose by moving its roots, and my hospital is ruined."

But a strange thing happened. As he stood weary and panting from his work someone tapped his arm. It was a tired, haggard woman, bearing a child in her arms.

"Father," she said, "I am dead-weary and like to die, can you give me shelter and food? If I die the child will die also, and she is unbaptized."

"Now I know for certain that the Hosts of Heaven are on my side," thought the priest. To the woman he said, "First the greater thing, which is the baptism of the child; then the less, which is the housing of you and her in this cottage, where you shall rest and remain, if you will."

So the woman lived and the child was baptized and prospered, and the rose tree climbed within a year or two over the entire wall of the cottage, being covered almost at all times with beautiful blooms. And the woman was installed as nurse and managed well, for a blessing was upon the house, even more than men knew, though sick folks were brought from a distance to the hospital because it was known that the special favour of providence was upon it.

And even when the old priest died the prosperity of his hospital remained, for the rose never failed in its perpetual harvest, and the blossoms had their own special value in the market. Sometimes the little child gave away a bud or a flower to some passer-by, and though the recipient might not be aware of it, there went ever a special blessing with the blossom. If a maiden received it, love, perhaps, came with it. To mothers it carried the fiding of some grace, maybe, in an erring child. To everyone there came the fulfilment of some hope or great desire; yet neither the child who gave it nor the fortunate one who received the flower could tell of the mysterious blessing that dwelt in the priest's rose tree.

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CHAPTER I.

Beechwood Chase was well named. The house was nothing but roomy and comfortable—a substantial stone mansion without architectural pretension, the country guide-book called it—but the trees around it were the wonder and delight of the neighbourhood and the pride of Lord Darley's heart. They were nearly all beeches, those fairest of forest trees, beside which oaks are clumsy and elms are stiff. The great smooth boles reached to magnificent girth; the drooping branches, all brodered with half-ripened nuts that glowed like beads of amber in the sun, spread themselves far and wide and made great stretches of shadow on the soft grass below. Here deer couched, and squirrels ran about the laden boughs rejoicing, and shy, timorous birds, that shunned the haunts of men, built their nests in peace. The park was large, with a slope to a little stream that ran noisily over its pebbles, and mingled its baby bawling with the rustle of the trees, and the cry of the wood-pigeon, and the song of the linnet and thrush.

It was seldom that the solitude was broken by anything but the tread of a gamekeeper or wood-reeve, except in the shooting season, but this year Lady Darley had been recommended country air and quiet, and had brought with her a train of distinguished guests, at whose appearance in the park the squirrels hid themselves, and the rabbits disappeared in their holes, and the browsing deer lifted startled heads, and scudded away into sylvan retreats, where no stray feet would either follow or find them.

With Lady Darley had come, as a matter of course, her special friend Delia Churchill, sole daughter and heiress of the late Sir John Churchill, banker and financier, and reputed millionaire, and more young men than are prone to bury themselves in the country in June. "But where Miss Churchill is, there will the gallants be gathered together," said Coventry Smith, who wrote for society papers, and affected wit of a more or less degraded quality. Delia looked at him with the cold scorn her admirers knew so well.

"I don't think parodies like that are quite—reverent," she said, and then returned to the book from which her dark eyes had been for just a moment raised.

"Don't crush him quite, Delia," said Lady Darley, languidly. But Mr Smith did not look crushed. He smiled jauntily and kissed his hand as he disappeared through the open window.

"Crushed? A mangle wouldn't do it!" said Delia. "I do dislike that man, self-sufficient, conceited coxcomb that he is!"

"I wonder if you will ever see anyone you will like, my dear! It will not be for want of aspirants."

"No," said Delia, bitterly, and there was so much pain in her voice that Lady Darley looked at her inquiringly. "Do you think I do not know why?" cried Delia, with sparkling eyes. They were quite alone now, and she got up, and began to walk about with an excitement that would have astonished those who only knew the proud and reserved Miss Churchill in society. "Ah!" she cried, "you cannot understand it, Della—you, who were poor, who were loved for yourself! Ah! how I loathe these creatures who fawn and flatter and cringe, like that abject thing that crawled away just now!"

"Delia, do you know, I think you are a little unjust, even to Coventry Smith."

"Unjust? very likely!" said Miss Churchill. "What chance have I of being just? How can men do themselves justice when they are seeking not love, but gold?"

