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A GIRL IN TEN THOUSAND

BY
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A GIRL IN TEN THOUSAND.

CHAPTER I.

"You are the comfort of my life, Effie. If you make up your mind to go away, what is to become of me?"

The speaker was a middle-aged woman. She was lying on a sofa in a shabby little parlor. The sofa was covered with horse-hair, the room had a faded paper, and faded chintz covered the shabby furniture. The woman's pleading words were emphasized by her tired eyes and worn face. She looked full at the young girl to whom she spoke.

"What shall I do without you, and what will your father say?"

"I have made up my mind," said Effie. "I don't want to be unkind to you, mother,—I love you more than words can say,—but I must go out into the world. I must live my life like other girls."

"You had none of these ideas until you met Dorothy Fraser."

"Yes, I have had them for a long time; Dorothy has given them emphasis, that's all. Dorothy's mother did not like her to go away, but now she is glad. She says that nothing has made Dorothy into so fine a woman as taking her life into her own hands, and making the best she can of it. Before I go, mother, I will get Agnes to learn all my duties; she shall help you. She is nearly fourteen; she ought to be of use to you, ought she not?"

"She would not be like you," replied Mrs. Staunton. "She is very young, remember, and is at school most of the day. I won't argue with you, Effie, but it tires me even to think of it."

Effie sighed. She bent down and kissed her mother. Her words had sounded hard and almost defiant, but there was nothing at all hard or defiant about her sweet face. She was a dark-eyed girl, and looked as if she might be any age between seventeen and twenty. There was a likeness between her and her mother quite sufficient to show their relationship; both faces were softly curved, both pairs of eyes were dark, and the mother must have been even prettier in her youth than the daughter was now.

"As I say," continued Mrs. Staunton, "it fills me with terror to think of doing without you."

"Try not to think of it, mother. I am not going yet, I only want to go very much indeed. I am going to talk to father about it. I want to have the thing arranged while Dorothy is here."

Here Effie went suddenly on her knees by the sofa and threw one young arm protectingly round her mother.

"You do not know what it means to me," she said. "When Dorothy talks of the full life, the keen interest, the battle, the thrill of living, I feel that I must go into it—I must."

While Effie was speaking, Mrs. Staunton looked fixedly at her. There are moments which all mothers know, when they put themselves completely out of sight, when they blot themselves out, as it were. This time had come to Mrs. Staunton now.

After a pause, she said, and her words came out even without a sigh:

"The question, after all, is this, Effie: What will your father say?"

"When he thinks it out carefully he will be pleased," replied Effie. "He must be interested in the profession I want to take up. How often—oh, how often, mother—has he groaned and sighed at the bad nursing which his patients get! You know you have always said, and he has said the same, that I am a born nurse. Won't he be proud and pleased when I come home and tell him all about the new ways in which things are done in London hospitals? You know there are six of us, and Agnes and Katie are growing up, and can take my place at home presently. Of course I know that father is quite the cleverest doctor in Whittington, but nobody gets ill here, and it is quite impossible to go on clothing and feeding six of us with no means at all. I do not think I am vain, mother, and I do not really care very much about dress, but mine is shabby, is it not? I think I should look pretty—as pretty as you must have looked long ago—if I were better dressed."

"No dress can change your face," said Mrs. Staunton, with sudden passion. "You have the sweetest and dearest face in the world to me. When you go away the sunshine will go out of my life; but, my darling, my darling, I won't—you shall never have it to say that your mother stood in your way. I must think, however, of what your father will say to this. I can only warn you that if there is one person your father dreads and dislikes more than another, it is the modern girl. He said to me, 'Thank God, Effie has none of that hideous modernity about her. She is fairly good-looking; she does not think about Girton or Newnham, or any of the women's colleges; in short, she has no advanced ideas.'" 8

"That is all he knows," replied Effie. "The fact is, I must and will do something to earn my living. You are sending George out into the world to win his spurs, and I am going to win mine."

"In what way?" asked Mrs. Staunton. "You know you are not clever."

"Dorothy thinks I can be a nurse, mother. May she come and see you, and talk it all over?"

"There is no harm in talking it over," said Mrs. Staunton. "But now I wish you would go upstairs and help Susan to put the children to bed. You can bring baby downstairs if you like, and I will undress him. Run along, Effie—run along, there's a good child."

"Oh, yes, mother, I'll go; only just answer me one question first. May Dorothy come here after supper to-night?"

"What is the use of my seeing her? Your father is the one to decide."

"I will ask father to stay in after supper."

"I don't think he will. A message has come from the Watson people over at the farm. Mrs. Watson was taken bad with a stitch an hour ago, and they want your father as quickly as he can go."

"Well, he will be back in time—he won't spend the whole evening there. Anyhow, Dorothy can come and see you, and if father does come in before she leaves, well and good. I may run and tell her to come, may I not?"

"Won't you put the children to bed first, and bring me baby?"

"Oh, yes, yes, if you insist."

"I do, Effie; while you are at home you must help me all you can. I have not had a bit of strength since baby was born. It is perfectly dreadful to feel all your strength going and to know that things are at sixes and sevens, and however hard you try you cannot put them right. Dear me, Effie, I did think when you were grown up that you would stay at home and be a comfort to me." 9

"I shall be a greater comfort to you when I send you money from London. Now, don't speak another word. I will put the children to bed, and I will look after baby myself, while you close your eyes and go to sleep."

Effie pressed her warm young lips on the older woman's brow, and then ran out of the room.

There was a large nursery upstairs, where everything at the present moment was, as Effie's mother had said, at sixes and sevens. The nursemaid, a young girl of seventeen, was not up to her duties—the children ruled her, instead of her ruling the children. Effie, however, could be masterful enough when she liked. She had a natural sense of order, and she soon put things straight in the nursery. The children were undressed quickly and put to bed; and then Effie, taking the baby in her arms, asked Susan to go downstairs.

"You can have your supper," she said. "I will look after baby."

"I thought my missus would like me to take baby to her," said the girl.

"No; I will look after him for the present," said Effie. "Mother is tired, and she must sleep. Run away, Susan, and have your supper, and come back here as quickly as you can."

"Yes, Miss Effie; and I am sure I am very much obliged to you. You 'as a wonderful way with the children, and I only wish I could learn it."

Susan left the room. Pressing the baby's soft curly head against her breast, Effie began to pace up and down with it. The baby was three months old; he was fractious and disinclined to sleep, but when his sister began to purr a soft song into his ear, an old nursery rhyme which her mother had sung to her long ago, his wide-open eyes closed, and he sank off into peaceful slumber. 10

When she saw that he was quite sound asleep, Effie put him in his cot, drew the cot near the crib where Philip, a dark-eyed little boy of five, lay, and bending down to kiss Phil, said:

"You are to be baby's nurse until Susan comes up; if he wakes or begins to cry, just pat him on his back. I am most anxious that mother should have a quiet time; she is just worn out, and if she hears baby cry she is certain to send for him. Now, Phil, you are a very clever little man when you like—I trust to you to keep baby from crying until Susan comes back!"

"'Es, that I will," replied Phil, in a voice of intense importance. "I do love 'ou, Effie," he said.

Effie kissed him, and softly left the room. She ran downstairs, and began to help the servant to lay supper.

No one could look more bright than Effie as she performed the thousand and one duties which fell to her lot in this poor home. Dr. Staunton was poor, there were six children, Effie was the eldest daughter; it needs no more words to explain her exact position. From morning to night Effie was busy, very busy, doing what she herself called nothing. She was getting discontented with her life. A feeling of discontent had stolen over her ever since her eldest brother George had gone to London, to help his uncle in a large warehouse. For months the dream of her life was to give up the little duties near at hand, and to take some great duties which nobody wanted her to do, far away from home. She was quite prepared for the advice which her friend Dorothy Fraser, who lived all the year round in London, and only came home for the holidays to Whittingham, was able to give her. Effie's conscience was not in the least pricked at the thought of leaving her mother—it seemed to her quite right. "Had she not to make the most of her youth? Why should she spend all her young days in looking after the children, and making things tolerable for her father and mother?" 11

These thoughts kept swiftly passing through her brain, as she noiselessly laid the table and made it look charming and pretty. When all was done, she took up a little frock of one of the children's, and, sitting down by the window, began to work. Her pretty dark head was bent over her task; her thick curling lashes lay heavy on her rounded cheek. Mrs. Staunton, who had been having a doze on the sofa, started up now and looked at her.

"Oh, Effie dear, I have had such a nice sleep," she said, with a little sigh; "I am ever so much the better for it. But what have you done with baby?"

"I have put him to sleep, mother; he is in his cot now, as comfortable as possible."

"How good of you, Effie! What a comfort you are to me!"

Effie smiled. "I think I hear father coming in," she said, "and supper is quite ready."

Mrs. Staunton started up from the sofa; she pushed back her tumbled hair, and shook out her somewhat untidy dress.

"Now let me make you trim," said Effie.

She ran over to her parent, put back her gray hair with an affectionate little touch, and then kissed her mother on her flushed cheeks. 12

"You look better for your nice sleep, mother," she said.

"So I am, darling, and for your loving care," replied Mrs. Staunton.

Her husband came into the room, and she took her place before the tea-tray.

Supper at the Stauntons' was a nondescript sort of meal. It consisted of meat and vegetables, and tea and cakes and puddings, all placed on the table together. It was the one hearty meal Dr. Staunton allowed himself in the twenty-four hours. At the children's early dinner he only snatched a little bread and cheese, but at peaceful seven o'clock the children were in bed, the house was quiet, the toil of the day was supposed to be over, and Dr. Staunton could eat heartily and enjoy himself. It was at this hour he used to notice how very pretty Effie looked, and how sweet it was to see her sitting like a little mouse on one side of the table, helping him and his wife in her affectionate way, and seeing to the comforts of all. It did not occur to him as even possible that Effie could carry such a dreadful thing as rebellion in her heart. No face could look more perfectly happy than hers. Was it possible that she was pining for a wider field of usefulness than the little niche which she filled so perfectly in the home life? Dr. Staunton never thought about it at all. Effie was just a dear little girl—not a bit modern; she was the comfort of her mother's life, and, for that matter, the comfort of his also.

He looked at her now with his usual grave smile. "Well, Effie, useful and charming as usual? I see you have not forgotten my favorite dish, and I am glad of it, for I can tell you I am just starving. I have had a hard day's work, and it is nice to feel that I can rest for this evening at least." 13

"Have you been to the Watsons', dear?" inquired Mrs. Staunton. "They sent a message for you two or three hours ago."

"Yes; I met the farmer in the High Street, and went straight out to the farm. Mrs. Watson is better now, poor soul; but it is a bad case, the heart is a good deal implicated. I shall have to go out there again the first thing in the morning. It would be a dreadful thing for that family if anything happened to her."

"The heart—is it heart trouble?" said Mrs. Staunton.

"Yes, yes! Don't you begin to fancy that your case is the least like hers; yours is only functional, hers is organic. Now, why have I broken through my rule of saying nothing about my patients? You will be fancying and fretting all night that you are going to shuffle off this mortal coil just as quickly as poor Mrs. Watson will have to do before long, I fear. Why, Effie, what is the matter? Why are you staring at me with those round eyes?"

Mrs. Staunton looked also at Effie, and the sudden memory of her recent conversation with her returned.

"By the way," she said, "if you are likely to be at home this evening, John, Effie would like to ask her friend Dorothy Fraser to come in for an hour or two. She wants to introduce her to you."

"She is one of those modern girls, is she not?" said the doctor.

"Oh, father, she is just splendid," said Effie. "If you only knew her, if you could hear her speak ——"

"Well, my dear, don't get into a state, and above all things, don't learn that dreadful habit of exaggeration. I dare say Miss Fraser is very well, but there are few prodigies in the world, my little Effie; and, for my part, give me the home birds—they are the girls for my world; they are the girls who will make good wives by and by. There, my love, I shall be pleased to welcome any friend of yours, so ask her over, by all means. She won't mind the old doctor's pipe, I hope?" 14

"Oh, no, father!" Effie could not help smiling. She knew perfectly well that Dorothy thought it no harm to indulge in a tiny cigarette herself, not often, nor every day, but sometimes when she was dead beat, as she expressed it. Effie had to keep this knowledge of her friend's delinquencies to herself. If Dr. Staunton knew that Dorothy did not consider smoking the unpardonable sin in woman, he would not allow her inside his doors. "I will go and fetch her," Effie said, jumping up and putting on her hat. "She is longing to know you, father, and you can smoke two or three pipes while she is here."

Effie left the room. Mrs. Staunton looked at her husband. "I doubt if Dorothy Fraser is the best of friends for our Effie."

"Eh!" said the doctor, taking his pipe out of his mouth for a moment. "What ails the girl?"

"Oh, nothing at all," replied Mrs. Staunton. "Effie is very fond of her, and I believe she really is a fine creature. You know she is educating her two brothers."

"What is she doing—how does she earn her living?"

"Oh, she is a nurse in a hospital. She has been in St. Joseph's Hospital for years, and is now superintendent of one of the wards. She gets a good salary."

The doctor rubbed his hands together in a somewhat impatient way. "You know my opinion of lady nurses," he said, looking at his wife. 15

"Well, dear, make the best of Dorothy for Effie's sake. I hear the steps of the two girls now. You will do what you can to be agreeable, won't you?"

"No," said the doctor; "I shall growl like a bear with a sore head, when I see women who ought to be content with sweet home duties struggling and pining to go out into the world."

The last words had scarcely left the doctor's lips before the dining-room door was opened, and Effie, accompanied by her friend, entered the room.

Dorothy Fraser was about twenty-eight years of age; she was tall; she had a fair, calm sort of face; her eyes were large and gray, her mouth sweet. She had a way of taking possession of those she spoke to, and she had not been two minutes in the shabby little sitting-room before Dr. and Mrs. Staunton were looking at her earnestly and listening to her words with respect.

Dorothy sat near Mrs. Staunton.

"I am very glad to know you," she said, after a pause. "Effie has talked to me over and over again about you."

"May I ask how long you have known Effie?" interrupted Dr. Staunton.

"Well, exactly a week," replied Miss Fraser. "I have been home a week, and I am going to stay another week. I met Effie the night I came home, and—— But one can cultivate a friendship in a week; don't you think so, Dr. Staunton?"

"Perhaps, perhaps," said the doctor in a dubious voice. "I am slow in making friends myself. It is the old-fashioned way of country folk."

"Oh, pray don't speak of yourself as old-fashioned, Dr. Staunton; and don't run down country folk, I see so many of them at the hospital. For my part, I think they are worth twenty of those poor London people, who are half starved in body, and have only learned the wicked side of life." 16

"Poor creatures!" said Mrs. Staunton. "I wish you would tell us something about the hospital, my dear. It is vastly entertaining to hear all about sick people."

"No; now pardon me," said the doctor; "you will do nothing of the kind, Miss Fraser. There are not many sick folk about here, but what few there are I have got to look after, and my thoughts are bothered enough about them and their sicknesses, so I would rather, if you please, turn our conversation to people who are not ill. The wife here is a bit nervous, too, and she is never the better for hearing people talk about what they call 'bad cases.' I think it is the worst thing in the world for people to keep talking of their maladies, or even about other people's maladies. My motto is this, 'When you are ill, try and see how soon you can get well again, and when you are well, try to keep so. Never think of illness at all.'"

Miss Fraser looked fully at the doctor while he was talking. A slight frown came between her eyebrows. Effie's bright dark eyes were fixed on her friend.

"Illness interests me, of course," Dorothy said, after a pause; "but I won't talk of it. There are

many other things, as you say, just as vital."

"Well, at any rate," said Mrs. Staunton, "Miss Fraser can tell us how she came to be a nurse——"

"For my part," interrupted Dr. Staunton, "I think it is a great pity that girls like you, Miss Fraser, should take up that sort of life. Lady girls are not suited to it; for one who is fitted for the life, there are fifty who are not. If you could only guess how doctors hate to see lady nurses in 17
possession of a case. She is a fine lady through it all; she thinks she is not, but she is. Do you suppose she will wash up the cups and plates and spoons as they ought to be washed and kept in a sick person's room? and do you fancy she will clean out the grate, and go down on her knees to wash the floor? Your fine lady nurse won't. There is a case of infection, for instance,—measles or scarlet fever,—and the nurse comes down from London, and she is supposed to take possession; but one of the servants of the house has to go in to clean and dust and arrange, or the sickroom is not dusted or cleaned at all. That is your lady nurse; and I say she is not suited to the work."

Miss Fraser turned pale while the doctor was speaking.

"You must admit," she said, when he stopped and looked at her,—"you must admit, Dr. Staunton, that every lady nurse is not like that. If you have an infection case in your practice, send for me. I think I can prove to you that there are some ladies who are too truly women to think anything menial or beneath them." She colored as she spoke, and lowered her eyes.

The conversation drifted into other channels. After a time Dorothy got up and went away; and Effie, yawning slightly, went up to her room to go to bed. She slept in a little room next to the nursery. Instead of undressing at once, as was her wont, she went and stood by the window, threw it open, and looked out. "What would father say if he knew my thoughts?" she said to herself. "He despises ladies who are nurses; he thinks it wrong for any lady girl to go away from home; but I am going—yes, I am going to London. Dorothy is my friend. She is about the 18
grandest, noblest creature I ever met, and I am going to follow in her steps. Mother will consent in the end—mother will see that I cannot throw away my life. Dear mother! I shall miss her and father awfully, but, all the same, I shall be delighted to go. I do want to get out of this narrow, narrow life; I do want to do something big and grand. Oh, Dorothy, how splendid you are! How strong you look! How delightful it is to feel that one can live a life like yours, and do good, and be loved by all! Oh, Dorothy, I hope I shall be able to copy you! I hope——"

Effie's eager thoughts came to a sudden stop. A tall dog-cart dashed down the street and pulled up short at her father's door. A young man in a Norfolk suit jumped out, threw the horse's reins to his groom, and pulled the doctor's bell furiously. Effie leaned slightly out of her window in order to see who it was. She recognized the man who stood on the doorstep with a start of surprise, and the color flew into her face. He was the young Squire of the neighborhood. His name was Harvey. His place was two miles out of Whittington. He was married; his wife was the most beautiful woman Effie had ever seen; and he had one little girl. The Harveys were rich and proud; they spent the greater part of their time in London, and had never before condescended to consult the village doctor. What was the matter now? Effie rushed from her room and knocked furiously at her father's door.

"Father, do you hear the night-bell? Are you getting up?" she called.

"Yes, child, yes," answered the doctor.

The bell downstairs kept on ringing at intervals. Effie stood trembling on the landing; she felt positively sure that something dreadful must have happened. 19

"May I go down stairs and say you are coming, father?" she called again through the key-hole.

"Yes, I wish you would. Say I will be downstairs in a minute."

Effie ran off; she took the chain off the heavy hall door and threw it open.

"Is Dr. Staunton in?" asked the Squire. He stared at Effie's white trembling face. His eyes were bloodshot, his hair in disorder; he looked like a man who is half distracted.

"Yes," said Effie, in as soothing a voice as she could assume; "my father will be down in a minute."

Harvey took off his cap.

"You are Miss Staunton, I presume? Pray ask your father to be as quick as possible. My little girl is ill—very ill. We want a doctor to come to The Grange without a moment's delay."

"All right, Squire; here I am," said the hearty voice of Dr. Staunton on the stairs.

The Squire shook hands with him, made one or two remarks in too low a voice for Effie to hear, sprang into his dog-cart, the doctor scrambled up by his side, and a moment later the two had disappeared. Effie stood by the open hall door looking up and down the quiet village street. The great man of the place had come and gone like a flash. The thing Mrs. Staunton had longed for, dreamed of, and almost prayed for, had come to pass at last—her husband was sent for to The Grange. Effie wondered if Fortune were really turning her wheel, and if, from this date they would be better off than they had been.

Dorothy Fraser's people lived in the house nearly opposite. From where Effie stood she could see a light still burning in her friend's window. The thought of Dorothy raised the girl's state of 20

excitement almost to fever pitch. She longed to go over and see her friend; she knew she must not do that, however. She shut the hall door, and went slowly back to her bedroom. She wanted to sleep, but sleep was far away. She lay listening during the long hours of the summer night, and heard hour after hour strike from the church clock close by. Between two and three in the morning she dropped off into a troubled doze. She awoke in broad daylight, to start to her feet and see her father standing in the room.

"Get up, Effie," he said. "I want you; dress yourself as quickly as you can."

There was an expression about his face which prevented Effie's uttering a word. She scrambled into her clothes—he waited for her on the landing. When she was dressed he took her hand and went softly down through the house.

"I do not want your mother to be disturbed," he said. "There is a very bad case of illness at The Grange."

"What is it, father?" asked Effie.

"Well, I fear that it is a complication of scarlet fever and diphtheria. The child will have an awful fight for her life, and at the present moment I am afraid the odds are terribly against her."

"Oh, father, and she is the only child!" said Effie.

"Yes, yes, I know all that; but there is no use in going into sentiment just now—the thing is to pull her through if possible. Now, look here: I can send to London, of course, for a nurse, but she would not arrive for several hours—do you think your friend Miss Fraser would undertake the case?"

"Yes, I am sure she would," said Effie. 21

"That's just like you women," said the doctor impatiently; "you jump to conclusions without knowing anything at all about the matter. The child's case is horribly infectious. In fact, I shall be surprised if the illness does not run right through the house. The mother has been sitting up with this baby day and night for the last week, and they were so silly they never sent for a doctor, imagining that the awful state of the throat was due to hoarseness, and that the rash was what they were pleased to call 'spring heat.' The folly of some people is enough to drive any reasonable man to despair. They send for the doctor, forsooth, when the child is almost in the grip of death! I have managed to relieve her a bit during the night, but I must have the services of a good nurse at once. Go over and awake Miss Fraser, Effie, and bring her to see me. If she has the pluck she gave me to understand she had, she will come in as a stop-gap until I get somebody else. And now, look here: the case is so infectious, and your mother is so weak just now, that I am going to devote myself altogether to it for the next few days. I am going to take up my abode at The Grange, and I shall wire to my old friend Edwards to look after the rest of my patients. There are only half a dozen to be seen to, and he will keep them quiet until I am free again. Now go over and bring Miss Fraser for me to see. I have driven down on the Squire's dog-cart, and will take her back with me if she will come. Run along, Effie, and wake her up."

