

candor. And he was very generous. I can never forget his sympathy when you disappeared. He gave me hope at first; and then later—later—

'Tried to induce you to surrender hope—yes, I see!' From his tone it was to be inferred that John Graham saw a great deal. 'And now he is with you, is he not?' I heard his name mentioned by one of your companions. Are you going to marry him?'

The question was harsh in its abruptness, but she answered it quietly.

'If that had been asked me an hour ago, I should have said "Yes." It did not seem to matter—then. But now everything is changed. You are alive!' She looked at him joyously. 'Is it not strange that my heart always told me you were alive, even while he tried to convince that you must be dead?'

'He tried to convince you of that?'

'He has argued often that if you were living, and if you loved me as I believed, that nothing could keep you away from me.'

'Nothing could keep me away from you?'

He appeared to repeat the words mechanically, while his glance turned toward a letter lying on the table beside him. Involuntarily he extended his hand, as if to push it out of sight; but Margaret's quick eye followed the motion and passed to the letter. The next instant she was on her feet, and it was in her hand.

'Laidlaw's writing!' she exclaimed.

There was a moment's intense silence as she stood staring at it, then her flashing gaze turned again on Graham. 'What does this mean?' she demanded imperatively. 'You will tell me the truth now, or I will make him tell it. He writes to you—he knows that you are alive!'

'Yes,' the man answered quietly. 'He knows—he has always known. I would not have told you, but the matter has been taken out of my hands. It seems that for us three this is the day of fate.'

'The day of fate for me, indeed,' she echoed bitterly, 'since in it I learn that you not only tossed me out of your life without a word, or apparently a thought, but that you left me to be deceived by a traitor like this!' She faced him passionately. 'What is the meaning of it?' she cried. 'If you cared nothing for me—that is plain enough now—had you no care for yourself, for your own broken and ruined life? What power has this man to make you serve him by dishonorable silence—you, John Graham, whom I thought a very paladin of honor? What bribe has he given you? It is at least—her brilliant, scornful glance swept over the bare poverty around—'not money.'

'No, it is not,' John Graham said calmly. He rose as he spoke, supporting his weakness by leaning against the table. 'I understand now,' he went on, 'why death has delayed so long in coming to me, and why fate has brought you here to-day. It was too much that I should go out of the world and leave you to one whom you are right in calling a traitor—one who has betrayed me as well as you.'

She looked at the letter. 'How can that be?' she asked.

'A little while ago,' he said, 'you spoke of what you have heard—what everyone has heard—of me. Do you not know that Laidlaw is president of the company whose funds were—misappropriated?'

'I suppose I knew it,' she answered indifferently, 'but what then? Are you going to tell me that you did—what is the euphemism?—misappropriate those funds? It is possible that I might believe it now.'

'No,' he replied again, 'I am not going to tell you that. It is time for the truth to be spoken between us. I did not take the money, but—my brother did.'

'Your brother?'

'My half-brother, Lucien Kent. He is, you know, much younger than I am, and has been more like a son than a brother to me ever since our mother gave him into my care on her death-bed. He was only a little chap then, but so winning, so brilliant, always so lovable. Ah, well!—it was a short, quick sigh—those were the qualities which were his undoing. Every one spoiled him, and I, no doubt, worst of all.'

She nodded. 'Yes, you worst of all,' she said, 'for you allowed him to be a burden on your life and a drain upon your fortune. I have always known that. And so it was Lucien who has ended by ruining you, who had done everything for him!'

'It was my fault,' Graham said. 'I should have held a sterner hand over him, but I never imagined how far dissipation and extravagance had carried him until he came, in an agony of shame and fear, and told me that he had taken thousands, many thousands, of the money of the company in which I, as one of its officials, had given him a position of trust.'

His voice fell, he moved across the floor, looked for an instant out of the iron-barred window on the sunny street, and then returned to where Margaret still stood, erect, silent, waiting.

'Surely you see how it was!' he said in a tone of appeal. 'I had to save him—the boy at the beginning of his life, whom my indulgence had allowed to go astray. Besides, putting all feeling for him aside, I made myself responsible for his acts when I placed him in the position which rendered his defalcations possible.'