"It is not fair to class them all together," said Lady Darley, who had her favourites among the aspirants,

as she called them. "There is young Horner, for instance. He does not care about your money—or at least, no more than is reasonable."

"No, it is a good little boy, and has an honest bit of calf-love, I believe," said Delia, smiling with a genuine face; "but all the same, I am not the 'plum' he will pull out of life's pie."

"You may well say a plum—I begin to think your heart is nothing better than a stone," said Lady Darley, laughing.

"Here is Darley," said Miss Churchill, who was standing by the window.

"And Maurice Arnold with him! There is another man, Delia, that I am sure you must acquit of fortune-hunting. He couldn't pay you less attention if you were as poor as a church mouse."

"No," agreed Delia. "I couldn't imagine what brought him down here, but it seems he has some old aunt who lives in the village."

"Oh!" "So that must be it," said Lady Darley, comfortably. "You know that little old lady who goes about with all those dogs?"

"Yes." "Well, that is she—little Miss Macksey, you know. I believe she is getting a little childish, for she can't be less than eighty. She must be Mr. Arnold's great-aunt, I should think—shouldn't you?"

"Really, I don't think I should think about it," said Miss Churchill. She moved away from the window as she spoke, and the next moment the two men passed it and came into the room.

Lord Darley was short and dark and stout, and his companion was tall and slim and fair. Both were about thirty, but Mr. Arnold looked a little younger. He had a clever face, with a dash of sarcasm about the mouth, and grey eyes that expressed just as much or as little as their owner pleased. They were pleased to express very little just now. He did not see Miss Churchill, who had moved into the shadow of the curtain, and Lady Darley was not a favourite of his.

"I'll go and hunt up that book about the German mines, Darley," he observed. "It's somewhere in the library, I dare say."

"Well, if you must have it, I think you will find it on the third block on the right, bottom row," said Lord Darley; "but won't you come and make one at pool?"

"Not this morning, thanks." He went away, and Darley burst into a laugh almost before the door had closed.

CHAPTER II.

"You'll never guess what we've been doing this morning," said Lord Darley, when Arnold had gone. "We've been to a dog's funeral—we have, upon my honour! You never saw such a sight in your life. Miss Macksey has lost one of those pugs of hers, and she took it into her head to have it buried in the park. Of course I said she might, for she's as fond of the little brutes as if they were children."

"I know," said his wife; "and calls them by such ridiculous names. That big mastiff that walks behind her chair is Sir Galahad, and all the pugs and poodles are Sir This or Lady That. One is Lady Clara Vere de Vere, I know."

"Well, there they all were, and every dog of 'em had got a bit of crape round his left fore-paw. I declare I could have laughed my head off, except that the poor little woman was in such a way. One of the keepers had dug a hole down in the copse by the brook, and Arnold put the poor little beggar in, as grave as a judge, and then we walked Miss Macksey off home, and all those ridiculous dogs trotted at our heels. I was in fits, but Arnold never as much as smiled. I dare say he knew better—the old lady's got a pretty bit of money, and can leave it as she likes."

"Lord Darley!" cried Delia, in a tone of trenchant scorn. She came forward from her shadowed corner, and the light fell on her face, and showed it curiously disturbed; her mouth trembled, her eyes flashed indignant fire.

"Eh? what's all this about?" cried the unconscious little peer, facing this angry apparition with innocent wonder. "Lord Darley, indeed! What next?"

"Darley," said Delia, more gently, "I think you ought to ussay that. There are plenty of men who would restrain their laughter or their tears, who would perjure themselves in any way you please for gold, but you know—you know!—that Maurice Arnold is not one."

Lord Darley did not answer, and something in his face made Delia turn sharply round. One glance sufficed. In the doorway stood Maurice Arnold, looking almost as confused as herself. He had come back to ask something further about his book, and stood arrested at the sound of his own name.

"I—I beg your pardon," he stammered, but Delia fled through the window, scarlet and shamed, and Darley exclaimed, with a laugh—

"You didn't know you had such a doughty champion, did you? We shall have you proposing to the heiress next, old man!"

"I am much indebted to Miss Churchill," said Arnold, stiffly; "but I think that would hardly be the way to justify her good opinion."

He went away with his question unasked, and indeed forgotten. The sight of Delia, flushed and moved in his defence, had been sweeter to him than he cared to own. Why, oh! why was she so rich, and he so poor, that to woo her would be to lose his self-respect? His only defence against

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