22

CHAPTER II.

Dorothy Fraser was sound asleep when Effie rushed into her little room.

"Get up!" said Effie, shaking her friend by the shoulder.

As a nurse Miss Fraser was accustomed to unexpected disturbances. She opened her eyes now and gazed at Effie for a bewildered moment, then she sat up in bed and pushed back her heavy hair.

"Why, Effie," she exclaimed, "what do you want? I fancied I was back at St. Joseph's and that one of the nurses had got into trouble and had come to me, but I find I am at home for the holidays. Surely it is not time to get up yet?"

"It is only five o'clock," said Effie. "It is not the usual time to get up; but, Dorothy, father wants you. There is a bad case of illness at The Grange—very bad indeed, and father is nearly distracted, and he wants to know if you will help him just for a bit."

"Why, of course," cried Dorothy. "I shall be delighted."

"I knew you would; I knew you were just that splendid sort of a girl."

Miss Fraser knit her brows in some perplexity "Don't, Effie," she said. "I wish you would not go into such ecstasies over me; I am only just a nurse. A nurse is, and ought to be, at the beck and call of everyone who is in trouble. Now run away, dear; I won't be any time in getting dressed. I will join you and your father in a minute."

"Father will see you in the street," said Effie. "The fact is——"

"Oh, do run away," exclaimed Dorothy. "I cannot dress while you stand here talking. Whatever it is, I will be with your father in two or three minutes." 23

Effie ran downstairs again. Mrs. Fraser, who had let her in, had gone back to bed. Effie shut the Frasers' hall door as quietly as she could. She then went across the sunlit and empty street to where her father stood on the steps at his own door. The groom who had driven the doctor over was standing by the horse's head at a little distance.

"Well," said Dr. Staunton, "she has fought shy of it, has she?"

"No; she is dressing," said Effie. "She will be down in a minute or two."

"Good girl!" said Dr. Staunton. "You didn't happen to mention the nature of the case?"

"No, no," answered Effie; "but the nature of the case won't make any difference to her."

The doctor pursed up his mouth as if he meant to whistle; he restrained himself, however, and stood looking down the street. After a time he turned and glanced at his daughter.

"Now, Effie," he said, "you must do all you can for your mother. Don't let her get anxious. There is nothing to be frightened about as far as I am concerned. If mortal man can pull the child through, I will do it, but I must have no home cares as well. You will take up that burden—eh, little woman?"

"I will try, father," said Effie.

Just then Dorothy appeared. She had dressed herself in her nurse's costume—gray dress, gray cloak, gray bonnet. The dress suited her earnest and reposeful face. She crossed the road with a firm step, carrying a little bag in her hand.

"Well, Dr. Staunton," she said, "I hear you have got a case for me." 24

The doctor gazed at her for a moment without speaking.

"Bless me," he exclaimed; "it is a comfort to see a steady-looking person like you in the place. And so you are really willing to help me in this emergency?"

"Why, of course," said Dorothy. "I am a nurse."

"But you don't know the nature of the case yet!"

"I don't see that that makes any difference; but will you tell me?"

"And it is your holiday," pursued the doctor, gazing at her. "You don't take many holidays in the year I presume?"

"I have had a week, and I am quite rested," said Dorothy. "I always hold my life in readiness," she continued, looking up at him with a flash out of her dark blue eyes. "Anywhere at any time, when I am called, I am ready. But what is the matter? What do you want me to do?"

"I want you to help me to pull a child back from the borders of death."

"A child! I love children," said Dorothy. "What ails the child?"

"She has acute scarlet fever and diphtheria. No precautions have been taken with regard to sanitation. She is the child of rich people, but they have been wantonly neglectful, almost cruel in their negligence and ignorance. The mother, a young woman, is nearly certain to take the complaint and, to complicate everything, there is another baby expected before long. Now you understand. If you get into that house you are scarcely likely to go out of it again for some time."

Dorothy stood grave and silent.

"Oh, Dorothy, is it right for you to go?" exclaimed Effie, who was watching her friend anxiously. 25

"Yes," said Dorothy, "it is right. They may possibly be obliged to fill my place at St. Joseph's. I was only considering that point for a moment. After all, it is not worth troubling about. I am at your service, Dr. Staunton. We may require one or two other nurses to help us if things are as bad as you fear."

"God bless you!" said the doctor. Something very like moisture came into his eyes. He began to blow his nose violently. "Now, Effie, you will do your best at home," he said, turning to his daughter. "This way, please, Miss Fraser."

"Good-by, Effie, dear," said Dorothy. She kissed her friend. The doctor and the nurse walked toward the dog-cart; he helped her to mount, and then drove rapidly down the street. The vehicle was soon out of sight.

"I wonder what father will think of Dorothy after this?" thought Effie to herself. The feeling that her father would really approve of her friend gave her much consolation. She went back into the house, and as it was now half-past five, decided that it was not worth while to return to bed. There was always plenty to be done in this little house with its overflowing inhabitants, and Effie found heaps to occupy her until it was time to go into the nursery to help the little nursemaid with her various duties.

The children always hailed Effie with a scream of delight; they were not a bit afraid of her, for she was the most indulgent elder sister in the world, but all the same she managed to make them obey her.

Susan was sent downstairs to get her breakfast, while Effie saw the elder ones safely through the process of dressing. She took the baby on her knee, and, removing his night-clothes, put him into his bath, and dressed him herself quickly and expeditiously. She then carried him into her mother's room. 26

Mrs. Staunton had spent a troubled night.

"Is that you, Effie?" she exclaimed, looking at her daughter; "and oh, there is baby—how sweet he looks! What a splendid nurse you are, my darling, and what a wonderful comfort to me! Give me my dear little man. I will take care of him while you see about breakfast."

"How are you this morning, mother?" asked Effie. "Have you had a good night?"

"Yes, pretty well. I had one or two bad dreams. I could not help thinking of poor Mrs. Watson and that heart-trouble your father spoke about. I wonder how she is this morning."

"Now, mother dear," said Effie, "you know father said you were not to dwell upon that—you must turn your thoughts away from illness of every sort. I thought we might go for a little drive in the gig this morning."

"But your father will want the gig."

"No, that's just it, he won't."

"What do you mean? Surely he will go out as early as he can to see Mrs. Watson?"

"No, mother," said Effie, "he won't—not to-day. I have something to tell you. Now, please don't be frightened; there is nothing to be frightened about."

Mrs. Staunton was half sitting up in bed; she had thrown a little pale blue shawl round her shoulders, and held the pretty baby in her arms. She was a remarkably good-looking woman, a really young-looking woman for her age, but weakness was written all over her—the weakness of a frail although loving spirit, and the weakness of extreme bodily illness, for she was ill, far more ill than her children knew. The greatest anxiety of the honest doctor's life was connected with his 27 wife's physical condition. Effie looked at her mother now, and something of the fear which dwelt in her father's heart seemed to visit her.

"I have something to tell you," she said, "but it is nothing that need make you the least bit afraid. Father has left you in my charge. He says I am to look after you, and to do all in my power to help you."

"But what can you mean, Effie? Has your father gone away?"

"Not really away," replied Effie, "for he is close to us, and can come back if necessary at any moment; but the fact is this: If all is well, father is not coming home for two or three days. In one way you will be pleased to hear this, mother. You know how you have wished him to be called in at The Grange."

"At The Grange!" exclaimed Mrs. Staunton, starting up. "You don't mean to tell me that the Harveys have sent for your father?"

"Yes, mother, I do; and is not that good news? The little girl is very ill, and Squire Harvey came over to fetch father last night—that time when the bell rang so suddenly."

"I remember," said Mrs. Staunton. "I made sure that someone came from the Watsons'."

"No; it was the Squire who called—Squire Harvey. Father went there and found the little girl very ill. He came back again this morning, and took Dorothy Fraser out with him as nurse, and he saw me, and he asked me to tell you that he would stay at The Grange for a couple of days until he could pull the child through, and you are on no account to expect him home, but you are to keep as well and cheerful as possible for his sake; and Dr. Edwards from Boltonville is to take father's work for the time. So you see," continued Effie in conclusion, "that the horse and gig will be at 28 liberty, and we can go for a drive. I thought we might go to Boltonville, and take baby, and buy some fruit for preserving. There are sure to be heaps of strawberries at the Bolton Farm if we drive over early."

All the time Effie was speaking, Mrs. Staunton kept gazing at her. As the eager words flowed from the young girl's lips, the heart of the mother seemed to faint within her.

"You," she said, after a pause; her voice trembled, no words could come for an instant,—"you," she went on,—"Effie, you have not told me what ails the child?"

"She is very ill, mother; that goes without saying."

"But what ails her? Why should not your father come home?"

Effie thought for a moment. "I will tell about the scarlet fever, but not about the diphtheria," she said to herself. "Mother is always so terrified about diphtheria ever since poor little Johnny died

of it, long, long ago. She won't mind scarlet fever so much."

"Why don't you speak, Effie?" exclaimed her mother. "You terrify me with your grave and silent way."

"There is nothing to be terrified about, mother, but you are weak, and therefore you get unduly nervous. I was only thinking for a moment whether you had better know; but of course, if you wish it, you must be told. The child at The Grange is suffering from scarlet fever."

"Do you think it will spread?"

"Father is very anxious. I heard him telling Dorothy that Mrs. Harvey had been very imprudent. You know how young she is, mother, and how beautiful; and she has been with this dear little child day and night from the beginning, not knowing in the least what ailed her, and Mrs. Harvey is expecting another baby, and of course father is anxious."

"I should think he is," cried Mrs. Staunton, drawn completely out of herself by the tragedy conveyed in these words. "Oh, poor young thing, poor young mother! I wish I were strong and well myself, that I might go and help her. She will have a bad time. She will have an awful risk when her baby arrives, Effie. Well, my darling, we can do nothing but pray for them all. There is One who can guide us even through dark days. Go down, Effie, and get breakfast, and then come back to me. I am very tired this morning, and will lie still for a little, now that I have got such a dear, useful daughter to take my place for me."

Effie put on a bright smile, and turned toward the door.

As she was leaving the room, her mother called out after her:

"There is one good thing, there is no diphtheria in the case; nothing terrifies me like that."

Effie shut the door hastily without reply.

29

CHAPTER III.

Meanwhile Dr. Staunton and Dorothy drove quickly to The Grange. It was still very early in the morning, and when they arrived at the great hall door it was opened by Squire Harvey himself.

"That's right, Dr. Staunton!" he exclaimed. "I am so glad you have come. Oh, and I see you have brought a nurse. What a blessing! Now, perhaps, you will induce my wife to take some rest. How lucky that you were able to find a nurse in a little place like Whittington!"

30

"I am very fortunate indeed," replied the doctor in his hearty voice. "Nurse Fraser has been trained at St. Joseph's, and happens to be staying at Whittington for a brief holiday. She has most kindly consented to undertake the case until we can get fresh assistance from London."

"I will stay as long as I am wanted," said Dorothy in her quiet voice. "If I can be shown to a room for a moment to take off my bonnet and cloak, I will go immediately afterward to the little patient."

Dorothy's voice was perfectly cool and calm. She did not speak in the constrained whisper which the poor Squire thought it right to use. There was an everyday tone in her voice which at this moment was absolutely refreshing, and the sympathy in her blue eyes just gave the right quality to the cool tones.

The doctor looked at her with unconcealed admiration. "That girl is one in ten thousand," he said to himself. "She will keep us all on our mettle, I can see, but there is plenty of heart underneath that cool exterior."

The great luxurious house looked neglected and wretched. Although the father and mother were up, and one or two servants were assisting in the sickroom, the greater number of the servants were still in bed. There was no one to take Miss Fraser to a room, and the Squire looked round him in hopeless bewilderment.

Dorothy saw at a glance that she must take matters into her own hands.

"I do not want to trouble you," she said. "I can put my cloak and bonnet in here. I should like to put on my cap and apron before I go upstairs."

31

She opened a door as she spoke, and went into a room where all the blinds were down, took off her outdoor things, and, taking a cap out of her bag, slipped it over her hair, tied on a white apron, and then stood ready and capable, and fresh and bright, before the Squire and the doctor.

"Now, come straight upstairs with me," said the doctor.

They went up together; Squire Harvey followed them at a distance. When the doctor reached the first landing, he opened a green baize door, shut it behind him, and walked down a long, cool

corridor which led in the direction of the nurseries.

"Now, look here," he said, turning and facing Dorothy, "the great thing that we have both to do is to keep this terrible disease from spreading. One or two of the servants have been with the case from the first; the father and mother have been in and out of the room as freely and unconstrainedly as if the child had only a cold the matter with her; if they are likely to take the infection, the mischief is probably done already; but, on the chance of this not being so, I shall beg of the Squire to come into this part of the house as seldom as possible. And as to Mrs. Harvey, she must be got away; that is your task, nurse. You will allow me to call you nurse, won't you?"

"Certainly. Call me Nurse Dorothy; I like that name best. I am called that by the children at St. Joseph's."

"Very well. I am sure you will be a blessing here; but a great deal of tact must be used. The position of affairs is extremely difficult."

"I will do my best," replied the nurse. The doctor gave her another look of complete satisfaction, and they entered the room where the little patient lay between life and death. 32

A small cot had been drawn almost into the center of the room, the blinds were down, there was a sense of desolation, and a heavy smell in the air.

"Who has shut these windows?" said the doctor in a voice of disapproval.

He went straight across the room, drew up one of the blinds, and opened the window two or three inches. A fresh current of air immediately improved the close atmosphere.

When he spoke, and when he and Nurse Fraser came into the room, a fair-haired young woman, who was on her knees by the side of the cot, started up suddenly, and gazed at them out of a pair of wide blue eyes. Her cheeks were deeply flushed, her lips were parched and dry.

"Oh, doctor," she said, staggering toward Dr. Staunton, "you have come back. What a blessing! She is asleep now; perhaps she is better."

The doctor went over and looked at the child. She was a little creature of not more than five years of age. In health she may have been pretty, she probably was; but now, the shadowy little face, the emaciated hands, the hot, dry, cracked lips, were the reverse of beautiful. They were all that was pathetic, however; and Dorothy's heart went straight out to the baby who lay there in such suffering and weakness.

The doctor looked at her, and gave a significant glance toward Mrs. Harvey.

Dorothy took her cue at once.

"I have come to nurse your dear little girl, madam," she said. "Dr. Staunton has brought me. I have a great deal of experience, as I am superintendent of one of the children's wards at St. Joseph's Hospital. I think you may trust your little girl to me; but first of all, let me take you to 33 your room and put you to bed."

"Put me to bed!" said Mrs. Harvey, with a laugh which jarred on everyone's nerves. "I have not been in bed for nights. I could not sleep. When the doctor tells me that Freda is out of danger, then I may be able to sleep, but not before—not before."

"Whether you sleep or not," continued Dorothy, "you must come and lie down. You are completely worn out, and can do no good whatever to the child in your present condition. While she sleeps it is surely right that you should sleep too. Come, I will promise to call you if you are wanted."

"Yes, dear madam, let me entreat of you to go to bed," said the doctor.

The door was opened at this moment, and the Squire came in.

"Now Elfreda," he said, coming up to his wife, "you will go and take some rest, won't you?"

She looked from him to the nurse, and from the nurse to the doctor, and then her tired, bright eyes fell upon the little parched face lying on the pillow.

"I know she is going to die!" she said, with a kind of broken sob. "I cannot leave her. How can anyone dare to ask me to leave my little child just now?" Her agitation became more terrible each moment. She was evidently on the verge of hysterics.

Dorothy walked straight from the nursery to a sort of dressing-room which lay beyond. There was a small bed there, which was sometimes occupied by the under-nurse. A scared-looking, tired young woman was standing in this room. Dorothy gave her quick directions. "Get clean sheets, and make this bed up immediately," she said. 34

The girl started, but looked relieved at having anything explicit to do. She ran off to obey, and Dorothy came back to the sickroom.

"Hush!" she said, going up to Mrs. Harvey, who was standing shaking from head to foot with dry sobs. "You must not give way like this; it is very wrong. Remember you have not only yourself to think of." She bent forward and whispered a word in the young mother's ear. Mrs. Harvey started, and with a violent effort controlled herself.

"I see that you must not be separated from your child," continued Dorothy—"at least, not at present. I am having a bed made up for you in the dressing-room, where you will be within call."

"Ah, yes, that's better," said the poor lady—"that's much better."

"Come, then, at once," said Dorothy. She held out her hand. Mrs. Harvey crossed the room. She and Dorothy disappeared into the dressing-room.

In ten minutes the nurse came back to Dr. Staunton. "I have undressed her, and she is in bed," she said. "She is very weak, and in a terribly nervous condition; she ought to sleep for hours. Will you prepare a composing draught for her it once?"

"Yes," said the doctor; "I have brought some medicines with me."

He went out of the room, and returned in a minute or two with a small dose in a glass.

Dorothy took it into the dressing-room. Mrs. Harvey's tired eyes were shut already.

"Now, you're to drink this," said Dorothy, raising her head slightly. "Drink this—don't open your eyes. Trust. Lean on me, if you like. Believe me, that nothing would induce me not to call you if your child were in real danger, but you must sleep now—sleep, and try to believe that all will be well." 35

"You comfort me, nurse," said Mrs. Harvey. "You are strong. I somehow believe in you."

"You may do so," said Dorothy. She bent down and kissed the hot lips. She absolutely forgot that she was only the nurse, and that the tired woman in the bed was a lady of high position. At such a moment as this they were only two women, two sisters.

Dorothy waited for a moment to see the sleeping draught take effect, then, drawing down the blind, she left the room, closing the door softly behind her.

When she returned to the nursery, Dr. Staunton was bending over little Freda, who had opened her eyes, and was moaning in terrible pain.

"The fever is better," he said, turning to the nurse; "the feverish stage is over, and of course, although we may expect and must guard against complications, there is no reason why the child should not do well as far as that is concerned, but the state of the throat is the real anxiety. I do not like to suggest such a terrible operation as tracheotomy, but if the child does not get relief before long, I fear there is no help for it, and it must be performed."

Dorothy bent down and examined the little patient carefully.

"I have had a good deal of experience in these cases," she said, after a pause, "and have found "—she mentioned a certain remedy which could be inhaled—"work wonders, especially in the cases of children."

"I have not heard of it," said Dr. Staunton, knitting his brows in anxiety, "but it sounds simple, and I see no harm in trying it."

"It is very simple," said Dorothy. "I should like to try it."

The child moaned and tossed on her pillow. 36

The doctor went out of the room to prepare the medicine which the nurse had recommended, and Dorothy called one of the frightened servants to her side. She told her that she meant to take the child up and walk about the room with her in her arms.

"While she is out of bed I will have the windows closed," said the nurse, "and of course she must be well wrapped up in blankets. She may drop off to sleep again in my arms; anyhow, the change of position and the slight movement will be most refreshing to her. Will you make the bed and put on clean sheets while I am walking about with the child?"

The girl promised to obey.

"It is very infectious, ain't it, miss?" she said suddenly.

"It is in God's hands," replied the nurse.

There was a sound in her voice, a sort of thrill of strength, which subjugated the girl at once, and made her forget her fears. She obeyed the nurse's directions with a will; and when, in an hour's time, Dr. Staunton returned with the remedy which Nurse Dorothy had suggested, he scarcely knew the sickroom.

The little child had been laid back again in bed. Her long hair was combed away from her pale, worn face, Dorothy had plaited it neatly; the little face was washed, and looked almost cool compared with its old flushed and weary condition. The bed was neat, and in perfect order, with snowy sheets. The tired little head rested on a cool pillow. Dorothy and the maid had removed the carpets from the floor, and the room was sprinkled with a disinfectant. Two of the windows were open, and a faint sweet breath of air from the garden outside blew into the room.

"Why, nurse, this is an admirable change," said the doctor.

"It is necessary," replied Nurse Dorothy. "There is no chance of recovery without fresh air and a

cool, quiet, calm atmosphere. I think Rhoda"—she looked at the servant as she spoke—"will help me with this case, and I should like as few other people as possible in the room. I have promised Mrs. Harvey to call her if there is any change for the worse in the child, but my impression is she will soon be better."

"God grant it!" said the doctor.

"What a blessing a good, properly-trained nurse is!" he thought, as he went off to the room which had been prepared for him, and where he was glad to take an hour or two of much-needed rest.

37

CHAPTER IV.

All through the long hours of that day Dorothy watched by the sick child. The child was on the Borderland. Her life hung in the balance—a feather's weight on either side and she would go to the country from which there is no return, or she would become well again. Dorothy's efforts were directed to turning the balance in the scale toward life.

Notwithstanding all her care, however, and all the alleviations which she used, the sick child suffered and moaned terribly. The awful state of the throat, the terrible prostration caused by this form of blood poisoning, were no light foes to have to beat and conquer. But unceasing care presently produced a happy result, and toward evening the high temperature went down a couple of degrees, and the child's breathing became less difficult.

38

"I believe she will recover," said Dorothy, looking at Dr. Staunton, who had just come into the room. "I hope you agree with me, doctor, in thinking that she is rather better?"

"Yes," replied the doctor, "she is better; she is less feverish, and her breathing is easier. You have done wonders already."

"What happy news for her poor mother! I am so glad that I can tell her that the child is really better," said Dorothy. "I want to induce her to give the little creature altogether into my care for the present, and not to come near her again unless a change for the worse should set in. I hear Mrs. Harvey stirring now in the next room, so she may be in at any moment. May I speak to her, doctor? Do you give me leave to tell her that her child is on the mend, and that you would rather she kept out of the room?"

"I would do anything in the world to keep her out of the room," said the doctor. "Yes, I give you full leave to say what you please. You would have more influence with her than I should have. I am almost as great a stranger to her as you are. Use your strongest influence, nurse—do what you can. I believe in you. I am sure she will do the same."