'Ah, the ideal of honor!' she murmured. 'I knew it would demand its sacrifice.'

'There could not be even a question of that,' he declared firmly. 'I went at once to Laidlaw, told him of Lucien's confession, offered all I had to replace in part what had been taken, and assured him that the remainder would in a short time be covered by my life insurance. All I asked was that Lucien should not be prosecuted, nor his guilt be made public. And then—'

'Well, then—'

'He made difficulties, talked in a high tone of morality, of setting a bad example. "Such a crime cannot possibly be condoned," he said. "We cannot refrain from prosecuting if the embezzler remains within reach of the law. If you wish to save your brother from the penitentiary, you must send him to Mexico—unless you are willing to go in his place.'

Once more the speaker paused, and once more there was tense silence for a minute in the strange, bare chamber. Then he went on.

'It was some time before I grasped what he meant, before I understood that he was offering me the opportunity to save Lucien from disgrace and degradation by taking the burden of his misdoing on myself. When I finally understood, I had no idea why he offered this—I was so hopeless with regard to you that it never occurred to me that he wanted to remove a rival from his path—but it flashed upon me that it was a step which would cut many knots, and many difficulties.'

Margaret Sylvester put her hand to her throat. 'Without,' she cried in a half-strangled voice, 'a single thought of me!'

'On the contrary, with more thought of you than of any other human being,' Graham told her gently; 'for it was in thinking of you that the road of sacrifice opened as a way of escape from intolerable pain. You see, I not only believed that you would marry Laidlaw, but there was every reason why I was debarred from any hope of even trying to win your love. What had I to offer you? I was not only a ruined man, whom disgrace touched nearly, but, more than that, I was a man whose death-warrant had been read. Do you understand now? I was ready to efface myself, since Laidlaw demanded that as the price of giving Lucien another chance in life, because, in the first place, I did not believe that you cared for me; and, in the second place, I had the assurance of more than one physician that I would be dead within two years. So I went away—'

'And pretended to be already dead!'

'No; that was an accident with which I had nothing to do. A passenger on the ship on which I sailed was lost overboard soon after we left port. No one knew him, so a rumor went abroad that it was I. Laidlaw was accountable for the rumor, but it mattered little to me—indeed, I was glad of the peace and freedom which it secured to me. I have lived here very quietly, unmolested even by curiosity—a dead man yet alive, for whom everything has ended, except just to sit in the sunshine and watch death coming a step nearer every day.'

Perfect quietness, the quietness of one for whom indeed all effort is over, and the end of the journey in plain sight, was in his tone, his face, his manner; but all the passion of human love and human anger was in Margaret Sylvester's voice when she suddenly flung herself upon him.

'John,' she cried, 'I cannot—I will not endure it! We have been tricked and deceived, you and I; but if you will take courage, we can yet have our life together. Trust me to deal with the traitor as he deserves, if you will come back to the world. John—for my sake—you will come?'

He smiled exquisitely as he put his arm around her. 'Dear heart,' he answered, 'I had a strange sense of lightness when I waked this morning that I said to myself: "Surely the end is near at hand—surely I shall die before night comes again." For I could not guess that what the day was bringing me was—you. It is a wonderful happiness to be given as a nunc dimittis, not only this glimpse of your face, but the knowledge of your love, the assurance of your faith. Ah, never mind the traitor—give him no further thought! After all, what has he done for us but to help us to learn, through pain and separation, that love is of the soul, not of the body, and that even death—death itself—will be powerless to separate—'

He put a handkerchief to his lips, there was a moment's struggle, and then the red tide gushed forth, while with her strong young arms the girl laid him back in his chair and knelt beside him.

A little later a persistent knocking at the door was followed by an impatient hand pushing it open, and as a flood of sunlight rushed into the room, a man's figure stood in the brightness.

'Excuse me,' he said, 'but I wish to inquire if Miss Sylvester is here?'

Out of the gloom a clear voice answered him:

'Yes, Miss Sylvester is here, Mr. Laidlaw; and so is John Graham—dead.'—*Catholic World.*

**WANTED KNOWN**—That Bill-heads, Circulars, Cards, Programmes, and General Printing of every description are executed at the *Tablet* Office. Moderate rates.