





A Select Story.

The Colde Fell Mystery

BY THE AUTHOR OF "PUT ASUNDER."

CHAPTER LI.—(continued.)

SISTER TERESA.

"How came the locket there, dear child?" she asked kindly. "Tell me."

"I do not know, sister," she cried, "I did not take it; I did not put it there; I did not steal it; but, oh, sister, how can I make any one believe me?"

How often had that cry been rung from her in her despair. "How could she make any one believe in her innocence when appearances were against her?"

"How can such things be?" cried the child. "Indeed I never touched it, yet it is found among my things, and when I say that I did not take it, no one believes me."

"Heaven does!" said Sister Teresa, who had now to teach what she had learned.

"But why does not Heaven speak?" cried the child; a question which she had asked herself in Ardrossan court, and which Monica Grey had thought her to answer.

"Heaven will, in its own time," she answered, gently.

"And I must wait until then?" cried Annie, whose face was flushed with angry resentment.

"Yes, my dear you must wait," said the sister, gently. "Perhaps it will not be long."

She said to herself that she was waiting still. Heaven spoke for the little Annie very soon, for the next day the real thief confessed.

She had stolen the locket and hidden it in Annie's box, to be avenged upon her, and then finding herself troubled in conscience, miserable because another was punished for her wrongdoing, she had owned her fault.

"Never judge by appearances," was the inference Sister Teresa made every one draw from this. This was the story of her life since she had entered the convent of the Sisters of Peace.

And now, as she sits musing by the fire, its light playing over her beautiful face, a messenger comes to tell her that she is wanted in the sick-room.

CHAPTER LIII.

A WELL-KNOWN FACE.

A SMALL, square, bright room, plainly furnished as were all the hospital rooms, a bed with white hangings, a wash-stand, dressing-table, three or four chairs, a towel-stand that stood by the bedside, a few books, and a crucifix that hung on the wall. All this Sister Teresa's eyes took in at one glance.

The patient, whose face she did not see, lay still and quiet, but when he spoke his voice seemed strange.

Two doctors were present—the one who was attached to the hospital; in the other she recognized Sir James Carlingford, the cleverest physician of modern days.

They were talking together in low, earnest tones, and in some vague way, she could not tell how or why, the scene reminded her of the doctors at Colde Fell. Sir James turned to her, and looked with wonder at the beautiful face, which seemed to have nothing left of earth upon it.

"I should like to speak to you, sister, a few minutes," he said, and she led the way into a small consulting-room near.

"You will have little to do," he said; "but your work will be tiresome. The patient utterly refuses to believe that he lies in any danger; the fact is that he suffers none or very little pain; his spine is broken; there is no earthly aid or help for him. There is nothing to do but to watch him, cheer him, soothe him, until he dies. Give him wine—brandy—cordial; but make him understand, as soon as you can, that he has to die! Men hear such news better from you than from us."

"I will do my best," said Sister Teresa.

"He will die quite quietly," continued Sir James; "he will die by inches, as it were, and the end will be all calm."

"How long?" asked Sister Teresa, and Sir James took out his jeweled watch.

"It is eleven now," he said. "He may last until sunrise."

So human lives are measured off. Then the doctors went away, and she was left alone with the patient. She shielded from him the light of the lamp, but he laughed.

"No, sister," he said, "let me have light while I may. Some strange words are running in my head about eternal darkness. I wonder what they mean." She turned the lamp on again, and then it struck her that the voice was familiar to her in some degree, a voice that she had known in the long, dead past; yet it might all be fancy.

"I can not help laughing," he said, "although it seems a terrible thing to do just after a serious accident like mine. The horse I was riding rolled over me, but fortunately it did not hurt me. It might have broken all my bones, but it did not. Yet those two men look as solemn and as grave as though I had been mortally wounded, and they look as though I were going to die. Such nonsense! I have not even a pain—not a pain! You see no cause for fear, do you?"

"The doctors are wiser than I," she said, in a sweet, low voice, wondering why every moment his face grew more familiar to her.

"It is their business to croak, and to make people miserable," he said. "I have never even thought of death. To tell me, I who feel well, comparatively speaking—to tell me that in a few hours I shall be dead is arrant nonsense."

What could she say or do? Yet he was intrusted to her, and she must do her best.

"Would you like anything," she asked, gently.

"Yes, I should. Give me what I have liked all my life—a foaming glass of champagne."

"I will get it for you," said Sister Teresa.

The sick man laughed as he watched the sparkling liquid foaming into the glass.

"That will do a man's very heart good," he said; and she wondered with a sigh how she was to prepare such a man's heart for death. She went up to him with that strange sense of being familiar with his voice that had disturbed her all along. For the first time she saw his face. The wonder was that she did not drop the glass and the wine!

That she did not cry out in her sharp anguish of fear; that she did not fall on her face in her first thrill of despair. A thick cluster of dark hair lay on the white pillow—a dark, handsome face, every line of which was familiar to her—the dark eyes, the straight brows, the handsome mouth with its dark mustache—the face of Captain Archie Douglas, which she had seen last in the court of Ardrossan! She stood quite still for a few moments after her discovery, sick and faint of heart, pale and trembling.

"Now, sister," cried the sick man, "give me the wine. I can not stir. Well, you must raise me. I am stiff with the fall."

She raised his head and held the glass to his lips. As she did so, her fear and terror, her despair and horror were so great that she almost died. All the details of that scene came over her; she saw the bedroom at Colde Fell, the dying face of her husband, the suspicious looks of his friends; she heard again that terrible accusation—"You did it! I am dying like a rat poisoned in a whole, and you did it!"

Then she came to herself with a sudden shock, finding that the dark eyes were fixed full upon her, but there is no recognition in them. How should he, who believed Hester Blair drowned and dead, how should he recognize her in the dark-veiled sister whose face was half-hidden by that same veil?

"You are trembling, I believe," he said. "Surely those doctors have not frightened you?"

"No, not for my own sake," she replied.

"Surely not for mine," he answered. "I am not afraid."

"They have left me such a difficult task," she said, gently.

"They always leave the hardest part to other people," said the sick man, grimly. "What is your task?"

"To give their message to you," she replied. "But perhaps I need not fear; brave men do not fear death—you may be brave!"

(to be continued.)

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