"I'll go into the day nursery and wash my hands before I see Mrs. Harvey," said Dorothy.

She was scarcely a moment away. In a couple of minutes she was standing by Mrs. Harvey's bed.

Exhausted by her days and nights of watching, the tired-out mother had slept all through the long hours of the day. She opened her eyes now with a start. Healing sleep had done wonders for her—the dewy look of youth had come back to her face; her beautiful blue eyes were fixed for a moment on Dorothy with a puzzled expression of non-recognition.

39

"Where am I? What has happened?" she asked in a startled voice.

"You have just had a lovely sleep," said Dorothy. "You'll be all the better for it."

"And who are you? I cannot quite collect my thoughts—I know something has happened. Who are you? I cannot remember you."

"I am the nurse who is taking care of your dear little girl. She is better."

"Oh, yes, now I remember," said Mrs. Harvey. She sat up in bed and clasped her hands tightly.

"It was wrong of me to sleep so long," she said, "but I won't be a moment getting dressed; I must go back to the child at once."

"Will you come to your room?" said Dorothy. "You can change your dress there. I know Mr. Harvey is most anxious that you should dine with him this evening."

"Dine with my husband!—have dinner? But Freda is ill; she is at death's door."

"She is ill undoubtedly, but she is better; she is on the mend. I am taking good care of her. Don't you trust me?"

"Oh, yes, I trust you; but I must go back to her. Don't talk to me of dinner; I could not eat. Is it really evening? Oh, now I remember everything—at last I remember! We have been in agony. We have lived through such a week. We have been down in the depths, truly. Yes, yes, I recollect it all—my little child, my only little child, my darling, my treasure! Oh, nurse, you should not have

allowed me to sleep on all day, you should have called me; she may have been wanting me. But you say she is better—better; but perhaps Dr. Staunton—oh, I am frightened! Are you keeping anything from me? Oh, my head, my poor head! I shall go mad; I shall lose my senses." 40

"No, dear Mrs. Harvey," said Dorothy; "I have good news for you, not bad. Freda is really better—she is less feverish, and her throat does not hurt her so badly. I don't pretend that she is yet out of danger, but if she continues to improve as she has done during the last seven or eight hours, she will be out of danger before long. Now I want you to take care of yourself and to trust your child to me."

"Oh, I cannot give the child up to anyone. You must not keep me from her another moment. I am not a bit hungry, but I'll have something to eat in her room if you'll bring it to me. How awfully my darling must have missed me!—she is such a child for her mother. Let me go to her at once—my dear little treasure!"

"Dr. Staunton is very anxious that you should not go to her to-night."

"How can he dare to keep a mother from her child? Here, give me my dress, will you? I tell you that nothing will keep me from the room. I am sure you are deceiving me."

"Do you really think I would deceive you?" said Dorothy. "Before you went to sleep you promised to trust me. Look at me now—look into my eyes. I have nursed a great many sick children—I have seen many mothers in agony—I have never deceived one. When the truth was good I have told it; when it was bad I have also told it. I am not deceiving you, Mrs. Harvey."

Poor Mrs. Harvey's dazed and frightened eyes gazed into Dorothy's strong face. Its repose, its calm, impressed her. She was in an overstrung and highly hysterical state. She burst into tears.

"I do trust you, nurse," she said, with a great sob. "I trust you, and I bless you. I know my dear little one is better. Oh, thank God; thank the great and good God! But, dear nurse, I must go to her. You are tired, and I am quite rested and refreshed. I'll spend the night with the child, and you can go to bed." 41

"No, dear madam; I cannot resign the care of the child to anyone. I am using a certain remedy in the form of a spray which no one in this house understands but me. If that remedy—which has made the child better—is not continued unceasingly during the whole of this night, her throat will get as bad as ever, and there will be no hope of her recovery. I want you, Mrs. Harvey, to sleep to-night, and leave the child in my care, I wish this, and the doctor wishes it, and I am sure, if you asked your husband, he would tell you that he wished the same. You are not required to do anything for little Freda, and it is your duty to take care of yourself. If she gets worse, I promise to come for you—I promise this, Mrs. Harvey. Now, will you go to your room and dress, and then go downstairs and have some dinner? In the morning I expect to have splendid news for you."

Mrs. Harvey clasped her hands in perplexity and uncertainty.

"It is dreadful to keep a mother from her child," she said; "and yet—and yet——"

"And yet in this case it is right," said Dorothy. "You must remember that you have not only Freda to think of. There is your husband, and——"

"Oh, yes, I know; there is my poor little unhappy baby, but I cannot love it as I love Freda."

"Still you owe it a duty. It is not right of you to do anything to risk its life or your own. When it comes to you, you will see how dearly you love it. Now, please, let me take you to your room." 42

"But may I not take one peep at my little treasure?"

"She is asleep just now, and you may wake her. Please let me take you to your room."

Mrs. Harvey staggered to her feet.

"I trust you, nurse," she said, with a wistful sort of look. "You will remember your promise?"

"I will; nothing in the world will make me go back from my word. Now, come with me."

Dorothy led Mrs. Harvey away. They walked down the corridor together. The nurse opened a baize door, which shut away the nurseries from the rest of the house, and a moment later found herself standing in Mrs. Harvey's luxurious bedroom. Her maid was there, and Dorothy asked her to help her mistress to dress.

"What dress will you wear, madam?" asked the girl.

"Anything—it doesn't matter what," replied Mrs. Harvey.

"Yes, it matters a great deal," said Dorothy. "You ought to wear a pretty dress; I think it is your duty to do so. You have got to think of the Squire. Nothing will please him and reassure him more than to see you coming down to dinner looking bright and pretty in one of your nice dresses."

"Really, nurse, you amaze me"—began Mrs. Harvey, but then the shadow of a smile crept into her eyes. "I don't think you would talk like that if you did not really think Freda would get well," she exclaimed suddenly.

"My impression is that she will get well," replied Dorothy, "Now, please put on one of your pretty

dresses."

"That pink dress with the lace ruffles, Martin," said Mrs. Harvey, turning to the maid. She got up as she spoke, walked across the room, and put her arms round Dorothy's white neck.

"You are a very brave woman," she said. "You are someone to lean on. It rests me to lean on you —I love you already."

"And I love you," said Dorothy in her simple, direct fashion. "God has given you to me to take care of just now, and I fully believe that your sweet little girl will be spared to you. Now, I see you are going to be very brave and good yourself, and I'll go back to the child. I ought not to be too long away from her."

All through the night that followed, the nurse persevered in the remedies which were slowly but surely undermining the awful blood poisoning. Slowly but surely, as the hours advanced, the fell disease lost its power, the choking sensation grew less and less in the throat, the horrible fungus-like membrane became absorbed, and the child, exhausted, worn to a little shadow, dropped toward morning into a peaceful and natural sleep.

"From my heart, I believe I have conquered," thought Dorothy. She sank on her knees by the bedside. She felt worn-out herself. Never before had she nursed a case like this. Never before had she gone through such a hand-to-hand fight with death. The child was far gone when she arrived. The diphtheria was particularly acute, and the poor little frame was already terribly weakened by the sharp attack of scarlet fever.

"Another twelve hours, and nothing would have saved her," murmured Dorothy. "Oh, I thank Thee, my God!—I thank Thee for this mercy! Oh, what a joy it is to feel that I can give this child back to her mother!" 44

Dorothy remained by the bedside. Her head was bowed on her hands. Someone touched her on her shoulder—she looked up, and met the keen eyes of Dr. Staunton. He was looking dreadfully pale and tired himself.

"See," said Dorothy, rising and pointing to the child, "she is not feverish now, she sleeps sweetly."

"She will recover," said the doctor. "Thank the Almighty!"

"I believe she will certainly recover," replied Dorothy.

"It is your doing, nurse."

"With God's blessing," she answered, bowing her head.

The doctor asked her one or two more questions.

"Now, the thing is, to keep up her strength," said Dorothy in conclusion. "She must have every imaginable form of nourishment. But that can be done, for I mean to undertake the management of her food myself. Please, Dr. Staunton, will you tell Mrs. Harvey the good news that her child is out of danger?"

"Yes," said the doctor; "but ought not that to be your own reward?"

"No, no; I don't want to go near her. I wish you to do all in your power to keep her from the room. I believe that when she knows that her child is really on the mend she will be guided by your wishes and those of her husband. I have a kind of feeling,—I may be wrong, of course,—but I have a kind of feeling that God will stay His hand in this matter, and that the plague will not spread. Now, the thing is to think of the mother. I suppose you will attend to her when her baby is born?"

"She has asked me to do so."

"Then, don't you think," said Dorothy, after a pause for reflection,—"don't you think you might leave little Freda to me? I am willing to be shut up in this part of the house with the child and one of the maids, a girl called Rhoda, who has been most helpful to me during the last twenty-four hours. If you are wanted, doctor, you are on the spot; but, unless there is occasion, don't you think it would be best for you not to come into this room?"

"It would be certainly the safest course as regards the mother," pursued the doctor in a thoughtful tone. "You are a wonderful woman, nurse. I'll go and consult the Squire."

45

CHAPTER V.

One day, a week after the events related in the last chapter, Dr. Staunton suddenly walked into the little parlor where Effie and her mother were sitting together.

Effie sprang up at sight of him. Some needlework over which she had been busy fell to the floor.

A rush of color came into her cheeks.

"Oh, father, father!" she exclaimed, "how delightful it is to see you again! Oh, how glad we are! Is little Freda really better? How is Mrs. Harvey? And—have you come back to stay, father?"

"I can't answer such a lot of questions all together, child," said the doctor, with a smile. "Yes, I have come home to stay. The fact is, I am tired out, and simply with doing nothing. Ever since 46
that blessed angel of a woman, Dorothy Fraser, came to The Grange, there has been little or nothing for me to do. Yes, that's a fact; I am worn-out with doing nothing. I should like a cup of tea beyond anything. Make it strong for me, my dear—strong and fragrant."

"The kettle is boiling," said Effie. "I won't be a minute. Oh, it is delightful to have you back!" She ran out of the room, shutting the door softly behind her.

Dr. Staunton went over and sat on the sofa by his wife.

"At last, my darling," he said, putting his arms round her, "I am safe back again. You see that for yourself, thank God."

"Thank God, John," replied Mrs. Staunton. "I have missed you," she repeated.

She held out both her thin hands. The doctor put his own strong, sinewy hands round them. He clasped them tightly.

"Oh, how hot you are!" she said, starting back and looking anxiously at him. "Your fingers almost burn me."

"I am simply tired, that's all," he replied,—"tired out with doing nothing. I don't believe The Grange is a wholesome place; it is big and grand and richly furnished, but the air does not suit me. I suspect there is something wrong with the drains. The drains are probably at the root of all this mischief to poor little Freda, but let us forget all that now. Let me look at you, wife. How are you? Why, you look bonnie, bonnie!"

He stretched out his hand and passed it gently over his wife's faded cheek. "I have been thinking of you morning, noon, and night," he said. "You have never been out of my thoughts for a 47
moment, you and the children—that dear little Effie in particular, but the other children too. I had time to pause and consider during those days of waiting at The Grange, and I could not help remembering that, if anything happened to me, there were five children unprovided for—five children, and you, Mary, with the strength of a mouse in you."

"That's all you know," replied Mrs. Staunton, with a little show of spirit. "I am better; I have made wonderful progress during the last few days. You can't think what a good nurse Effie has been—the most considerate, the most thoughtful, the most kind and clever darling you can possibly imagine. She manages the whole house; our servants would do anything for her, and the children love her so much that it is a pleasure to them to obey her. She has that wonderful and invaluable knack in a woman, she never teases or worries; she just contrives to turn people round her little finger, without their knowing anything about it themselves. But now don't let us talk any more about Effie and me. I want to hear your news. How is Mrs. Harvey? How has she borne the death of her poor little baby?"

"It lived just two hours after its birth," said the doctor, with a sad look on his face. "The shock the poor mother underwent evidently had some effect upon it. Well, she is getting on splendidly—she seemed to know from the first that her poor little baby would not live, but as Freda is doing so well, not a murmuring word has passed her lips. She is a sweet young woman, and I am thankful to say I don't believe she took a scrap of infection from poor little Freda."

"And the little one; is she continuing to get better?" 48

"She is doing magnificently—thanks to that fine creature, Dorothy Fraser. I never came across such a woman. If you only saw, Mary, the state of hopeless confusion, of pandemonium—for it really amounted to that—of that wretched house the morning Miss Fraser arrived; if you could only have seen the condition of the sickroom, and then have gone into it two hours later, why, it was like stepping from the infernal regions into paradise. The order of the sickroom seemed to affect the whole house. The servants ceased to be in a state of panic, the meals were properly cooked, the Squire came back to his normal condition, and Mrs. Harvey became quite cheerful. In short, except for the loss of her poor little one, she seems to have had no ill effects from the terrible strain she has undergone. Little Freda is making rapid marches toward recovery, and I do not at present see the slightest trace of the disease spreading through the house."

"Have you seen Freda often?" asked Mrs. Staunton.

"No; that good soul simply forbade it—I was like wax in her hands. Of course her reason was a very legitimate one, or I should not have submitted to it, for it would not have been safe for me to have attended to Mrs. Harvey coming straight from the child's room. All is now going on well at The Grange, and I can come home and rest."

"I wish you did not look so dreadfully worn out," said Mrs. Staunton.

"Oh, the home air will soon pull me together. Heigh-ho! here you come, my good angel, and the tea is more than welcome."

The doctor sank back in his deep armchair.

Effie placed the fragrant tea on the table, and, pouring out a cup, brought it to her father. She had made crisp toast as well, but he did not care to eat. 49

"Thank you, child," he said; "I am not hungry. The meals up at that place are preposterous—nothing short of preposterous. There is no doubt whatever that far more people die from eating too much than from eating too little. I wonder the Squire has a scrap of digestion left—heavy meat breakfasts, heavy meat luncheons, and then a groaning dinner at the end of the day. Such meals, and practically nothing to do for them!—for what has a man of that sort to occupy his time beyond what one would call fiddle-faddle? Well, this tea is refreshing; I will go for a walk afterward. And now tell me, Effie, have you heard anything about my patients?"

"Mr. Edwards called this morning, and said they were all doing well," said Effie. "The little Beels have got whooping-cough, but I do not think anyone else is ill. Of course poor Mrs. Watson is much as usual, but hers is a chronic case."

"Ah, yes, poor soul,"—the doctor gave an apprehensive glance toward his wife. "I cannot call to see Mrs. Watson for a day or two," he said; "not that there is the least scrap of infection, for I changed everything before I came home, but in her state it would not do to make her feel nervous. Well, wife and daughter, it is good to see you both again; and now I am going out for a stroll."

The doctor left the room. Effie stood by the table. She was putting back his empty cup on the tray, and preparing to take the things into the kitchen, when her mother spoke.

"What is the matter with your father?" she said in a husky voice.

Effie slightly turned her back. "He is just tired," she answered; "that's all." 50

"Put down that tray, Effie, and come here," said her mother.

Effie obeyed.

"Yes, mother," she said. "Now, mother darling, you are not going to get nervous?"

"No, no, I am not nervous," said Mrs. Staunton,—her lips trembled slightly,—"I am not nervous. Nothing shall make me show nervousness or weakness of any sort in a time of real extremity. But, Effie, child, I know something."

"What in the world do you know, mother?" Effie tried to smile.

"Your father is ill. The unimportant people have escaped, but he has taken this complaint. He is ill, Effie—I know it."

"Now, mother, is that likely?" said Effie. "Father comes home tired, he has gone through a great deal of anxiety—has he not all his life been exposed to infection of all kinds? Why should he be ill now? Besides, if he were ill, he would say so. Mother, darling, I cannot listen to this kind of talk."

"All right, my dear, I will say no more. It sometimes happens so, Effie. Lives we think of no account are spared—spared on indefinitely. The one life on which so many others hang is taken."

"Mother, I do not understand you."

"I understand myself," said Mrs. Staunton. "I know what I fear. Nay, I do not fear it—I rise up with strength to meet it. You will see, Effie, dear, that your mother is no coward in any real danger."

"You are a dear," said Effie. "You are the best and most unselfish mother in the world. I feel ashamed of myself when I see how bravely you struggle against the weakness and the anxiety which must be yours, more or less, always. But now, mother, dear, you will not look trouble in the face before it comes—you will not meet it halfway. If you are really better, come out into the garden, and we will take a turn before dinner." 51

"Very well, my dear."

"I want to show you the sweet-peas that have come up in the south border," continued Effie. "Come, let us talk of pleasant things, and be cheerful when father comes home."

"Oh, I will be perfectly cheerful," said Mrs. Staunton.

She went into the good-sized garden at the back of the little cottage, and began with nervous, energetic fingers to pick some flowers, and to arrange them in a big nosegay.

"We will put these in the center of the supper-table," she said. "I should like to have everything as bright and cheerful as possible for your father to-night."

"Yes, that's capital," said Effie.

"We ought to have something particularly good for him to eat, Effie."

"But, mother, he said he wasn't hungry. You remember how he complained of having so many meals at The Grange."

"Yes, yes, he always was a most abstemious man; but I know what he never can resist, and that is cold raspberry tart and cream. There are plenty of raspberries ripe in the plantation—I will

gather some, and I'll make the pastry for the tart myself."

"Very well, mother; but is it well for you to fag yourself picking those raspberries, and then making the tart?"

"I want to make it—I should love to make it. I used to be famed for my pastry. My mother used to say, 'You have a light hand for pastry, Mary.' I remember so well when I made my first tart. I was just fifteen—it was my fifteenth birthday. Mother showed me how to do it; and I remember how the water ran all over the pastry-board. Afterward I was the best hand at pastry in the house. Yes, I'll make the tart myself. Here is sixpence, Effie; run to the dairy and get some cream. And listen, love, as you go through the house you might tell Jane to get the pastry-board ready." 52

"All right, mother, I'll tell her to put it in the larder. You must not go into the hot kitchen to make that tart."

"Very well, child, I'll remember. Now run and get the cream."

Effie left her mother standing by the raspberry plantation. She was pulling the ripe raspberries and dropping them into a large cabbage leaf which she held. Her slender but weak figure was drawn up to its full height. There was a look of nervous energy about her which Effie had not observed for many a long day. The curious phase into which her mother had entered had an alarming effect upon the young girl. It frightened her far more than her father's look of lassitude and the burning touch of his hands. She tried to turn her thoughts from it. After all, why should she become nervous herself, and meet trouble halfway?

She went across the village street, and entering the pretty dairy, asked for the cream.

"Is it true, Miss Staunton, that the doctor has come back again?" asked the woman of the shop, as she handed her the jug of cream across the counter.

"Yes, Mrs. Pattens, it is quite true," replied Effie. "There's good news now at The Grange. Mrs. Harvey is doing splendidly, and little Freda is nearly well again." 53

"Well, it is a good thing the doctor can be spared," said the woman; "we want him bad enough here, and it seemed cruel-like that he should have been sort of buried alive at The Grange."

"He is only able to be spared now," said Effie, "because he has secured the services of a very wonderful nurse."

"Oh, one of the Fraser girls," said the woman, in a tone of contempt—"those newcomers, who have not been settled in the place above a year. For my part, I don't hold with lady-nurses. I am told they are all stuck-up and full of airs, and that they need a sight more waiting on than the patients themselves. When you get a lady-nurse into the house you have to think more of the nurse than of the patient, that's what I am told."

"It is not true," replied Effie, her eyes flashing angrily—"at least," she continued, "it is not true in the case of Nurse Fraser. You must get my father to talk to you about her some day. I am afraid I haven't time to spare now. Good-evening, Mrs. Pattens."

Effie went home with her jug of cream. Mrs. Staunton was still in the larder making the raspberry tart. Effie went and watched her, as her long thin fingers dabbled in the flour, manipulated the roller, spread out the butter, and presently produced a light puff paste, which, as Effie expressed it, looked almost as if you could blow it away.

"That's the best raspberry tart I have ever made," said Mrs. Staunton. "Now we will put it in the oven."

54

CHAPTER VI.

The raspberry tart was put in the oven, and Mrs. Staunton went upstairs to her own room.

She was a woman, who, as a rule, utterly disregarded dress. She gave but little thought to her personal appearance. Like many other women of the middle class, she had sunk since her marriage from the trim, pretty girl to the somewhat slatternly matron.

Nothing could destroy the sweet comeliness of her face, however, but in the struggle for life she and Fashion had fallen out—Fashion went in one direction, and Mrs. Staunton strayed gently in another. She did not mind whether her dress was cut according to the mode or not—she scarcely looked at her faded but still pretty face. Now and then this trait in her mother's character vexed Effie. Effie adored her mother, she thought her the most beautiful of women, and anything that took from her sweet charms annoyed her.

This evening, however, Mrs. Staunton made a careful and deliberate toilet.

She removed her dowdy black dress, and, opening a drawer in her wardrobe, took out a soft gray

silk which lay folded between tissue paper and sprigs of lavender. She put the dress on, and fastened soft lace ruffles round her throat and at her wrists. The dress transformed her. It toned with all her faded charms. She put a real lace cap over her still thick and pretty hair, and, going down to the little parlor, sat upright on one of the chairs near the window which looked into the garden.

Effie came in presently, and started when she saw her mother.

"Why, mother," she said, "how sweet, how sweet you look!" She went over and kissed her. Mrs. Staunton returned her embrace very quietly.

"It is for your father," she said. "He would like me to look nice—I am sure he'd like us all to look nice to-night. Go upstairs, Effie, dear, and put on your pretty blue muslin. And you, Agnes, I wish you to wear your Sunday frock."

Agnes, who had bounded into the room at this moment, stopped short in astonishment.

"Are we all going to a party?" she asked, excitement in her tone.

"No, no; but your father has come home."

"Only father! what does that matter?" Agnes lolled on to the sofa and crossed her legs. "I want to read over my lecture for the High School. I can't be bothered to change my dress!" she exclaimed.

"Yes, Aggie, go at once when mother wishes you," said Effie. "Go and put on your Sunday frock, and tell Katie to do the same, and ask Susan to put the younger children into their white dresses. Go at once; mother wishes it."

Agnes flung herself out of the room, muttering.

Effie looked again at her mother.

She did not notice her, she was smiling softly to herself, and looking out at the garden. Effie felt her heart sink lower and lower.

She went gravely upstairs, put on her blue dress, brushed out her bright dark hair, and, looking her sweetest and freshest, came downstairs again. Mrs. Staunton was still sitting by the window. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes were unusually bright. She looked twenty years younger than she had done two hours ago—she looked beautiful. The soul seemed to shine out of her face. When Effie came in, she stood up restlessly and looked at the supper table.

"Yes," she said, "it is just as he likes it—the fragrant coffee, the raspberry tart and the jug of cream, the new-laid eggs, the brown loaf and the fresh butter. A simple sort of meal—yes, quite simple and very wholesome. Very homelike, that's the word. Effie, there never was such a homelike sort of man as your father. Give him home and you fill his heart. This supper table is just what he will like best. He does not care for new-fangled things. He is old-fashioned—he is the best of men, Effie, the best of men."

"He will be glad to see you in your nice dress, mother—he is so proud of you—he thinks you are so lovely."

"So I am in his eyes," said Mrs. Staunton in a wistful voice. "I am old-fashioned like himself, and this dress is old-fashioned too. It was a pretty dress when it was made up. Let me see, that was twelve years ago—we went to Margate for a week, and he bought me the dress. He took great pains in choosing the exact shade of gray; he wanted it to be silver gray—he said his mother used to wear silver gray when she sat in the porch on summer evenings. Yes, this dress is like a piece of old lavender—it reminds me of the past, of the sunny, happy past. I have had such a happy life, Effie—never a cross word said, never a dour look given me. Love has surrounded me from the moment of my marriage until now. I feel young to-night, and I am going to be happy, very happy. The children must look their best too. Run up, darling, to the nursery and see that Susan is doing them justice—they are pretty children every one of them, worthy of your father. Now, let me see, would not a few roses improve this table? That great jug of sweet peas in the middle is just what he likes, but we might have roses and mignonette as well. I'll go and gather a bunch of those Banksia roses which grow in front of the house."

"You'll tire yourself, mother. Let me go."

"No; I never felt stronger than I do to-night. I'd like to pick them myself."

Mrs. Staunton went out of doors. She cut great sprays from the Banksia rose and brought them back with her. She placed them in a brown jug, and stood the jug on the table. Then she opened both windows wide, and left the door ajar. There was the sweetest smell wafted through the room —the sweet peas, roses, mignonette, seemed to be floating in the air.

The children all came down dressed in their Sunday frocks. They looked puzzled, uncomfortable, awed. One and all asked the same question:

"Is it a party, mother? Are any visitors coming to tea?"

"No. No!" replied the mother to each in his or her turn. "It is only your father who has come home, and it is right that we should give him a welcome."

When she had answered the last of the children, Dr. Staunton entered the room.

He started at the pretty sight which met his eyes. The room and the temptingly laid out supper table—the children in their best dresses—the old wife in her gray silk—looked to him the most beautiful sight his eyes had ever rested on.

What was all this festival about?—he drew himself up hastily—a sort of shudder went through him. In spite of his efforts his voice was terribly husky. 58

"Are we going to have company?" he asked, with a twinkle in his eyes. All the other eyes looked back at him—he knew perfectly well even before the children burst out with the news, that he himself was the company.

"You have come back, father, and mother says we are to look our very best," exclaimed little Phil.

"All right, Phil, I am more than agreeable," replied the doctor. "Now you must excuse me, good folk. I am bound in duty to do honor to all this company splendor, by washing my hands and putting on my Sunday-go-to-meeting coat."

"Effie, you may fetch the coffee," said her mother.

The supper that followed was a merry meal—Dr. Staunton told his best stories—they were capped by his wife's. Effie laughed as if she had never heard them before, and the children made themselves riotously agreeable.

When the meal was at an end, Dr. Staunton and his wife went out into the garden at the back of the house. He drew his arm round her waist, and they walked up and down together on the little rose path at the top of the garden.

Effie watched them from the parlor window. There was a queer lump in her throat. She could not get over the strange sensation of nervousness and coming disaster. The foreboding which filled her could not be fought down. She had laughed almost against her will at supper-time, but now she ceased to smile—she no longer made the faintest attempt to be cheerful. She hated the pretty room, and the sweet-peas, and the roses and mignonette.

The children were idly lolling about. She turned, and spoke almost crossly. 59

"Don't you know, Aggie, that it is long past the younger children's hour for staying up? Can't you make yourself useful for once, and go up and put them to bed?"

"Can't you come, Effie—we'd much rather have you," said little Phil and Walter, the brother next in age. "Agnes is so cross, she pulls our hair so when she combs it out."

"I don't, you bad boys!" exclaimed Agnes, coloring high. "Won't I give it to you next time we are alone for saying that!"

"She does, Effie; she does indeed," said little Phil, running up to his elder sister, and clasping his arms round her light blue dress.

"Don't, Phil; you will spoil my pretty frock!" she cried.

"Why, you are cross too," he answered, looking up at her. He was so startled and amazed at this new tone in Effie's voice, that words failed him altogether for a minute. It seemed to him as if a castle of cards had tumbled all over his head, and as if he stood in the middle of the ruins. If Effie were going to turn nasty, according to Phil's idea, there was nothing further to be looked for in life. Walter, however, who was older, had more discernment than his little brother.

"Effie has a headache," he said; "can't you see that she has a headache? We'll be very good indeed, Effie, if Agnes will put us to bed."

"Come along, then," said Agnes, scuttling them out of the room in front of her. "You must be quick about it, for I have not half prepared my to-morrow's lessons. Now then, out you go."

The children disappeared.

The room was once more empty, except for the silent figure who stood in the window. She could catch a glimpse of her father and mother walking up and down in the garden. Presently the two approached the house. Mrs. Staunton went straight upstairs to her room, and the doctor returned to the parlor. 60

"Your mother is very tired to-night, Effie," he said in a grave voice.

He sat down in the armchair just where he could smell the sweet-peas and the Banksia roses.

"Yes," he continued, "I am anxious about her." There was not a trace now of any of the jollity which had marked him at supper. His face was gray and worn—his voice decidedly husky. That huskiness in her father's voice went like a stab to Effie's heart. She shut the door and went and stood by his side.

"Don't you think you had better go upstairs and help your mother to get to bed?"

"No; she likes best to be alone," replied Effie. "I want to sit by you. What is the matter with your throat?"

"My throat!—why?"

"You are so husky."

"I am dead beat, that's the truth of it. I am as weak as a cat, and for no earthly reason. Don't bother about my throat, it will be all right after I have had a good night's rest. I tell you, Effie, I never saw a child so ill as that little Freda Harvey. That woman who nursed her is an angel—an angel."

"I didn't say too much about her, father, did I?" said Effie, with a little note of triumph coming into her voice even in the midst of her anxiety.

"That you didn't, my darling—she is one of God's angels and I say 'God bless her!' Now I want to talk about your mother."

"Yes, father," said Effie, laying her hand on his. She started back the moment she did so. The evening was a very hot one, and touching the doctor's hand was like clasping fire. 61

"How you burn!" she exclaimed.

"That's weakness," he said. "I shall take some bromide to-night; I am completely worn-out, shaken, and all that sort of thing. Now, Effie, don't interrupt me. I wish to talk to you of your mother. Are you prepared to listen?"

"Of course, father."

"She has been talking of you—she says you have got an idea into your head that you ought to make more of your life than you can make of it staying at home, and being the blessing of the house, and the joy of my life and of hers."

"Oh, father, father, I did wish it," said Effie, tears springing into her eyes. "I did long for it, but I'll give it up, I'll give it all up if it makes you and mother unhappy."

"But it doesn't, my dear. The old birds cannot expect to keep the young ones in the nest for ever and ever. Your mother spoke very sensibly to-night. I never saw any woman so altered for the time being. She would not let me imagine there was a thing the matter with her, and she spoke all the time about you, as though she wanted to plead with me, your father, to give you a happy life. Do you think I would deny it to you, my dear little girl?"

"No, father; you have never denied me anything."

"I have never denied what was for your good, sweetheart."

Dr. Staunton clasped Effie to his breast. She flung her arms round him with a sudden tight pressure.

"Easy, easy!" he exclaimed; "you are half-choking me. My breathing certainly feels oppressed—I must have taken a chill. I'll get off to bed as fast as I can. No, child, you need not be alarmed. I have often noticed this queer development of hoarseness in people who have long breathed the poisonous air which surrounds diphtheria and scarlet fever, but in my case the hoarseness means nothing. Now, Effie, let me say a word or two to you. I don't know what the future has in it—it is impossible for any of us to know the future, and I say, thank God for the blessed curtain which hides it from our view; but whatever it has in it, my child, I wish you to understand that you are to do your best with your life. Make it full if you can—in any case make it blessed. A month ago, I will admit frankly, I did not approve of lady-nurses. After my wonderful experience, however, with Dorothy Fraser, I must say that I have completely changed my opinion. The girl with heart and nerve, with common sense, with an unselfish spirit, can be a nurse whatever her station in life. If to these qualifications she adds the refinements of good breeding and the education of a lady, she is the best of all." 62

"Hurrah!" cried Effie—tears filled her eyes. "What a grand triumph for Dorothy!" she exclaimed.

"She deserves every word I have said of her. If she wishes to take you back with her to London when she goes,—if that is what is now at the bottom of your heart,—go, child, with my blessing. We shall miss you at home, of course, but we are not worth our salt if we are going to be selfish."

"You never, never were that," said Effie.

"Now I have one more thing to say—it is about your mother. I have never really told you my true fears about her. You know, of course, that she suffers from weakness of the heart. At present that weakness springs from no organic source, but of late there have been symptoms which make me fear that the functional mischief may be developed into the more serious organic form of disease, should any shock be given her. It is that fear which haunts my life—I could not live without your mother, child. Effie, child. I could not live without her." 63

The doctor's voice suddenly broke—he bowed his head on his hands, and a broken sort of groan escaped his lips.

"We'll take all possible care of her," said Effie. "She shall not have any pain, nor fear, nor anxiety."

"I know you will do your best," said the doctor; "but if you leave her——"

"I'll never leave her if it is to injure her—there, I have promised."

"You are a good girl. I trust you. I lean on you. Your mother could not live through an anxiety—a great fear, a great trouble would kill her."

"It shan't come," said Effie.

"God grant it may not come," said the doctor in his husky voice.

He rose suddenly to his feet.

"I must go to bed," he said. "I have not had a real proper sleep for nights and nights. By the way, Effie, you know, of course, that my life is insured for a thousand pounds. If—if at any time that should be needed, it will be there; it is best for you to know."

"I wish you would not talk about it, father."

"Very well, I won't; but talking about things doesn't bring trouble any nearer. I hold it as an article of faith that each man should arrange all he can for the future of his family. Arranging for the future never hastens matters. There is a God above. He has led me all my days. I trust Him absolutely. I submit to His mighty will."

The doctor left the room—his broad back was bowed—he walked slowly.

Effie stood near the door of the little parlor, watching him, until his gray head was lost to view. Then she went back and sat on the old horse-hair sofa, with her hands clasped tightly before her.

"My father is the best man in the world," she murmured under her breath. "I never met anyone like my father—so simple—so straightforward—so full of real feeling—so broad in his views. Talk of a sequestered life making a man narrower; there never was a man more open to real conviction than father. The fact is, no girl ever had better parents than I have; and the wonderful thing is that they give me leave to go, and take their blessing with me. It is wonderful—it is splendid. Agnes must be taught to do my present work. I'll train her for the next three months; and then, perhaps, in the winter I can join Dorothy in London. Dear father, he is nervous about mother; but while he is there, no harm can come to her. I do not believe one could live without the other. Well, well, I feel excited and nervous myself. I had better follow father's example, and go to bed."

64

CHAPTER VII.

Effie's little room faced the east. She never drew down her blind at night, and the sun was shining all over her face when her mother came in the next morning to call her.

Mrs. Staunton, standing in her nightdress in the middle of the room, called Effie in a shrill voice. 65

"What in the world is the matter?" said her daughter, sitting up, and pushing back her hair from her eyes.

"What I feared," said Mrs. Staunton. "I am not going to break down; don't think it for a minute. I am as well as possible." She trembled all over as she spoke. There was a purple spot on one cheek, the other was deadly pale. A blue tint surrounded her lips. "I am perfectly well," continued Mrs. Staunton, breathing in a labored way. "It is only that I have got a bit of a—— Your father is ill, Effie. He has got it—the—dip—dip—diphtheria. He is almost choking. Get up, child; get up."

"Yes, mother," said Effie.

She tumbled out of bed. Her pretty cheeks were flushed with sleep; her eyes, bright and shining, turned toward the eastern light for a moment.

"Oh, mother," she said, with a sudden burst of feeling, "do, do let us keep up our courage! Nothing will save him if we lose our courage, mother."

"We won't," said Mrs. Staunton; "and that's what I came to speak about. He must have good nursing—the very best. Effie, I want you to get Miss Fraser to come here."

"Miss Fraser! But will she leave little Freda Harvey?"

"She must leave her—the child is completely out of danger—anyone can nurse her now. She must leave her and come here, and you must go and fetch her. Your father may lose his life in the cause of that little child. There is not a moment to lose—get up, Effie. You can go at once to The Grange. Go, go quickly and bring Dorothy Fraser. We none of us can nurse him as she will. She will do it. He has been murmuring in his sleep about her, about something she did for little Freda, clasping his throat all the time and suffocating. One glance showed me what ailed him 66 when I awoke this morning. He has a hard fight before him, but he must not die—I tell you, child,

your father must not die!"

"No, no, mother! God will spare him to us," said Effie. Tears dimmed her eyes, she got quickly into her clothes.

"Now, I will go," she said. "I will bring Dorothy back with me."

"If there is any difficulty," said Mrs. Staunton, "if she hesitates for a moment, you must remember, there is only one thing to be done."

"Yes, mother; what do you mean?"

"You must offer to nurse Freda Harvey instead of her—do you understand?"

"And I am not to come back to father when he is ill?" said Effie, aghast.

"That is not the point," exclaimed Mrs. Staunton. "The only thing to be considered is, what will save him, and you and I, and our feelings, are of no consequence. His life is so valuable that no sacrifice is too great to keep it. Go, child, go. If you can come back, come—if not, stay."

"And who will manage the children—they ought not to remain in the house."

"Don't worry about the children. Get Dorothy as quickly as possible."

Effie buttoned her dress and pinned on her hat, and then went out on the landing.

"Where are you going, child? Why don't you go downstairs?"

"I must kiss father first."

"What folly!—why should there be this delay?"

"I won't be a minute."

Effie turned the handle of the bedroom door, and went softly into the room. Her father was lying on his back—there was a livid look about his face. Great beads of perspiration stood on his brow. His eyes were closed. He did not see Effie when she came into the room, but when she bent down and kissed his forehead, he opened his eyes and looked at her. He said something which she could not distinguish—he was too hoarse to make any words articulate.

"I am going for Dorothy," she said, with a smile,—"she'll soon make you better,—good-by. God bless you—father. I love you—father, I love you."

His eyes smiled at her, but his lips could not speak.

She went quickly out of the room.

67

CHAPTER VIII.

It did not take Effie long to harness the old horse to the gig. She had often driven old Jock, and this part of her task did not put her out in the least. She had a curious sense, as she was driving toward The Grange in the fresh early morning air, of the complete change which was awaiting her. She was quite certain that one door in her life was shut—shut forever. She had longed for change,—it had come at last with a vengeance; it was horrible,—it made her shudder.

Effie was a thoroughly healthy girl, healthy both in mind and body, but now a sick pain was over her. She did not care to think of the real terror which haunted her. She arrived at The Grange between six and seven o'clock. The woman at the lodge ran out and opened the gate for the doctor's gig in some surprise. She thought something was wrong again up at the house, but her surprise strengthened to astonishment when she saw that Effie was driving the horse.

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"Why, Miss Effie, what is the matter?" she exclaimed. Everyone in the place knew Effie, and loved her for her father's sake.

"The doctor is ill, Mrs. Jones," said Effie, "and I have come to fetch Miss Fraser."

"Oh, God help us! he hasn't taken it?" said the woman, falling back a step or two in horror.

Effie nodded her head—she had no words to speak. She whipped up Jock, and drove quickly down the avenue.

A kitchen-maid was on her knees whitening and polishing the front steps. Effie jumped from the gig, and asked the girl to call someone to hold the horse.

"There ain't any of the men round just now, it is too early," said the girl.

"Then take the reins yourself," said Effie. "Stand just here; Jock won't stir if I tell him to be quiet.

Hold the reins. I am in a great hurry."

"You are Miss Effie Staunton, ain't you, miss?"

"I am. My father is ill, and I want Miss Fraser."

"God help us! the doctor ill!" exclaimed the girl.

She stood where Effie told her, holding Jock's reins.

"Be quiet, Jock; don't stir till I come out," said Effie. The old horse drooped his head. Effie ran up the steps and into the house. She had never been at The Grange before, but she had no eyes for the beauties of the old place this morning. There was something too awful lying at the bottom of her heart, for any external things to affect her. She went quickly up the broad front stairs, and paused on the first landing. How was she to discover the room where Dorothy and little Freda 69
Harvey spent their time together? She was about to turn back in utter bewilderment, when, to her relief, she saw another servant. The servant stopped and stared at Effie. Effie came up to her quickly.

"You may be surprised to see me here," she said. "I am Miss Staunton, Dr. Staunton's daughter. He is ill. I want to see Nurse Fraser immediately. Take me to her at once."

"We are none of us allowed near that part of the house, miss," replied the woman.

"You can take me in the direction, anyhow, and explain to me how I am to get to Miss Fraser," said Effie. "Come, there's not an instant to lose—be quick."

"Oh, yes! I can take you in the direction," said the girl.

She turned down a corridor; Effie followed her. The servant walked rather slowly and in a dubious sort of way.

"Can't you hurry?" said Effie. "It is a matter of life and death."

The girl hastened her steps a little. Effie's manner frightened her. Presently they reached a baize door—the servant pushed it open, but stood aside herself.

"It is as much as my place is worth to open this door," she said. "It is here the infectious case is, and Miss Fraser's own orders are that the door is not to be opened; but you frighten me somehow, miss, and I suppose there's no harm in it."

"No, of course there is no harm. Now, tell me which is Miss Fraser's room?"

"The nurseries are entered by the third door as you go down that passage, miss."

The servant banged to the baize door, and Effie found herself alone. She ran down the passage, 70
and opened the outer nursery door. It was quiet and still, in perfect order, the blinds down, and the windows open. Effie, in spite of all her agitation, walked on tiptoe across this room. A door which led into another room was half open, and she heard someone moving about. That step, so quiet and self-possessed, must belong to Dorothy.

"Dorothy! Dorothy! come here," called Effie.

Dorothy Fraser, in her dressing-gown, came out to the other room at once.

"Effie!" she exclaimed. "Effie Staunton!"

"Yes, it is I," said Effie; "it is I." She began to unpin her hat as she spoke. "I have come here to stay; I am going to nurse little Freda, and you are to go back to father. The gig is waiting outside, and you can easily drive old Jock. Drive him straight home, and go as fast as ever you can."

"Is your father ill, Effie?"

"Yes; he has taken the diphtheria. He is very ill. Mother sent me for you. If father dies, mother will die. They love each other so dearly—so very dearly. One couldn't live without the other. Go, and save them both, Dorothy, and I will stay with Freda."

"You are a dear, brave little girl," said Dorothy.

She went and put her strong arms round Effie.

"I will go at once," she said. "But are you prepared to take full charge here, Effie?"

"Yes; tell me quickly what is to be done!"

"There's nothing to be done now but simply to see that Freda doesn't take cold. She is not free from infection yet, but she is quite out of danger, if she does not catch a chill. Treat her as you would any sick child. Rhoda is here. She is a capital girl, and will help you with Freda's food. Freda may come into this room for a little to-day, but you must see that she keeps out of a draught. Good-by. Effie. I won't be any time getting ready. I'll send you telegrams about your father. God bless you, Effie."

CHAPTER IX.

From the first it was a bad case. The throat was not so particularly affected, but the weakness was extreme. All imaginable devices were resorted to, to keep up the patient's strength. Notwithstanding all human precautions, however, that strength failed and failed.

In a few days the strong man was like an infant. He could not lift a finger, he could scarcely turn his head, his voice was completely gone. His stricken soul could only look dumbly into the world through his eyes. Those honest eyes were pathetic. Dorothy was unremitting in her attentions. She took complete charge from the very first. Dr. Edwards came and went, but he gave the nursing to Dorothy. She had prepared herself for a great fight. She had hoped to conquer, but on the third day of the doctor's illness she knew that the battle was not to the strong nor the race to the swift—in short, the good doctor was called to render up his account, his short span of mortal life was over.

One evening he had lain perfectly still and in a state of apparent stupor for several hours. Dorothy stood at the foot of the bed. Her eyes were fixed on the patient.

"It is strange how much I admire him," she said to herself. "I never met a nobler, truer-hearted man."

"Dorothy, come here," said the doctor.

She went at once, and bent over him.

"I am going," he said, looking at her.

"Yes, Dr. Staunton," she answered.

He closed his eyes again for a moment.

"The wife," he murmured—"does she know?"

"I am not sure," said Dorothy in her quiet, clear voice, which never for a moment sank to a whisper. "I think she must guess—I have not told her."

"She had better know," said the doctor. "Will you bring her here?"

"Yes, I'll go and fetch her at once."

Dorothy left the room. She stood for a moment on the landing.

The task which lay immediately before her made her spirits sink. She knew just as well as Dr. Staunton did how precarious was Mrs. Staunton's tenure of life. She knew that a sudden shock might be fatal. Were those children to lose both parents? The doctor was going,—no mortal aid now could avail for him,—but must the mother also leave the children?

"I do not know what to do," thought Dorothy. "She must see her husband—they *must* meet. He is the bravest man I know, but can he suppress his own feelings now—now that he is dying? No, no, it is too much to ask; but I greatly, greatly fear that if he does not, the shock will kill her."

Dorothy went slowly downstairs. She was generally decisive in her actions. Now, she trembled, and a terrible nervousness seized her.

When she reached the little entrance hall, and was about to open the door of the parlor where she expected to find Mrs. Staunton, she was surprised to come face to face with a tall, bronzed young man, who was taking off his hat and hanging it on one of the pegs in the hat-rack. He turned, and started when, he saw her. He was evidently unfamiliar with nurses and sickness. His face flushed up, and he said in a sort of apologetic way:

"Surely this is Dr. Staunton's house?"

"Yes," said Dorothy.

"I am George Staunton. I—I came down on pressing business—I want to see my father in a hurry. What is the matter?"

He stepped back a pace or two, startled by the expression on Dorothy's face.

"Come in here at once," she said, seizing his hand. She dragged him into the seldom-used drawing-room. The moment they got inside, she deliberately locked the door.

"You have come just in time," she said. "You must bear up. I hope you'll be brave. Can you bear a great shock without—without fainting, or anything of that sort?"

"Oh, I won't faint!" he answered. His lips trembled, his blue eyes grew wide open, the pupils began to dilate.

"I believe you are a brave lad," said Dorothy, noticing these signs. "It is your lot now to come face to face with great trouble. Dr. Staunton—your father—is dying."

"Good God! Merciful God!" said the lad. He sank down on the nearest chair—he was white to the lips.

Dorothy went up and took his hand.

"There, there!" she said. "You'll be better in a moment. Try to forget yourself—we have not, any of us, a single instant just now to think of ourselves. I have come down to fetch your mother."

"You are the nurse?" said George, glancing at her dress.

"Yes, I am nursing your father. It has been a very bad case—diphtheria—a very acute and 74
hopeless case from the first. There's a great deal of infection. Are you afraid?"

"No, no! don't talk of fear. I'll go to him. I—I was in trouble myself, but that must wait. I'll go to him at once."

"I want you to go to your mother."

"My mother! is she ill too?"

"She is not exactly ill—I mean she is not worse than usual, but her life is bound up in your father's. It would be a dreadful thing for your sisters and yourself if your mother were to die. Your coming here at this moment may mean her salvation. I have to go to her now, to tell her that her dying husband has sent for her. Will you follow me into the room? Will you act according to your own impulses? I am sure God will direct you. Stay where you are for a minute—try to be brave. Follow me into the room as soon as you can."

Dorothy left the drawing room. As she went away, she heard the young man groan. She did not give herself time to think—she opened the parlor door.

Mrs. Staunton was sitting in her favorite seat by the window. Her face was scarcely at all paler than it had been a week ago. She sat then by the window, looking out at her trouble, which showed like a speck in the blue sky. The shadow which enveloped her whole life was coming closer now, enveloping her like a thick fog. Still she was bearing up. Her eyes were gazing out on the garden—on the flowers which she and the doctor had tended and loved together. Some of the younger children had clustered round her knee—one of them held her hand—another played with a bunch of keys and trinkets which she always wore at her side. 75

"Go on, mother," said little Marjory, aged seven. "Don't stop."

"I have nearly finished," said Mrs. Staunton.

"But not quite. Go on, mother; I want to hear the end of the story," said Phil.

Mrs. Staunton did not see Dorothy, who stood motionless near the door.

"They got so tired," she began in a monotonous sort of voice—"so dreadfully tired, that there was nothing for them to do but to try and get into the White Garden."

"A *White Garden*!" repeated Phil. "Was it pretty?"

"Lovely!"

"Why was it called a White Garden?" asked Marjory.

"Because of the flowers. They were all white—white roses, white lilies, snowdrops, chrysanthemums—all the flowers that are pure white without any color. The air is sweet with their perfume—the people who come to live in the White Garden wear white flowers on their white dresses—it is a beautiful sight."

"It must be," said Marjory, who had a great deal of imagination. "Are the people happy?"

"Perfectly happy—rested, you know, Marjory. They are peaceful as you are when you are tucked up in your little bed."

"I like best to play and romp," said Marjory in a meditative voice; "but then, you see, I am never tired."

"Dorothy is standing at the door," exclaimed Phil. "Come in, Dorothy, and listen to mother's beautiful story."

"Do you want me?" asked Mrs. Staunton, standing up. She began to tremble—the children looked 76
at her anxiously.

Dorothy went straight up and took her hand. "Dr. Staunton wishes to see you," she said. "Will you come with me?" She looked anxiously toward the door.

Mrs. Staunton put up her hand to her head. "Good-bye, my darlings," she said, looking at the little pair, who were gazing up at her with puzzled faces. "Go and play in the garden, and don't forget the White Garden about which we have been speaking." She stooped down and deliberately kissed both children, then she held out her hand to Dorothy. "I am quite ready," she said.

At that moment George entered the room. He put his arms round his mother. He was a big fellow—his arms were strong. The muscles in his neck seemed to start out, his eyes looked straight into

his mother's.

"You have got *me*, mother; I am George," he said. "Come, let us go to my father together."

Mrs. Staunton tottered upstairs. She was not in the least surprised at seeing George, but she leaned very firmly on him. They went into the sickroom, and when George knelt down by his father's bedside, Mrs. Staunton knelt by him.

The doctor was going deeper and deeper into the valley from which there is no return. Earthly sounds were growing dim to his ears—earthly voices were losing their meaning—earthly sights were fading before his failing eyes. The dew of death was on his forehead.

Mrs. Staunton, whose face was nearly as white, bent down lower and lower until her lips touched his hand. The touch of her lips made him open his eyes. He saw his wife; the look on her face seemed to bring him back to earth again—it was like a sort of return wave, landing him high on the shores of time.

His impulse was to say, "Come with me—let us enter into the rest of the Lord together;" but then he saw George. George had thrown his arm round his mother's waist.

"Let me keep her, father," said the young man. "Don't take her yet, let me keep her."

"Yes, stay with the lad, Mary," said the doctor.

It was a final act of self-renunciation. His eyelids drooped over his dying eyes—he never spoke again.

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CHAPTER X.

George stayed at Whittington for a week; he followed his father to the grave. Mrs. Staunton clung to him with a sort of feverish tenacity; whenever he came into the room, her eyes followed him. A sort of wistful, contented expression came into them when he sat down beside her. During all the time George was in the house she never broke down. At last, however, the time came when he must leave her.

"I must go back to my work," he said; "but you are coming to London soon, then I'll be with you every evening. You know my father has given you to me to take care of. It will be all right when we are in London together."

"Yes, my boy," she replied, "it will be all right then. I don't complain," she added; "I don't attempt to murmur. I shall go to him, but he cannot return to me; and I have got you, George, and he gave me to you. I am willing to stay with you just as long as you want me."

78

It was late that night when George left his mother's room. Effie was standing in the passage—the brother and sister looked at each other. Effie had come home the day after Dr. Staunton's death.

"Come out with me for a bit, Effie," said her brother. They went into the garden, and she linked her hand through his arm.

Dorothy Fraser had now returned to her duties in London; the Stauntons were to go up to town as soon as ever the cottage could be sold. It had belonged to the doctor. George was to live with them when they were in town, and perhaps Effie would be able to follow the great wish of her mind. There was just a possibility that she might be able to be trained as a hospital nurse. She looked up at George now.

"You have been such a comfort to us," she said. "Dorothy told me everything; and I know that if you had not come just at the opportune moment, we should have lost our mother as well as our father. I'll do all in my power to hurry matters, so that we can come to London before the winter."

"Yes," said George. He was a finely built young fellow, with a handsome face. He was not the least like Effie, who was dark and rather small, like her mother. George had the doctor's physique; he had great square shoulders, his eyes were frank and blue like his father's, but his mouth wanted his father's firmness.

"Effie," he said. "I don't know how I am to bring myself to confide in you."

"Confide in me?" she said, with a little start. "We always did tell our secrets to one another, but all this terrible trouble seems to have put childish things away. Have you really a secret, George, to tell me?"

"I don't know how I can tell it to you," he replied; his lips quivered—he looked down. Effie clasped his arm affectionately.

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"You know I would do anything for you," she said.

"Yes; I know you are the best of girls, and you're awfully pretty, too. I know Fred Lawson will think so when he sees you."

"Who is he?"

"A friend of mine—a right good fellow—he is a medical student at St. Joseph's Hospital. I have often met him, and he has talked to me about his own sisters, and one day I showed him your photograph, and he said what a pretty girl you were. Somehow, Effie, I never thought of you as pretty until Fred said so. I suppose fellows don't think how their sisters look, although they love them very dearly; but when Fred said it, it opened my eyes. Dear, dear, why am I talking like this, when time is so precious, and I—Effie, when I came down that day to see my father, I was in trouble—great trouble; the shock of seeing him seemed to banish it from my mind, but it cannot be banished—it cannot be banished, Effie, and I have no one to confide in now but you."

"You must tell me of course," said Effie; she felt herself turning pale. She could not imagine what George's trouble was. The night was dusk; she raised her eyes to her brother's face—he avoided meeting them. He had a stick in his hand, and he began to poke holes in the gravel.

"How much money have we got to live on?" he asked abruptly.

"How much money have we to live on?" repeated Effie. "I believe, when all is collected, that there will be something like a hundred a year for mother and Agnes and Katie and the two little children. Of course I am going to support myself *somehow*, and you are naturally off our hands." 80

"It's awful," said George; "it's awful to be so starvingly poor as that. Why, I get a hundred a year now; fancy five people living on a sum on which I never can make both ends meet!"

"What is the matter with you, George? How queerly you speak! You knew we should be awfully poor when father died. You are going to pay for your board, are you not, when you come to us, and that will be a great help."

"Yes, of course; I vow and declare that I'll give mother at least half of what I earn."

"Well, that will be fifty pounds—a great help. My idea for myself is—but——" Effie stopped abruptly. She saw that George was making an impatient movement. "I'll tell you another time," she said in a gentle voice. "You have something now to tell me, have you not?"

"I have—God knows I have. I want to get two hundred and fifty pounds somewhere."

"Two hundred and fifty pounds!" exclaimed Effie. George might just as well have asked her for the moon.

"I don't understand," she said, after a pause.

"No, and I never want you to, Effie," replied the young man. "I can't tell you what I want the money for, but it's a matter of life and death. I thought I had made up my mind"—a husky sound came into his throat—"I made up my mind to tell everything to my father when I came down that night—I could have told him. It was not a sort of thing to talk to you about, but I thought I could tell him; he died, and he gave me mother. He left mother with me. You know perfectly well, Effie, that our mother's life hangs on a thread. You know she must not have a shock, and yet—Effie, Effie, if I don't get that £250, she will have such a shock, such a terrible shock, that it will send her to her grave!"

"I must think," said Effie. "I cannot answer you in a moment."

"Is there no earthly way you can help me? I must be helped," said George in a frantic voice. "I have got six weeks longer—I must get that £250 in six weeks, or—no, I can't tell you."

"Yes, you must try—I won't help you unless you try."

"Well, then—here goes. If I don't get it, I shall have to go to—*prison*." George's voice sank to a hoarse whisper.

Effie could not suppress a cry.

81

CHAPTER XI.

"Then you have done something wrong," said Effie, loosening her hold of her brother's arm and backing to a little distance. He could scarcely see her face in the ever increasing darkness, but he noticed the change in her voice. There was an indignant note of pained and astonished youth in it. Effie had never come face to face with the graver sins of life; the word "prison" stunned her, she forgot pity for a moment in indignation.

"George," she said, with a sort of gasp, "father left mother to you,—in a sort of way he gave her up to you,—and you have done wrong; you have sinned."

"You talk just like a girl," said George; "you jump at conclusions. You, an innocent girl living in the shelter of home, know as little about the temptations which we young fellows have to meet out in the world, as you know of the heavens above you. My God! Effie, it is a hard world—it is 82
hard, *hard* to keep straight in it. Yes, I have done wrong—I know it—and father gave mother to me. If you turn away from me, Effie, I shall go to the bad—I shall go to the worst of all; there will not be a chance for me if you turn from me."

The tone of despair in his voice changed Effie's frame of mind in a moment. She ran up to him and put her arms round his neck.

"I won't turn from you, poor George," she said. "It did shock me for a moment—it frightened me rather more than I can express; but perhaps I did not hear you aright, perhaps you did not say the word 'prison.' You don't mean to say that unless you get that impossible sum of money you will have to go to prison, George?"

"Before God, it is true," said George. "I cannot, I won't tell you why, but it is as true as I stand here."

"Then you will kill our mother," said Effie.

"I know that."

"And father left her to you. George, it cannot be. I must think of something—my head is giddy—we have not any money to spare. It will be the hardest fight in the world to keep the children from starvation on that hundred pounds a year, but something must be done. I'll go and speak to the trustees."

"Who are the trustees?" asked George. He rose again to his feet. There was a dull sort of patience in his words.

"Mr. Watson is one,—you know the Watsons, father has always been so good to them,—and our clergyman, Mr. Jellet, is the other. Yes, I must go and speak to them; but what am I to say?"

"You must not betray me," said George. "If you mention that I want the money, all will be up with 83
me. In any case, there may be suspicion. Men of the world like Mr. Watson and Mr. Jellet would immediately guess there was something wrong if a lad required such a large sum of money. You must not tell them that *I* want it."

"How can I help it? Oh, everything is swimming round before my eyes; I feel as if my head would burst."

"Think of me," said George—"think of the load I have got to bear."

Effie glanced up at him. His attitude and his words puzzled and almost revolted her. After a time she said coldly:

"What hour are you leaving in the morning?"

"I want to catch the six-o'clock train to town. This is good-by, Effie; I shan't see you before I go. Remember, there are six weeks before anything can happen. If anyone can save me, you can. It is worth a sacrifice to keep our mother from dying."

"Yes, it would kill her," said Effie. "Good-night now, George. I cannot think nor counsel you at present; I feel too stunned. The blow you have given me has come so unexpectedly, and it—it is so awful. But I'll get up to see you off in the morning. Some thought may occur to me during the night."

"Very well," said George. He walked slowly down the garden, and, entering the house, went up to his own room. Effie did not go in for a long time. She was alone now, all alone with the stars. She was standing in the middle of the path. Often and often her father's steps had trodden this path. He used to pace here when he was troubled about a sick patient, when his anxiety about her mother arose to a feverish pitch. Now his daughter stood on the same spot, while a whirl of troubled thoughts passed through her brain. It had been her one comfort, since that awful 84
moment when Dorothy had told her that her father was gone, to feel that George, in a measure at least, took that father's place.

George had always been her favorite brother; they were very nearly the same age—Effie was only two years younger than George; long ago George had been good to the little sister—they had never quarreled, they had grown up always the best and warmest of friends. Their love had been true—as true as anything in all the world.

George had gone to London, and the first tiny spark of discontent had visited Effie's heart. She would be so lonely without her brother. It was so fine for him to go out into life, her own horizon seemed so narrow. Then Dorothy came, and they had made friends, and Dorothy told her what some women did with their lives.

Effie had been fired with a sudden desire to follow in Dorothy's steps; then had followed the dark cloud which seemed to swallow up her wishes, and all that was best out of her life. George, at least, remained. Dear, brave, manly George! The brother who had passed out of childhood, and entered man's estate.

Her father's last message had been to George—he had given her precious mother into George's

care.

It seemed to Effie to-night, standing out under the stars, as if George, too, were dead. The old George was really dead, and a stranger had taken his place. This stranger wore the outward guise of her brother—he had his eyes, his figure; his voice had the same tone, he could look at you just in George's way, but he could utter terrible words which George had never known anything about. He could talk of *sin* and *prison*. He could propose that Effie should rescue him at the risk of her mother's livelihood. Oh, what did it mean? How was she to bear it?—how could she 85
bear it? She clasped her hands, tears filled her eyes, but she was too oppressed, too pained, too stunned to weep long. Presently she went into the house, and lay down on her bed without undressing.

During the whole of that terrible night Effie scarcely slept. It was the worst night in all her life. Toward morning she dozed a little, but sprang up with a start, fearing that George had gone to London without seeing her. For her mother's sake she must see him. Whatever happened, her mother must never know of this calamity. Effie got up, washed her hands and face, smoothed out her hair, and went downstairs. George was already up, he was standing in the little parlor. He turned round when he heard his sister's footsteps, and looked anxiously at her.

"What a brute I am!" he said, when he saw the expression on her face; "but I swear before God, Effie, if you will help me, I'll turn over a new leaf; I'll never do a wrong thing again as long as I live—I swear it."

"Don't swear it," said Effie; "it seems to make it worse to do that. If you did wrong once, you may again. Don't swear. Ask God to help you. I don't know that I have been praying all night, but I have been trying to."

"Well, Effie, what have you determined to do?" he asked.

"Is there no one else who can help you, George?"

"Not a soul; I have only one friend, and that is Fred Lawson."

"Oh, yes! I remember you spoke of him last night. Would he help you?"

"He help me!" said George, with a hysterical laugh. "Why, he is the chap I have wronged. There, 86
don't ask me any more. If you can help me, I am saved; if you can't, say so, and I'll go straight to destruction."

"No, you shan't do that, George. I have thought of something—nothing may come of it, but I'm going to try. It is terribly repugnant to me, but I would sacrifice much to save my mother. If it fails, all fails."

"I have thought," said George eagerly, "that, as the case is such an extreme one, we might take some of the capital. There is a thousand pounds; a quarter of that sum would put me right."

"It cannot be done for a moment," said Effie, her face flushing hotly. "That money must under no circumstances be touched; my mother and the children depend on it for their bread."

"I don't know what is to be done, then," said George in a hopeless voice.

"You must trust to me, George; I am going to try to help you in my own way. If I fail, I fail; but somehow I don't think I shall. If I have any news I will write to you soon; and now good-by, good-by."

George turned and kissed Effie; she gave him her cheek, but her lips did not touch his. She was willing to help him, but her love for the time was dead or dying.

The young man walked hurriedly down the village street. Effie stood in the porch and watched him; his shoulders were bowed, he stooped. George used to have a fine figure; Effie used to be proud of him—she was not proud of her brother now.

She went back to the house, and sat down listlessly for a time in the little parlor—her hands were folded in her lap. It seemed to her as if the end of all things had come. 87

Presently the sound of the children's voices overhead aroused her; she went upstairs, and helped Susan to dress them. Returning to the everyday duties of life had a soothing effect upon her. She made a violent effort and managed to put her trouble behind her for the time being. Whatever happened, her mother must not see any traces of it.

When the baby was dressed, she took him as usual to her mother's room.

Mrs. Staunton sat up in bed and stretched out her arms to receive him. Effie gave him to her mother, who began to kiss his little face hungrily.

"Has George gone, Effie?" said the mother.

"Yes, mother, dear."

"Did anyone see him off—did he have his breakfast?"

"Yes, he had a good breakfast; I got it ready for him last night."

"But did anyone see him off?"

"I did."

"That's right; I should not have liked him to have had his last meal by himself. I miss him awfully. Effie, dear, how soon do you think we can go to London?"

"As soon as possible, mother—in about six weeks."

"Six weeks!" exclaimed Mrs. Staunton. "I can't live without George for six weeks."

"Oh, yes, you can, mother—at least you'll try."

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CHAPTER XII.

When Effie had finished the many small duties which fell to her share in the household economy, she went up to her bedroom and hastily changed her everyday dress for her best one. She did not take long about this task. Her small face looked very pale and thin under the heavy crêpe on her hat. Taking up her gloves she ran down to the parlor where her mother was sitting. Mrs. Staunton was busily mending some stockings for George. A pile of his clothes lay on the table by her side.

"I thought we might send these to London next week," she said, looking up as her daughter entered the room. "George will want a really warm greatcoat for the winter, and this one of your father's—why, Effie, my dear——" She stopped abruptly, and gazed up at Effie's best hat. "Where are you going, my love?" she said. "I thought you could help me this morning."

"I am going out, mother, for a little."

"But where to? Why have you your best things on?"

"I am going to the Harveys'."

"To the Harveys'—to The Grange?"

Mrs. Staunton shuddered slightly; she turned her head aside. "Why are you going there?" she asked, after a pause.

"I want to see them—I won't be long away. Please, mother, don't tire yourself over all that mending now."

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"It interests me, my dear; I find it impossible to sit with my hands before me. I am stronger than I used to be. I have got to live for George; and George is young, he is entering life, he must not be saddled with an old, ailing mother. I must get strong, I must get back my youth for his sake. Don't be long away, Effie, dear. I wonder you like to go to the Harveys' under the circumstances, but you know best. Children are very independent nowadays," concluded Mrs. Staunton, with a sigh.

Effie went up to her mother and kissed her, then she softly left the room.

The day was a particularly fine one, the sun shone brightly upon the little High Street. Effie walked quickly; she soon turned into a shady lane, the lane led her into the highroad. By and by she stopped at the gates of The Grange.

The woman of the lodge came out when she saw her. This woman had been fond of Dr. Staunton, and she recognized Effie.

Effie's little figure, her heavy black dress, her crêpe hat, her white cheeks and dark eyes, all appealed with great pathos to the woman. She ran towards her with outstretched hands.

"Miss Effie, my dear, you're welcome," she said. She caught Effie's little white hands in her hard, toil-worn ones. "You are welcome, Miss Effie," she repeated; "it is good of you to come. Eh, dear, but it goes to the heart to see you in that deep black! Come in and rest, my dear young lady—come in and rest."

"I cannot just now, Mrs. Jones," replied Effie. "I am in a hurry—I want to go up to see the Squire on business."

"And how is your mother, poor lady—how is she bearing up, my dear?"

"Wonderfully," said Effie. "I'll come and see you another day, Mrs. Jones."

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"Eh, do! you'll be more than welcome. I long to hear all about the doctor, poor man, and how he went off at the end. The last words of the pious are always worth listening to. I'll be glad to hear particulars, if you can give me half an hour some time, Miss Effie."

"Some time," said Effie.

She walked on, trembling a little. The woman's words and her eager look of curiosity were dreadful to her; nevertheless, she knew that her father, under similar circumstances, would have

been very patient with this woman.

By and by she arrived at the heavy front door of the old Grange. She walked up the steps and rang the bell.

The door was opened almost immediately by a servant in livery. He knew Effie, and asked her in.

"Is the Squire at home?" she asked.

"I am not sure, miss, but I'll inquire. Will you step in here while I go to ask?"

The man opened the door of a little sitting room. Effie went in, and he closed it softly behind him.

After what seemed a very short time, she heard eager steps coming along the hall—the room door was flung open, and Squire Harvey, accompanied by his wife, came in.

Mrs. Harvey looked like a shadow—but her sweet face had a tender blush-rose color about it, her eyes had the intensely clear look which long illness gives; she was better, but she looked so frail and delicate that Effie's heart went out to her.

"My dear child," said Mrs. Harvey, "how good, how very good of you to come! I am only just downstairs. Dr. Edwards only allowed me down yesterday, but I could not resist coming to welcome you myself. Won't you come into my sitting room? It is just at the opposite side of the 91
hall. I'll send Rhoda upstairs to fetch little Freda. She will be so enraptured at seeing you. Come, my dear. Now that we have got you, we won't let you go in a hurry. I think it so sweet of you to come to see us, and under the circumstances. Don't you think it is sweet of her, Walter, dear?"

Squire Harvey had more perception of character than his wife. He noticed how white Effie's face grew; he noticed the pathetic trembling of her hands.

"My dear," he said, "perhaps Miss Staunton wishes to see me by herself. I understood from the servant that she had asked for me."

"Yes, I did want to see you very much," said Effie.

"Of course, dear little thing," interrupted Mrs. Harvey; "but I'll stay while you talk to her. I am immensely interested in you. Miss Staunton. I can never forget, as long as I live, what you and yours have done for us."

"Please don't talk of it now," said Effie. "I mean—I know how kindly you feel, and indeed I am not ungrateful, but I cannot bear to talk it over, and I want very badly, please, to say something to the Squire."

"Come with me to my study, Miss Staunton," said the Squire.

He opened the door, and Effie followed him.

"Be sure you make her stay, Walter, when your business is over," called Mrs. Harvey after him. "I'll send for Freda to my boudoir. Miss Staunton must stay to lunch. It is delightful to see her again, and it is so sweet of her to come to see us."

The thin, high voice kept calling these words out a little louder and a little louder as Effie followed the Squire down one long corridor after another, until at last they entered his special 92
study.

He shut the door at once, and offered her a chair.

"If I can do anything for you, you have but to command me," he said.

"I see you are in great trouble," he continued. "Pray take your own time. I have nothing whatever to do—I can listen to you as long as ever you like."

Poor Effie found great difficulty in using her voice. For one dreadful moment words seemed to fail her altogether. Then she gave a swift thought to her mother, to George, and her resolve was taken.

"I want to make a very queer request of you, Mr. Harvey," she said. "It may not be possible for you to grant it. For my father's sake, will you promise that you will never tell anyone what I am now asking you, if you don't find it convenient to grant it to me?"

"I'll keep your secret, of course," said the Squire. "But permit me to say one thing before you begin to tell it to me: there's not the slightest fear of my not granting it. There is nothing that you can possibly ask of me, that, under the circumstances, I should think it right to refuse. Now, pray proceed."

"I want you," said Effie—she gulped down a great lump in her throat, and proceeded in a sort of desperation—"I want you to lend me 250 pounds. I'll pay you interest—I think five per cent. is fair interest—I'll pay you interest on the money, and return it to you by installments."

There was not the least doubt that Effie's request startled the Squire. The amount of the money required was nothing to him, for he was a very rich man; but the girl's manner, her evident distress, the look of shame and misery on her face, surprised him. He guessed that she was 93
borrowing the money for another, but for whom?

"I can see you are in trouble," he said in his kindest tone. "Why don't you confide in me? As to the money, make your mind easy, you shall have it; but girls like you don't as a rule borrow a large sum of money of this kind. Do you want it for yourself?"

"No."

"You won't tell me who it is for?"

"I cannot, Mr. Harvey. Please don't ask me."

"I won't ask you anything that distresses you. As you are talking of money, you will forgive me for saying that I am told that your mother is left badly off."

"No; that's a mistake," said Effie. "She has money. My father left her very well off for a man in his position. He insured his life for a thousand pounds, and my mother had a little fortune of her own, which brings in about sixty pounds a year."

"And you think your mother well off with that?" said the Squire in a tone of almost amused pity.

"Yes, for a woman in her position," said Effie in almost a proud tone. "Forgive me," she said; "I know that, after the request I have just made, you would be justified in asking me any questions, but I would rather not say any more about my mother. If you'll lend me the money—if indeed you will be so good, so noble—when can I have it?"

"When do you want it?"

"I must have it before six weeks are up, but the sooner the better."

"You shall have it in a week. Come here this day week and I'll give you a check for the amount."'

"A check!" said Effie; "but I would have to pass that through mother's bank—and—and she might know." 94

"Are you really asking for this money without your mother's knowledge, Miss Staunton?"

"Yes; my mother is not to know. Mr. Harvey, the object of our lives is to keep all anxiety from our mother—she must never know."

"Forgive me," said the Squire, after a pause. "I know a great deal about business, and you very little. Would it not be best to open an account in your own name? I am told that you propose soon to go to London. I would introduce you to my bankers there, who would be very glad to open an account with you; and if at any time you should have need of assistance, Miss Staunton, you would give me the privilege of helping you. Remember, but for me and mine you would not now be fatherless. You must see that you have a claim on me. Allow me to fulfill that claim in the only possible way in my power."

"You are good, you are more than good," said Effie, rising. "But this is all I really need. I'll pay you the interest on the money every half year."

"Oh, that doesn't matter. I earnestly wish you would take it as a gift."

"Thank you, but that is impossible."

Effie stood up; she had nothing further to say.

"May I take you to my wife's room now?" said, the Squire. "I know she is waiting to see you, she is longing to be friends with you. Her recovery has been wonderful; and as to little Freda, she is almost herself again. You would like to see Freda, would you not?"

"Yes," said Effie, "but not to-day—I must hurry back to my mother. I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Harvey. Will you please tell your—your wife that I cannot stay to-day?—my mother wants me. 95
Thank you—thank you."

The Squire himself showed Effie out. He stood for a moment by his open hall door, watched her as she walked slowly down the avenue.

"That is a plucky little thing," he said to himself. "Now, what in the world does she want that money for? Not for herself, I'll be bound. I do hope she has got no disreputable relations hanging onto her. Well, at least it is my bounden duty to help her, but I wish she would confide in me. She is a pretty girl, too, and has a look of the doctor about her eyes."

"Where is Miss Staunton?" asked Mrs. Harvey, coming forward.

"Vanishing round that corner, my love," returned the Squire. "The fact is, the poor little thing is completely upset, and cannot face anyone."

"But her business, Walter—what did she want?"

"Ah, that's the secret—she made me swear not to tell anyone. It is my opinion, Elfreda, that the child has got into trouble. We must do what we can for her."

"I wish she would come here and be Freda's governess," said Mrs. Harvey.

The Squire looked at his wife.

"That's a good thought," he remarked; "and we might give her a big salary—she is so innocent, she would not really know anything about it. We might give her two hundred a year, and then she could help her mother; but I doubt whether she would leave her mother—she seems simply bound up in her."

"It is our duty to help her," said Mrs. Harvey, "whatever happens. If she won't come to us, we must think of some other way."

"Yes we must," said the Squire.

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CHAPTER XIII.

In less than six weeks the Stauntons were settled in London. George had taken lodgings for them in a cheap part of Bayswater. The rooms were high up in a dismal sort of house. There were a sitting room and three small bedrooms. George occupied one—Effie and the girls another—Mrs. Staunton, the baby, and little Phil the third. It seemed to Effie as if they had always lived in this uninteresting house, looking out on that narrow dismal street. They knew nobody. Their lives were very dull. Mrs. Staunton occupied herself over George, morning, noon, and night. She mended his clothes with scrupulous care; she washed his shirts herself, and took immense pride in bringing the fronts up to a wonderful polish. There was not a young man in the City who went to his daily work with such snowy collars as George, such neat cuffs, such a look of general finish. This work delighted Mrs. Staunton—it brought smiles to her eyes and a look of satisfaction to her face.

Effie had got the money from Mr. Harvey, and had handed it without a word to George.

He took it; his face flushed all over—tears filled his eyes.

He said, "God bless you, Effie; you are the bravest, best sister a man ever had"; and then he went out of the room and out of the house.

"He never asked me where I got it," thought poor Effie; "and now there's the interest to pay, and how can it possibly be taken out of our hundred a year? Mother must never, never know; but how is that interest to be paid?" 97

The Stauntons had been settled about a fortnight in their new home, when Dorothy came to pay them a visit.

She was very busy in her hospital life. She came in with her accustomed eager, purposeful walk. She sat down on the nearest chair, and began to talk cheerfully to the children and sympathetically to Mrs. Staunton.

As soon as she had an opportunity, however, she drew Effie aside.

"Now, my dear," she said, looking straight into Effie's brown eyes, "when are you coming to us?"

"Oh, if I could come," exclaimed Effie, "I should indeed be happy, but I don't see any chance of it."

"I do. You are not really wanted here; Agnes is growing a big girl. Your mother is devoted to your brother George; provided he comes home every evening, she scarcely gives a thought to anyone else. You can be spared, Effie, and it will be good for you. You do not look a bit the same girl. You have lost your 'go' somehow. You are very young. It is wrong to have a look like that when one is only twenty. You ought to come to the hospital, and there is a vacancy now for a probationer, if you can take it."

"If I dare to," said Effie, "but it does not seem right."

"Yes, I believe it is right. I know the matron of St. Joseph's Hospital so well that I think I can arrange with her that you should spend a part of every Sunday at home—at least, while you are training Agnes. The fact is, Effie, you are a born nurse, and it is a sin to lose you to the profession."

"I should like to come beyond anything," said Effie. "It is the very highest wish of my heart. The last night that I ever saw my dear father he spoke to me on this subject. He used to hate lady-nurses, but you won him over, Dorothy, and he said, if the time came, I could go with his blessing." 98

"Then surely that settles the matter," exclaimed Dorothy. "I'll speak to Mrs. Staunton before I leave to-day."

"Oh, no; don't! Mother seems quite happy and comfortable. I would not for the world do anything to upset or distress her."

"If it upsets and distresses her, you must give it up, that's all," said Dorothy, "but it is worth

sounding her on the subject. Don't say a word, Effie, I'll speak to your mother about it."

Effie looked puzzled and anxious.

"I would give anything to go," she murmured to herself. "It is torture to live on here, thinking of nothing but how to make a hundred pounds a year pay everything that is expected of it. Then I should be one off the family purse, for all my expenses would be paid by the hospital. Yes, surely it must be right. At any rate, I'll allow Dorothy to speak."

When tea was over, George, who had come in, and was as usual devoting himself to his mother, tried to coax her to come out with him a little.

"No, not to-night," said Dorothy suddenly. "I have something very special to say to Mrs. Staunton —perhaps you would stay and listen too, George?"

George did not mind being called by his Christian name by Dorothy. She was regarded by the Stauntons as part and parcel of the family.

"I'll do anything to oblige you," he said, giving the handsome nurse a look of genuine admiration. "Come, mother, if we are not to go out, we can at least sit near each other." 99

He drew up a chair close to his mother as he spoke, and put one of his arms round her neck. She leaned her head on his shoulder, and sat there in perfect content.

After a time one of his strong hands closed over hers. She had never, even in the doctor's time, felt more warmly and happily protected.

"Yes, Dorothy, what have you to say?" she remarked. "George and I are all attention."

"George and you!" laughed Dorothy. "I never saw such a devoted pair. Why, you are just like a pair of lovers."

"Well, we are lovers, aren't we, mother?" said the son.

"Yes, my boy," she replied. "No love was ever stronger than that which binds us together."

"I love to hear you say that," remarked Dorothy; "but now I want to talk on quite another matter. I am very anxious about Effie."

"Effie!" said Mrs. Staunton, just glancing at her daughter. "What about her? She seems quite well. Are you well, Effie?"

"Yes, mother, I am perfectly well," replied Effie.

"Oh, it is not that," said Dorothy, a touch of scorn coming into her voice. "Effie may be well in body, but she is just starved in soul."

"Starved!" said Mrs. Staunton, with a start "What do you mean, Dorothy?"

"Oh, never mind her, please, mother," said Effie in distress. "I am all right, really."

"No, she is not," continued Dorothy. "She is not right in the way I should like to see her right. The fact is, she wants a change."

"Poor child!" said Mrs. Staunton. "We are not rich enough to think of changes."

"The sort of change she wants will not cost you any money. The fact is, I want her to become 100
what Heaven has intended her to be, a thoroughly trained hospital nurse. There is a vacancy now for a probationer at St. Joseph's, and I can get her admitted at once. May she come? That's the main point to consider."

Mrs. Staunton looked at Effie. Effie looked back at her mother.

It seemed to Effie at that moment as if she would have given anything for her mother to say, "No, I cannot spare her." On the contrary, Mrs. Staunton said in a calm voice:

"I leave the choice entirely to Effie herself. If she thinks she can be spared, she may go. The fact is, Effie, my love, your—your dear father spoke to me on this subject the very night he was taken ill. He seemed to wish it then; that is, if you cared for it yourself. If you are still of the same way of thinking, I for one should not think it right to make the slightest opposition."

"But how are you to do without her?" asked George in some dismay.

"Oh, I can manage—I am not the helpless old woman you seem to consider me, George. I really feel better and stronger every day. The more I do for you, the less of an invalid I seem to be. Effie has been quite tiresome lately, trying to manage the money, and taking all care off my hands, but I am quite capable of seeing to matters myself; and then Agnes is growing a big girl, she can go out to buy what I shall order."

Effie looked very pale. She sat perfectly still for a moment. Then she stood up.

"Very well, mother, I'll go," she said in a subdued voice. "When can you be ready for me, Dorothy?" she continued. 101

"In a week's time," said Dorothy. "There are certain preliminaries to be gone through, but I will

send you a paper of our rules. You must fill up a form—in short, you must do exactly what you are instructed to do on the paper. You will probably be admitted before this day week."

Dorothy said a few more words, and then took her leave. Effie accompanied her out on the landing.

"I think you make a mistake in letting Effie go, mother," said George, when he was alone with his mother.

"Not at all, my son. The fact is, fond as I am of my dear Effie, she takes almost too much control lately of our money affairs—I shall be glad to get them into my own hands. There are very many comforts which I could give you, darling, which are simply put out of my power by Effie's determination to keep the family purse."

George said nothing. He stooped to kiss his mother's cheek.

He had not looked at matters from that point of view before. He allowed his mother fifty pounds a year, which was half his present income, and it suddenly occurred to him that he was making a very generous allowance, and that he should have a full share of the benefit.

"What I have been thinking is this," said Mrs. Staunton. "Out of the fifty pounds a year which you, dear boy, give us, we ought to provide a certain portion of your wardrobe. You really want new shirts. I suggested to Effie a week ago that I should like her to buy some fine lawn, as I wanted to make them for you, and she said at once that we could not afford it. But never mind, dearest; when mother is put into her own position again, you shall have the best shirts of any young man in the City." 102

Now, George was really satisfied with his present shirts, but if his mother chose to make him better ones he did not care to oppose her. He hoped that he would be asked out a little in the evenings during the coming winter, and he wondered if his mother could possibly squeeze an evening suit for him out of the allowance he gave her. He did not express this thought, however, at the present moment, and as Effie re-entered the room the two changed the conversation.

George went out for a little, and Effie took up some needlework, sitting where the lamp in the center of the table fell full upon her bright brown hair.

"I wonder, Effie," said Mrs. Staunton in a tone of almost discontent, "that you did not speak to me before now on this subject. I cannot bear to think that a child of mine does not give me her full confidence. You know I am the last person in the world to keep you drudging and toiling at home when you yourself long for a wider field of usefulness."

"Yes, mother, I know that," said Effie in a grave voice "The fact is," she continued, "I did not think it would be possible for you to spare me; but if you can, and you think it right for me to go, I shall of course be delighted, for I have long had my heart in this work."

"You are like all other modern girls," said Mrs. Staunton in that provokingly inconsistent way which characterized her; "you are not satisfied in the home nest. Well, well, I have got my boy, and I must not complain."

"Oh, mother, dear mother, you have got us all." Effie rose from her chair, went over and knelt by her mother's side.

"I would give anything in the world," she said, looking full at Mrs. Staunton, "for you to say that you are going to miss me awfully." 103

The sight of her pretty face softened the mother's heart.

"Of course I shall miss you, my darling," she said, "You always were the best of girls; but I don't wish to stand in your way. I know you will be happy where your heart is, and your father wished it. That, in my opinion, settles the matter."

"Well, I have a week," said Effie more cheerfully, standing up as she spoke. "I must do all in my power to instruct Agnes. I must teach her the little economies which I have been trying to practice."

"No, you need not do that, Effie. When you go to the hospital I intend to resume full control of the family purse."

Effie hesitated, and looked anxiously at her mother as she said this.

"I wish it, my love, so there's no use in discussing the matter," continued Mrs. Staunton. "I know exactly what we have got to spend—£150 a year. It is very little, indeed, but I rather fancy I am as good a manager as my child. I have at least a wider experience to guide me. Out of that income dear George provides a third. It seems to me, Effie, that we should give him rather more comforts than he has had lately for this generous allowance."

"Oh, mother! George really wants for nothing."

"I cannot agree with you. I should wish him to have beer at supper every night."

"I do not think it can be managed. There is not a penny to spare."

"Well, my dear, we will see. It is also only just that a proportion of his money should be devoted

to providing him with suitable underclothing."

"Oh, mother, mother, have you thought of the thousand and one things which are required for the children and yourself? Surely George can manage to buy his own clothes out of the fifty pounds which he reserves for his personal expenses."

"That's so like a girl," exclaimed Mrs. Staunton, clasping her hands. "She knows about as little of a young man's life as she does of his Greek and Latin. Well, my love, we will propose no changes while you are at home. You must go to the hospital with a light heart, taking your mother's blessing with you."

"A light heart, indeed!" thought poor Effie when she reached her room that night. "A light heart, with mother spoiling George as hard as ever she can! I wonder how the others are to fare when George is to be treated like a prince in every way, and I wonder how that interest is to be met. Oh, dear! oh, dear! but it shall be paid somehow. Well, I suppose I am doing right. Mother would not have been content with this state of things much longer, that's more than evident, and then my dear father wished it. Yes, I'll take up my new life—I trust it will bring a blessing with it—but oh, mother, how anxious you make me!"

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CHAPTER XIV.

In a week's time Effie found herself an inmate in the great hospital which, for present purposes, we will call by the name of St. Joseph's. It was situated in the east of London. Dorothy had been trained here, and was now superintendent of one of the wards. 105

Effie was to go up for a month's trial. At the end of that time she would be paid at the rate of twelve pounds the first year, and twenty pounds the second. Her training would take two years. A certain amount of her uniform would be also provided, and everything found for her with the exception of washing.

She did not soon forget the evening of her arrival. She had said good-by to her mother, had kissed the children, had given Agnes all final directions, and at last found herself in the cab which was to take her to St. Joseph's. It drew up presently outside one of the large entrance doors.

A lady, who was called the Home Sister, received Effie very kindly, and offered her a friendly cup of tea. The hour of her arrival was about four in the afternoon. She was then taken up to her own room, and instructed how to put her cap on, and how to wear her new uniform in the neatest and most compact way. Her dress was a pretty lilac check, and she wore a cap with a frill round it, and long tails at the back. Her apron bib was high to the collar in front, and fastened with straps which crossed at the back. Nothing could be neater and more serviceable than the dress.

The kind Sister, having seen that Effie was all right, gave her a friendly smile, and then led her along several dim passages, up and down many stairs, until she finally found herself in a long, light ward, where from thirty to forty women were lying in bed. The Home Sister introduced Effie to the Sister of the ward, who went by the name of Sister Kate. Sister Kate nodded to her, said a word or two in a very busy voice, and then Effie found herself practically on the threshold of her new life. The Sister who had been kind to her during tea, who had shown her to her room, and instructed her how to dress, had vanished. Sister Kate looked far too busy and anxious to be worried by questions; and Effie, capable and active as she always was, found herself, for the first time in her life, with nothing to do, and overcome by strange nervousness. She was too much embarrassed to be of real use. Her face was burning with blushes. Sister Kate was tired with her long day's work. There was a great deal to be done to put the ward straight for the night, and she really had no time to devote to the probationer. The women lying in their beds seemed to have eyes and ears for no one but Effie. Between sixty and seventy eyes turned on her wherever she moved, whatever she looked at, whatever she did. Some of the eyes in the pale and harassed faces looked kindly and interested, some of them merely amused, some of them cross and discontented. Effie knew that these women would be querulous and even rude under the touch of strange and untutored hands. 106

At last the night nurses arrived, the bell rang, and Sister Kate came forward to show the new probationer the way to the dining hall.

Here were several long tables, where the nurses, all dressed exactly alike, sat down to supper. Effie took her place, and quickly discovered that the others were far too tired and hungry to pay any attention to her. She felt too excited to eat, and sat watching the faces of those around her.

Supper was immediately followed by prayers, and then came bed. Effie's first evening as a probationer was over.

She did not know whether to cry or to laugh as she laid her head on her pillow. The reality was so different from anything her fancy had painted. The practical character of the work, the absence 107

of all sentiment, the real illness, the real burden of humanity, seemed to press down upon her.

She had thought, a week ago, when Dorothy proposed that she should come to St. Joseph's, of the delight of being in the same hospital with her friend, but she now discovered that she was unlikely to see much of Dorothy even though she lived under the same roof. Dorothy was Sister of a ward, and that ward was not the one where Effie was to serve her probationership. She had the comfort of a very small room to herself, and was just closing her eyes in sleep, when the handle of the room door was softly turned, and Dorothy, looking beautiful in her Sister's dress of soft navy serge, came in.

"So here you are, you poor little thing," said Dorothy, bending over Effie and kissing her. "I have just come in for one minute to say God bless you. You have come, the ice is broken. You have a fine career before you. Don't be discouraged by what you saw to-night."

"Oh, I am so lonely!" said Effie, with a quiver in her voice. "I was sure when I came here that I should be in the ward with you, Dorothy."

"No, my dear, that was not possible," replied Dorothy. "Of course I should have been very glad if it could have been arranged, but I had no voice in the matter. As it cannot be, dearest, try to believe that this is just the best thing that could have happened to you, to be flung at once, as it were, on your own feet. You will thus gain experience without having a crutch like me to lean upon. I know the first night is very bad, but you will soon learn your duties and become intensely interested in the life. You are with Sister Kate, are you not?" 108

"Yes," said Effie. "She scarcely spoke to me—I never felt so awkward in my life, and I know that I was never half so clumsy."

"Of course," said Dorothy, with a smile. "Don't I know the feeling well? It all passes over, my love, and far more quickly than you have the least idea of. Remember you have got the power—those little hands are capable, that head holds a steady and sensible brain. Why, Effie, you have gone through far worse times than this without flinching. Surely, surely you are not going to break down now?"

"Oh, I won't, I won't!" said Effie, with a sob; "but I felt lonely, very lonely, and it was so very kind of you to come to see me."

"Of course I have come to see you—I am only too delighted to do anything in my power for you. I would have rushed down to share your cup of tea on your arrival, but a bad case was just being brought into the ward, and I could not leave. Now, I must go to bed myself, or I shan't be fit for work to-morrow. Good-night, Effie. I have arranged that you are to spend every second Sunday at home."

"Oh, how good you are—how thankful I am!" exclaimed Effie.

Dorothy was leaving the room, when she turned back.

"I forgot to tell you that you are very lucky to be under Sister Kate," she said. "There is not a nurse in the whole hospital who trains as she does, and her probationers always get the best certificates at the end of the two years of training."

"She looks so severe and hard," said Effie.

"She is a little severe, and some people may call her hard, but she has a tender heart under all that strict, somewhat cold manner, and then she is so just. My dear, when you know more of 109 hospital life you will be thankful that you are with a just and patient Sister. Sister Kate is both. She will soon recognize you, Effie, for what you are. Now good-night, my love."

Dorothy went away, and soon afterward Effie fell asleep.

The next morning she was awakened by a bell, at what seemed to her something like the middle of the night. She had to dress herself quickly, and then go into the ward and begin her duties.

She found, somewhat to her surprise, that she had to begin her nurse's life as a sort of maid-of-all-work; she had to scrub floors, to clean grates, to polish handles—it seemed to her that she never had a moment to herself from morning till night. Her feet felt very sore, her back ached. Once or twice she felt so dreadfully fagged that she wondered if she could keep up. But through it all, growing greater and greater as the days went on, there came a sense of full satisfaction, of something accomplished, something done, of the feeling that she was being trained thoroughly and efficiently, so that at the end of her time of probation she might be able to say, "There's one thing which I can do *well*."

When the first Sunday came she was glad to hurry home. She went back brimful of news, and looked forward to the quiet time in her mother's little parlor with great delight.

Mrs. Staunton was glad to see her. The children were all dressed in their black frocks, and looked neat and comfortable. George was in the room. It seemed to Effie as if she did not recognize his coat—she wondered if it could possibly be a new one. 110

She arrived at home a little before the midday dinner, and presently the landlady came in to lay the cloth. This used to be Agnes' occupation. Effie did not say anything while the woman was in the room, but when she went out she remarked on this change.

"Oh, it's all right," said Mrs. Staunton. "I pay half a crown a week extra, and the landlady now waits on us. It is much more comfortable, I assure you, Effie, and worth the extra bit of money."

Effie colored; she gave Agnes a reproachful glance, but did not say anything.

Agnes turned her back with a little sniff.

"Why, Effie," she said suddenly, "How coarse your hands have got! What in the world have you been doing?"

Effie laughed.

"Polishing, cleaning, and scrubbing," she said. "In short, doing very much what Mrs. Robinson's little maid of all-work does down in the kitchen here."

"Oh, dear, dear!" exclaimed Agnes; "if those are a nurse's duties, you won't catch me going in for that sort of profession."

"It's awfully interesting," said Effie. "I have, of course to begin at the bottom, but I like it very much."

While she was speaking, there came a knock at the door. George went to open it, and a young man came in. George brought him up to introduce him to his mother.

"This is my great friend, Fred Lawson, mother," he said. "Effie, let me introduce you to Lawson—Lawson, this is my sister Effie."

Effie bowed. She felt the color rushing all over her face. Lawson was the man whom George had wronged in some mysterious way. Lawson was the man for whom that dreadful £250 was required.

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CHAPTER XV.

They all sat down to dinner, which Effie further noticed was a great deal more luxurious than when she held the purse strings. There was a nice little joint of roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, and one or two vegetables. This course was followed by an apple tart and custard; and then the board was graced with some russet apples and walnuts and a bottle of port wine.

Effie felt such a sense of consternation that she could scarcely eat this pleasant food. But Mrs. Staunton, George, Lawson, and the younger children enjoyed the dinner thoroughly. When the beef was taken away, there was very little left on the joint; and as to the fruit tart, it vanished almost as soon as it was cut. Effie could not help wondering to herself how £150 a year could meet this lavish style of living.

Lawson talked very pleasantly during dinner. After glancing toward Effie several times, he suddenly remarked:

"I cannot help feeling that I know your face," said he. "Where and when have we met before?"

"I saw you last night," said Effie, with a smile.

"You saw me last night! What in the world do you mean?"

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"Yes," said Effie. "Don't you remember No. 17, in B Ward? You came in to stop that terrible hemorrhage from the lungs from which she was suffering."

"B Ward at St. Joseph's?" exclaimed Lawson.

"Oh, my dear Effie, now I beg of you not to allude to horrible things at dinner," exclaimed Mrs. Staunton.

"No, mother; I am sorry I mentioned it." Effie colored up.

"What have you to do with St. Joseph's?" said Lawson.

"I am a probationer in B Ward, under Sister Kate."

"Never! how extraordinary! Now I remember, you are the girl who held the basin. So you really are a probationer! A fresh one! Have you been there long?"

"Just a week."

"Well, let me congratulate you on one thing, you held that basin without shaking it; I expect you have got plenty of nerve. Of course, I knew I must have seen you before; I never forget a face."

Lawson presently went out with George for a walk. Agnes dressed the children and took them with her to the Sunday school, and Effie was alone with her mother.

"Come and sit by me, darling," said Mrs. Staunton. "It is so very nice to have you home again; I miss you very much, my dear daughter. But I am really getting better. George wants me to consult Dr. Davidson at St. Joseph's Hospital. He thinks that your dear father may have been mistaken about my heart, and that it may get quite strong and well again."

"If you feel better, I don't think I would consult anyone," said Effie, trembling a little.

"Well, dear, well, there's no hurry about it. But I always notice, Effie, and it distresses me not a little that any suggestion of George's you are likely to pooh-pooh; now, surely that is scarcely fair 113
to him, dear fellow? You must notice, my love, how cheerful and pleasant we have made this room. George insisted on my getting new curtains—only white muslin, you careful child. They cost really very little, but they do make such a difference in the effect. Then he has also determined that I shall live better, plenty of meat and a little port wine. It is a most *false* economy, my dear, not to attend to one's diet. There's nothing else keeps up the health."

"Yes, mother, I know all that; but good, expensive, nourishing things have to be paid for."

"Now, Effie, don't let me hear you begin that dismal plaint. Do you really mean to insinuate that I, your mother, would go into debt for things?"

"Oh, no, dear mother! how could I think that?"

"You imply it, my love, by your manner."

Effie sighed.

It was hopeless to argue or remonstrate. She felt as if the little home, so different from the beloved one in Whittington, was in reality constructed over a volcano—any day it might collapse. The weight of sorrow which pressed against her heart as she thought of this, of her father, of the old life, quite crushed the brave spirit for the moment. Where was George's honor? How dared he lead his mother into these extravagances, when he knew, too, when he knew——

Effie clasped her hands tightly together. She restrained her emotions with an effort, and turned the conversation to indifferent matters.

Mrs. Staunton was certainly in better spirits. There was a little color in her cheeks, and some of the old sweet brightness in her eves.

When George had been absent about an hour, she grew restless and *distraite*; she left her seat by 114
Effie's side, and, going to the window, looked up and down the street.

"I hope the rain isn't coming on," she said; "he forgot to take an overcoat."

"Who, mother?"

"George."

"But really, mother dear, he isn't sugar; he won't melt."

"There you are again, Effie, making little of your brother. It so happens that he has a nice new coat on to-day, and I don't want it to get shabby at once."

"A new coat! How did he buy it?"

"I lent him a little money for the purpose; he didn't go into debt, so you need not think it."

"I wonder you were able to spare the money."

"Oh, yes; some of my dividends fell due, and were paid on Monday. I lent George three pounds; I think he has got a wonderful coat for the money. He will pay me back as soon as he gets his own salary. Ah! and there he is, dear fellow, and that nice-looking young man, Mr. Lawson. Effie, now do ring the bell; Mrs. Robinson ought to have tea on the table."

With a great effort Effie kept from making remarks which she knew would only irritate her mother.

She said to herself, "There's no help for things to-day. The person to talk to is George; he ought not to allow mother to rush through her money in this way. I wonder if I am doing wrong in giving up my home-life to the hospital; but no, I don't think I am. Mother would have insisted on managing the money in any case."

Mrs. Robinson appeared with the tea-tray. There was a little jug of cream and a shilling Madeira cake; there was also a great plate of thick bread and butter for the children. The tea-tray was 115
placed on the table, and George and Lawson took their tea standing. Effie helped them. Lawson looked at her once or twice, and thought what a wonderfully nice face she had, how true her eyes were, how good she seemed altogether.

"She's altogether of different metal from her brother," thought the young man. "I wish with all my heart he were like her; but although there is something lovable about him, and we are chums, of course, yet I never feel quite sure of myself when in his company."

The meal which followed was quite merry. Phil and Marjory had gone up to the top of their class in Sunday school; Agnes was promoted to teach a class of very little children; Katie was going in for the Junior Cambridge Examination, and eagerly consulted Effie about some books which she

was obliged to procure. Effie promised to give her the money out of her first month's salary.

"But that will be some time off," she said, "for I am only going through my month's trial now, so you must be patient, Katie."

"I'll lend you the money," said George, stroking his sister's hair.

He looked so affectionate and handsome, and so manly and good-humored, that it was impossible not to feel pleased with him. Mrs. Staunton's eyes quite beamed as she glanced at her eldest son.

"Now, mother, I am going to sit near you," he said. He drew his chair close to his mother, and began to talk to her in a low tone.

Effie and Lawson exchanged a few words over hospital work. He would make an enthusiastic doctor some day! he loved the profession and thought it the noblest in the world. He reminded Effie a little of her father.

The quick hours flew all too fast. Effie's time was up. She went back to the hospital with a curious sense of uneasiness, but equally also of rest and refreshment. It was nice to think that George had such a good friend as Fred Lawson.

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CHAPTER XVI.

Two months passed away without any special incident. Effie's month of trial being over, she was now established at St. Joseph's as a regular probationer. Her salary of twelve pounds a year began from the day her second month commenced. All those qualities which Dorothy was quite sure that Effie possessed were coming abundantly to the fore. She had tact, she had courage, she had nerve. She was also absolutely unselfish. Self was not in the foreground with her; the work which she had to do, the work which she meant to carry through in the best possible manner, in the bravest spirit, with the most conscientious sense of duty, ever filled her mental horizon. Sister Kate began to trust Effie. She began to smile at her now and then, and to give her not quite so much floor-scrubbing and grate-polishing, and a little more work to do for the patients themselves.

The patients liked to call Effie to smooth their sheets, to turn their pillows, to give them their drinks. One or two of them, when they had an odd moment, began to make little confidences to her. She learned their histories almost at a glance. She also studied their fancies; she began to 117
find out the exact way Mrs. Robinson liked her gruel flavored, and how Mrs. Guiers liked her pillows arranged. Effie made no fuss over the patients,—fuss and favoritism were strongly against the rules,—but notwithstanding, she was a favorite herself.

More than one pair of tired eyes looked at her with longing and refreshment as she passed, and more than one pair of wearied lips smiled when she came near.

Two months went by in this fashion—very, very quickly, as such busy months must. It was found impossible to allow Effie to go home every Sunday, but she went, as a rule, every second one.

Things seemed to be going fairly straight at home. The extravagance she had noticed on her first Sunday was not repeated to the same extent. Mrs. Staunton seemed decidedly better, and Effie gave herself up with a thankful heart to her work.

It was now the middle of winter, close upon Christmas-time. The weather outside was bitterly cold, although, in the ward, Effie scarcely felt this. She wore her neat lilac print dress just the same in winter as in summer.

One day, about a week before Christmas, when a thick yellow fog was shutting out all the view from the high ward windows, Effie was doing something for No. 47, a poor, tired-looking woman of the name of Martin, when Lawson, the young medical student, came suddenly into the ward. He had been sent by the house physician to take notes on a certain case. This case happened to be the very one which Effie was attending. When he saw Effie a peculiar expression passed over his face. It was against the strictest of all rules for the medical students ever to address a word to 118
the probationers; even the necessary duties required of them had to be conveyed through a Sister or a ward nurse. Effie was helping poor No. 47 to drink a little milk and soda water. As she put the glass back in its place, Lawson came close to her. He said abruptly:

"I am very anxious to have a conversation with you about George."

She colored crimson when he addressed her.

"Yes," she said.

"Nurse!" exclaimed Sister Kate's voice at that moment, in a harsh, sharp tone, "go at once and make up the fire at the other end of the room."

Effie went off, trembling and disturbed.

The fact of Lawson having specially addressed her passed out of her mind immediately, but the mention of George's name filled her with fear.

It was the first time in her hospital life that she absolutely forgot the rules laid down for her conduct. Sister Kate, who had the eyes of a hawk, noticed when Lawson bent over to speak to the pretty little probationer. It was her duty to correct the faintest attempt at flirting on the part of the probationers and medical students. She felt shocked at Effie, who was fast becoming a favorite of hers, permitting such a thing for a moment, and, when next Effie had anything to do for her, quite resumed her icy manner toward her.

No. 47 required some special attention again that evening—she was feverish, and not going on well. She called Effie to her side in an eager voice.

"You might turn my pillow again for me, dear," she said. "You know how to hitch it right under the small of my back, better than any of those other nurses. There now, that's better. Stoop your head a bit, love. I believe if you go downstairs into the hall near the surgery, you are safe to see 119
that young doctor; he is sure to be in the dispensary about this time, and you might catch him when he is going out."

"Hush!" said Effie. "I know you mean kindly, but you ought not to talk like that."

"Oh, my love, I know, I know," said the woman, with a wink. "We was all young once—I am three-and-forty, and have never had a mate. I missed my chance when I was young. Don't you miss yours, nurse."

Effie turned pale with indignation; but then, seeing that the woman meant kindly, she tried to smile.

"I am very much obliged to you," she said, "but things aren't a bit the way you think." She then went off to perform her other duties.

Sister Kate spoke to her sharply.

"Nurse," she said, "I hope you remember the rule which forbids favoritism—I noticed that you stayed longer than was necessary with No. 47."

"She complained a good deal of her back, Sister, and I was arranging her pillows for her."

"Don't try to deceive me," said Sister Kate. "You know perfectly well that you did not spend all that time arranging a pillow. Now, go and help to bring up the teas."

Effie turned to her duties with a tingling sensation in her eyes.

It was the first time since her arrival at St. Joseph's that her work seemed almost impossible to her. Her heart quite ached with longing to know what Lawson had meant. What had he to tell her about George? As she thought, her fears grew greater and her memory of the hospital rules less 120
and less.

She determined at any risk to try and see Lawson that evening. It would be impossible for her to venture down into the central hall of the hospital, but she knew for certain that he would come into the ward again late that evening.

Sister Kate would be off duty at nine o'clock, and Sister Alice, the night superintendent, was not nearly so strict. Effie hovered about near the door; she knew she was disobeying rules, for she ought to have gone to bed soon after nine o'clock. No one noticed her, however. The night nurses were all busy taking up their different duties, and Sister Alice was talking to the house physician at the farther end of the ward.

Suddenly Effie, standing near one of the doors, saw Lawson coming upstairs; she ran to him without a moment's hesitation. "What have you to tell me about George?" she said.

He colored, and looked almost annoyed when she spoke to him.

"I cannot tell you here," he said in a hasty voice. "Are you going home next Sunday?"

"No; it's my Sunday in—unless I could get one of the other probationers to change with me."

"I wish you would manage to do that; I really want to see you very badly. If you'll go home on Sunday, I'll call in the course of the afternoon, and then I can walk back with you to the hospital. Now, go at once—you must not be seen talking to me."

Effie flew down the corridor to her own little room.

That night she could scarcely sleep; she felt oppressed with all kinds of forebodings. The idea of her having broken one of the rules, and, in fact, laid herself open to dismissal, never once entered 121
into her head.

She was still the faithful nurse—the earnest-minded, gentle, good girl, who would give up her whole life to the alleviation of the sufferings of others. The fact of Effie having a dual life, of having a nature which could not forget the old home ties, was not likely, however, to be recognized in the hospital.

The next morning at breakfast she noticed that one or two of the probationers giggled a little when they saw her. She sat down in her usual seat, and one of the girls nudged her elbow.

"Well," she said, "you're no better than the rest of us."

"What in the world do you mean?" said Effie, coloring scarlet.

"Oh, don't be so sly!" said the girl, with a poke which she intended to make playful. "He is a very good-looking young fellow, too; only, if you don't want to get into mischief, don't let Sister Kate see it."

"I know what you mean," said Effie in a steady voice; "but you are altogether mistaken. I scarcely know Mr. Lawson; he only spoke to me yesterday because he happened to be a great friend of my brother's."

"Oh, the usual thing," laughed the girl. "It's so very convenient to have brothers; is it not, Lucy?"

The girl addressed as Lucy grinned, and Effie felt very uncomfortable.

At dinner that day, it suddenly passed through her mind that she must, by hook or by crook, induce one of the probationers to change Sundays with her. Lucy was usually a good-natured girl. Her people did not live in town; as a rule she spent her Sundays out with her aunt-in-law. Effie 122
went up to her when she had a moment to spare.

"Lucy," she said, "I wish you would do something for me."

"To be sure I will, Effie," she replied—"anything in my power."

"I want to go home very badly next Sunday; do you think it would be possible for me to change with you?"

"Heigh-ho!" said Lucy, "You want to meet Mr. Lawson; I know your sly little ways."

"No, indeed, it is not true," began Effie; but then she stopped, for she knew it was true. She would meet him. "Oh, how little Lucy knows the burden that is pressing on me!" thought the poor girl.

Tears suddenly rose to her pretty brown eyes.

"I cannot explain things to you," she said; "I would if I could. You must believe in me and trust me. I have a great deal of anxiety. Oh, it has nothing to do with the hospital; it is about my home life. There is a great burden laid upon me. I want very much to go home on Sunday. Indeed, Mr. Lawson has little to do with the real burden, only I believe he can tell me something."

"I know you are a good girl," began Lucy, who became grave on the spot. "Of course you shall take my turn if Sister Kate will allow it."

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CHAPTER XVII.

Sister Kate made no objection, and Effie hurried home in a state of excitement which she could scarcely restrain. Mrs. Staunton did not expect her, and the poor girl felt her heart sink low in her breast when she saw that her unexpected arrival scarcely gave satisfaction. There was a nice white cloth on the table, and a large bunch of flowers in a pretty cut-glass jug stood in the center. An attempt at dessert again graced the board, and Effie noticed that a bottle of sherry and a bottle of port stood on the little sideboard.

She felt a sense of dismay.

"Even mother is beginning to keep things from me," she said to herself. "It is all George, of course! They did not expect me home to-day, so they are having a particularly good dinner. Is it possible that even mother would try to deceive me? Oh, dear, dear! how changed all our life is, now that father is no longer here!"

There had never been the faintest shadow of concealment about the honest doctor, and while with her husband Mrs. Staunton was the most straightforward woman imaginable; but, alas! her character was a weak one—she was now completely under George's influence, and George had learned to walk in those crooked paths which those who begin to do wrong are always tempted to follow.

He came in presently, looking particularly handsome and manly. He had on a nice new coat; and his beautifully got-up collar showed off his fresh young face to the best possible advantage. 124

Mrs. Staunton called him up at once for Effie to criticise.

"Doesn't he look well in a white silk tie?" she said. "I like white ties better than colored ones for him, and they are not so expensive either, for I can wash them myself."

"I wonder all that washing does not fag you, mother," said Effie.

Before Mrs. Staunton could reply, Mrs. Robinson appeared with the dinner, and the family sat down to an excellent meal.

Effie saw quite plainly that it would be useless for her to attempt to expostulate. Mrs. Staunton, after her first start of unconcealed dismay, was very affectionate to her daughter. She told Effie that she thought she looked a little pale, and wondered whether all that nursing was not too much for her.

"No, mother, I love the work," said Effie.

"But that is not the question, my love," said Mrs. Staunton, shaking her head. "The question is this: is it undermining your health?"

"Well, in any case I should have to earn my living," said Effie. "I could not possibly afford to do nothing at home. As well earn it as a nurse as in any other way, and I love nursing beyond anything else in the world."

"You always were an obstinate dear little girl, was she not, George? But, after all, Effie——" Here Mrs. Staunton paused and looked at her son. "I think I might tell Effie?" she said, giving him a bright nod.

"Oh, I don't suppose there is anything to make a fuss over," replied George. He colored as he spoke, and looked out of the window. He could easily hoodwink his mother, but it was difficult to meet Effie's clear eyes and not to feel sure that she was reading him through, and seeing him as he really was.

Agnes jumped up, saying it was full time to go to Sunday school; she carried off the children with her, and George, his mother, and Effie were alone.

"Sit down in your usual chair, George," said his mother. He did so, bringing up the port wine as he spoke, and pouring out a glass, which he insisted on his mother drinking. He tossed off one or two glasses himself, after which his eyes grew bright and steady, and a color came into his cheeks.

"Yes, tell Effie," he said.

"I think you might do so, George; I am so proud of you."

"No, mother. I like to hear you describing me; you make me feel such an awfully fine fellow."

George laughed as he spoke.

"Well, then, Effie," said his mother, "you will in future learn to appreciate our dear George as he deserves. The fact is this: he has just got a rise in his salary of a whole hundred a year. George is now earning two hundred a year; and he has arranged, dear fellow, to give me one hundred a year, in order that I may have those little comforts which he thinks I require."

"Is that really true?" said Effie, coloring. "Oh, what splendid news!" She looked eagerly at George as she spoke. She longed to jump up, throw her arms round his neck, and kiss him.

"Is this true?" she repeated. "Oh, I am so glad! We do want the money so badly."

George stooped to flick off a speck of dust which had settled on his immaculate shirt-cuff; his eyes would not meet Effie's.

"Of course it is true," he said in a bravado sort of voice. "You don't suppose I would tell mother a lie, do you?"

"Oh, Effie! how could you doubt him?" said Mrs. Staunton, almost crying.

"No, mother, I don't doubt him," Effie replied. She walked to the window. Her momentary pleasure was over; she knew, just as well as if George had told her, that the whole thing was a fabrication. If he had more money, he was not getting it in his situation. His look, his attitude, joined to the few words Lawson had said to her, made Effie quite certain on that point. Burning words half rose to her lips, but she checked them. She did not doubt George. She read the truth in his eyes; what fell from his lips was nothing.

Mrs. Staunton kept on talking. "We shall have real comforts at home now," she said. "I am, as my boy says, a wonderful manager."

"The best in all the world," interrupted George; "there never was such a mother."

Mrs. Staunton's eyes quite shone with pleasure.

"What I was thinking was this, Effie," she continued, "that if you really are not strong enough to go on with your work, we can now afford to keep you at home."

"Of course we can," said George.

He had scarcely said these words, half turning his back on Effie as he spoke, when the room door was opened by Mrs. Robinson, and Lawson was announced.

When he saw his friend, George suddenly turned pale. He recovered himself in a moment,

however, and went forward to meet him, speaking in a loud and bragging voice.

"Is that you, Lawson? Welcome, old chap. We did not expect you to-day, but we are right glad to see you, of course."

"You will stay and have tea with us, won't you, Mr. Lawson?" said Mrs. Staunton in her sweet voice. 127

"Yes, certainly," said Lawson.

He had given Effie his hand when he came into the room, but he scarcely looked at her.

He sat down near Mrs. Staunton, and began to talk to her in his usual bright way. She yielded after a moment to his charm. Lawson was a young fellow with a great amount of general information; he had also abundance of tact, and he knew how to suit his words to Mrs. Staunton's requirements.

When George saw his friend talking to his mother, he went up to Effie and stood near her.

"Come to this end of the room," he said abruptly.

Effie followed him.

"I am likely to make quite a pile of money," he said, speaking in a low voice and glancing toward his mother. "I know you think badly of me,—it's awfully hard on a fellow when his sister thinks badly of him,—but, nevertheless, I am likely to be in a real good way of business soon. And what I want to say now is this, Effie. I am anxious to pay back that £250 which you borrowed for me."

"I wish you would," said Effie.

"Well, I dare say I can give you fifty pounds toward it this week. Squire Harvey won't require the whole of the money back at once."

"Oh, he doesn't require it at all," said Effie. "It is I who require it. It is my honor and the honor of my dead father that demands it. It ought to be paid back, and you ought to do it."

"Don't speak so loudly—you do get so excited about things," said George.

Effie lowered her voice. Lawson, as he talked to Mrs. Staunton, glanced sharply at her.

Tea was brought in, and Effie had to take her place at the tea-tray. George's words had made her feel more uncomfortable than ever. It was absolute nonsense to suppose that he could be earning money at this rate. 128

After tea, Effie had to go back to the hospital.

"Good-by mother," she said. "I won't see you now for a fortnight."

Mrs. Staunton got up and put her feeble old arms round her daughter's neck. "Good-by, my darling," she said. "Take care of yourself; don't overwork yourself. Remember it is unnecessary. You have got a home, and a dear, noble, faithful brother to provide for you."

"Yes, Effie, you are heartily welcome to all that I can give you," said George in a lofty tone.

Effie pressed her lips to her mother's, kept her arms for one moment round her neck, and then turned away with tears in her eyes.

"Good-by, George," she said, holding out her hand.

"I'll see you back to the hospital," said George.

"Don't do that. It is a beautiful evening; mother would like you to take a walk with her."

"And I'd have the greatest pleasure in seeing Miss Effie home, if she would let me," said Lawson.

George hesitated for a moment. For some reason, which was more than evident, he did not want Effie to be alone with his friend.

He looked at his mother. She did not catch his eye, or she would have read his wish by instinct. The evening was really very fine, and she liked to walk round the square leaning on George's arm. When well enough, too, she liked him to take her to church.

"I think I'd enjoy a little walk with you, George," she said. "The evening is quite like spring—Wonderful weather for so near Christmas; the air is as mild and soft as milk; and as Mr. Lawson has so kindly promised to see Effie back, perhaps you'd come?" 129

"All right," said George. "By-by, Effie; you'll hear from me, perhaps, in the course of the week."

Effie went downstairs, followed by Lawson. As soon as ever they got out, he looked her full in the face.

"You must be greatly amazed," he said, "at my presuming to bother you about your family affairs."

"Oh, no!" she replied. "I think you are kind, but your words have made me very anxious."

"Then," said Lawson, "you see for yourself that things are not all right."

"I have known that for some time."

"George is a great friend of mine," continued Lawson. "We saw a good deal of each other when he first came to town—he was a right jolly sort of fellow then; it was only about six months ago that, all of a sudden, he seemed to change. I suppose he took up with some bad companions, but I really can't say for certain."

"But what about him now?" said Effie, in a voice almost irritable with anxiety. "Have you anything fresh to tell me?"

"You heard him, probably, say to your mother that he had a rise of salary?"

"Yes."

"The fact is," continued Lawson, "I know that not to be true."

Effie also in her heart of hearts knew it not to be true, but she could not bear to hear a stranger abuse her brother.

"How can you be sure?" she said, somewhat inconsistently.

"How can I be sure?" he retorted. "This is not a matter of sentiment, I happen to know. George is working with a relative, it is true, but Mr. Gering is one of the hardest men in the City. Everyone who understands him knows the system on which he works, and a relative has no more chance with him than another. George will have to take his rise step by step at something like the rate of ten pounds a year. Perhaps he has told your mother that he has had quite a large rise." 130

"He said a hundred a year; he said he was now receiving two hundred a year."

"What is to be done?" said Lawson, "Something ought to be done to stop it. Your mother will certainly live beyond her means, and then you will all get into no end of a mess. Do forgive me for taking an interest; the fact is, George was a great friend of mine once."

"Oh, please don't give him up!" said Effie. "If good men turn against him, what chance has he, poor fellow?"

"I won't, if you wish me to look after him," said Lawson, giving her a quick glance.

At this moment two nurses from St. Joseph's Hospital, who were crossing the street, saw Effie. They noticed her earnest face, the sparkle in her eyes; they also observed the glance which the handsome young medical student gave her. The women nudged one another, smiled, and went on.

Effie never saw them.

"Let us walk a little faster," said Lawson, who was not so unobservant. He felt vexed that the women should see him with Effie, but now that he was with her he must at least unburden his mind.

"George told me," said Effie,—"perhaps it is not wrong to repeat it to you,—that he is likely to make a great deal of money." 131

"Did he? Did he tell you that—did he happen to say how much?"

"Well, he spoke as if money were very easily earned," said Effie. "He said something about getting fifty pounds this week."

"I must tell you the truth," said Lawson. "There's no help for it. Your brother will go straight to the bad if he is not rescued, and that at once."

"What do you mean? Oh, how you frighten me!"

Effie's face was as white as a sheet.

"I am ever so sorry," said Lawson; "but what is the use of keeping back the truth? George has had no rise of salary—indeed, if he is not careful, he is mother has gone far beyond our means. She hasn't [Transcriber's note: text of this paragraph in original is as shown and ends abruptly at this point.]

"Then how does he get his money?"

"He gets it by gambling."

"Gambling! Oh, no! oh, no!" said Effie.

She had the horror of that vice which a pure-minded, well-brought-up girl must ever have.

"It is true," said Lawson; "it gives me the greatest pain to tell you anything so bad of your brother, but there's no help for it."

"But how do you know?" interrupted Effie.

"I know by the best of evidence. I have had my suspicions for some time, but I happened to see him coming out of one of those places last week—yes, I must tell you, I saw him coming out of a

gambling den. I think he goes night after night. At present he is winning more than he loses, but that is always the game for drawing fellows on."

"It must be stopped," said Effie. She felt quite faint and sick. If her mother knew this it would kill her on the spot.

They had nearly reached the hospital, and Effie turned and faced Lawson. 132

"You don't half know what this means to me," she said. "George is not exactly like an ordinary brother. When my father died quite suddenly of diphtheria some months ago, he left my mother in George's care. If George goes to the bad now, she will certainly die; you must have noticed for yourself how she is wrapped up in him."

"Yes; no one could fail to notice it. I think her love for him beautiful; and he loves her, too. Poor fellow! that is his great redeeming point."

"Oh, I don't call it real love," said Effie, almost with passion—"to deceive her as he does—to do wrong, and that sort of wrong. Oh, I think my heart will break!"

Tears choked her voice, she had the greatest possible difficulty in keeping them back. Lawson took out his watch.

"You are not late," he said. "Let us take a turn round this square."

They had entered an old-fashioned square where there were very few people. They walked round and round the dismal central garden for some time. Lawson talked, and Effie listened. After a time they decided that George's perilous downward career must be stopped at any cost. Lawson said he would make it his business to see George the following evening, to tell him quite frankly what he knew, and, in short, to compel him, if necessary, to do what was right.

"He'll be obstinate," said Effie—"I know he'll be hard to deal with. Oh, what shall we do?—what shall we do? I am quite certain that already my mother has gone far beyond our means. She hasn't been half careful enough since I left her. If George stops getting money in this way she'll wonder and question. I doubt very much whether you can have the least influence over him. What 133 is to be done?"

"Don't be so down-hearted," said Lawson. "He requires a man to tackle him—a man who really knows the temptations young fellows meet. If you'll allow me to say so, Miss Staunton, I don't think the case quite hopeless; anyhow, you may be quite sure I'll do my best for him."

"Thank you," said poor Effie; "you are more than good, and I do trust you." She hurried back to the hospital; but, to her dismay, when she got there, found that she was a quarter of an hour late.

Absolute punctuality in returning from any outdoor pleasure is expected from all nurses. She hurried upstairs, hoping that she might gain her room, put on her cap and apron, and return to the ward before Sister Kate had time to miss her. This might have been the case—for Sister Kate had been very much occupied with some anxious cases during the afternoon—had not one of the nurses, who had a spite against Effie for being prettier and cleverer than herself, drawn Sister Kate's attention, to the fact that the young probationer was behind her time. This nurse had seen Effie walking with Lawson. Immediately her spirit of jealousy and envy was up in arms; she did not for a moment consider what injury she might do the poor girl by her false and unkind words.

"Nurse Staunton is late," she said. "I don't know how I am possibly to get the ward in order for the night unless I have some help."

"I must speak to her," said Sister Kate, glancing at the clock, and looking a little annoyed. "This wasn't her Sunday to go out, either. I cannot let the rules be broken in this way. Let me know as soon as ever she comes in." 134

"I suppose there's some excuse to be made for her," said the nurse, speaking in a knowing way. "She's a very careful, good sort of girl, but there *are* times when the best of us forget ourselves."

The woman knew that Sister Kate would interpret her words as she wished her to do. She went off in a hurry to perform her duties, and when Effie entered the ward, Sister Kate received her with marked coldness.

"You are very late, nurse," she said. "Where have you been?"

"I have been at home with my mother."

"Was your mother ill? Is that your excuse for being behind your time?"

"No; mother was well—better than she has been for some time."

"Then why are you late?"

"The fact is, I was walking with a friend, and forgot to notice the hour."

"That's no excuse. You have certainly behaved very carelessly, and have put the other nurses out by not being in time to take your duties. Who was the friend with whom you were walking?"

Sister Kate had no right to ask this question, but she felt much provoked at the moment, and the color which rushed all over Effie's face excited her curiosity.

"Perhaps you'll think I did wrong," said Effie, looking up at her almost defiantly. "The friend was Mr. Lawson. He knows my brother very well; he was talking to me about him. I cannot refuse to speak to him when I see him out of doors, can I?"

"Don't be pert, nurse! You know it is one of the strictest rules of the hospital that none of the nurses are to speak to the medical students." 135

"I know; and I don't wish to speak to him in the hospital."

"See you don't, or you'll be dismissed at once; in fact, the less you know of any of the medical students, the better for you. I am very sorry that this young man knows your brother. I should not have had anything to do with you, had I been aware of this fact."

"How absurd and unjust!" murmured Effie under her breath. She turned away—she felt absolutely cross.

Sister Kate called her back.

"Now, bustle about," she said. "The supper-trays want to be taken away; the women are perfectly tired of waiting to be settled for the night."

Effie moved mechanically about her duties. Her heart felt sick. She did not think she could remain much longer under Sister Kate's care. "If she treats me like this," thought the proud girl, "I cannot endure it. Mr. Lawson is nothing to me—he is only my brother's friend. He is good, and wants to help us in an hour of great perplexity. What shall I do? I feel tied and fettered in every way."

She laid her head on her pillow only to burst into tears. She cried herself to sleep. All the world seemed black to her.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

Effie saw very little of Dorothy Fraser, but on the following day, to her great surprise and pleasure, as she was leaving the dining-hall, Dorothy came up and spoke to her.

"You have a minute to spare," she said; "just come out on this balcony and talk to me."

Effie obeyed her.

"What do you want with me, Dorothy?" she asked.

"I wish to know why you look so pale and worried—you seem to have displeased Sister Kate, too."

Effie very nearly burst into tears, but she restrained herself.

"I'll tell you what it is," she said. "It is the most unjust thing!"

She then mentioned in as few words as possible the circumstance of Lawson having spoken to her—of her great anxiety about George—and of her having walked back with the young medical student from her home on the previous evening.

Dorothy looked very grave while Effie was speaking.

"It is unfortunate," she said. "This is just the sort of thing that injures a girl at the commencement of her hospital life."

"But it is so ridiculous and unjust," said Effie. "What in the world can Mr. Lawson be to me?"

"Oh, nothing, of course, my dear," replied Dorothy. "But still the rules cannot be too strict on this point. You know I am not a prude, but all girls are not like you, Effie; and, in short, Sister Kate is 137 in the right. Someone must have seen you walking back with Mr. Lawson, and must have told her, or hinted, at least, at the state of the case. Nothing else would have induced her to question you."

"She had no right to speak to me about acquaintances that I meet out of the hospital."

"Strictly speaking, she has no right; that's why I say she must have got a hint."

"Oh, well, never mind her," said Effie. "I won't speak to Mr. Lawson again, unless I meet him out of doors, where I can, and shall, whatever Sister Kate may say."

"Effie, you must be careful."

"I don't want to think of myself at all. Can't you see how miserable I am about my mother and about George?"

"Yes; it is a most wretched business. I am more sorry for you than I can say."

"Oh, I wish something could be done," said Effie. "I feel tired and fettered here—I feel almost wild. I cannot devote myself to my necessary duties."

"Poor child," said Dorothy in her caressing voice. "Let me think: I must help you in some way. Suppose I go to-day to see your mother? I had a chance of having the whole afternoon to myself, but, as I had nowhere in particular to go, was determining not to avail myself of it, but now I can be of use to you."

"Oh, Dorothy! would you really go to see mother? It will be of the greatest possible use. You have such tact—you can say things that no one else would venture to say; and then if only you could see George!"

"I'll take the thing up somehow," said Dorothy; "you shan't be dragged and worried to death, you dear, brave little girl. Give me a kiss, Effie, and go back to your work. Between Mr. Lawson and me, we will pull you through this trouble, see if we don't!" 138

"Do you know Mr. Lawson, Dorothy?"

"Know him! Of course I do. He is one of the very nicest fellows here—as good as gold and as steady as a rock, and with such a beautiful enthusiasm for his profession—he'll make a splendid doctor by and by. Yes, Effie, don't mistake me: it is not the man I object to, it is the fact that he is a medical student, and that you are a nurse. So many bad things have been said about nurses and medical students that all nurses worthy of the name have to make up their minds to show the world that they can and will nurse without even the thought of flirtation coming into their head."

"You're right, of course," said Effie, with burning cheeks. "But it's a shame, it's horrible! How can anyone think I wish to flirt?"

She turned away—she was obliged to go back to her duties; but her heart felt much lighter after her conversation with Dorothy.

That afternoon Sister Kate, watched Effie as she would, could find no fault with her. She was attentive, tactful, kind, and considerate; a little bit of her old pleasant cheerfulness had also returned to her—her face looked less careworn.

The fact is, she was leaning on Dorothy, and felt the comfort of Dorothy's strong support.

The patients were only too glad for Effie to do things for them; and No. 47, who was very weak and low, smiled whenever the girl approached her bedside.

"Hold my hand, love, whenever you have a minute to spare," said the poor creature. "I feel low like, awfully low; I am going down—down, and it supports me to hold your hand; you're a good girl, anyone can see that." 139

"I try to be," said Effie, tears springing to her eyes.

"Ah, it's well to be good," continued the woman. "When we come to lie as I'm lying now, we think a sight of goodness."

"I hope you'll soon be better," said Effie.

"Never, my love, never again. I'm going out—that's what is happening to me; it's a lonesome thing to die, but I don't feel so lonesome when I'm holding your hand."

Effie came to the poor creature as often as she could. Once again the fascination of the life she so dearly loved drew her out of herself, and enabled her to forget the heavy home cares.

In her bedroom that night Sister Dorothy paid her a visit.

"Well, Effie," she said, "I've news for you. Mr. Lawson saw George last night. He spoke to him quite frankly, and said that, if he did not immediately give over this awful gambling, he'd go and see his cousin, Mr. Gering."

"And what did George say?" asked Effie.

"Oh, he promised as faithfully as possible that he'd give it up. Mr. Lawson seemed quite pleased with him, and said he didn't think he'd have been so penitent and so easily influenced as he has been."

"But will he give it up?" questioned Effie.

"He promised to. Of course he is anxious at not being able to earn more money, for the foolish fellow encouraged your mother to be extravagant, and now there are several debts which must be met somehow. What's the matter with you, Effie? Why do you start?"

"How can I help it? Debts would kill mother. Perhaps I ought to tell you, Dorothy—you have been so good to me, and I trust you so much that I don't think it can be wrong to tell you any trouble which concerns me." 140

"No, of course it isn't. Speak out what is in your mind, Effie."

"Well, George was in trouble that time he came to see father—that time when father was dying. He owed Mr. Lawson—- I can't tell you how, I can't tell you why—£250. He said that if the money were not paid back within six weeks, that he, George—oh, Dorothy, how can I say it?—that he'd

have to go to—to *prison*! He said he must have the money; I felt, too, that he must have the money; for our mother's sake. So I went to see Squire Harvey, and he—he lent it to me."

Dorothy sat down on the side of the bed. Effie's story made her feel very grave. She paused for a moment, puzzled what to say.

"He lent me the money," continued Effie, looking straight at her friend with her bright eyes. "I know he never wants it back again, but he must have it back."

"Oh, yes! he must have it back," exclaimed Dorothy.

"Well, he lent it to me," continued Effie, with a sigh; "and I thought, of course, that George would be all right after that, and I arranged that the Squire should have his interest regularly. I thought my own salary would nearly cover that."

"It can't be done," interrupted Dorothy. "Your salary barely pays for your washing and your few out-of-pocket expenses. It's absolutely impossible that you can live here without a penny; the little you earn must go to yourself."

"Then there's nothing for it," said Effie; "I must go where I can earn more. I hate the thought beyond all words, but I must—I must do it!"

"You don't mean to tell me that you would give up your life as a nurse?"

"Do you think for a moment, Dorothy, that I'd give it up willingly? It makes me sick to think of relinquishing what has been my dream ever since I was a little girl; but I see plainly that I must do something to earn money to help mother; and then, if George does keep straight, perhaps we may all be happy some day."

Tears choked Effie's voice, her eyes grew dim.

"What do you think of doing, dear?" said Dorothy in a gentle voice.

"I'll go to the Harveys and ask them to take me as a governess for Freda. I fancy, somehow, that they might be induced to give me a good salary—something like fifty or sixty pounds a year, and I can teach a child like Freda very well indeed, for her father saw that I was well educated. There's nothing else for it, I can see that; but it breaks my heart all the same."

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CHAPTER XIX.

Dorothy talked a little longer to Effie. When at last she left her, the poor girl felt soothed and strengthened. She dropped off to sleep, to dream of the old days when she was living in the pretty little cottage in Whittington, and when she longed so earnestly to go out into the wide world. Effie woke long before it was time to get up. She thought of her dream, and sighed heavily 142
to herself. She was in the wide world now with a vengeance. Did it look as fair, as rose-colored, as fascinating, as it used to look in her early dreams? No; the reality was bitter enough. She would have given a great deal at that heavy moment of her life to turn back the page and be a child at home again.

The nurses' bell rang, and she got up quickly. Next week she was to take her turn at night-nursing. She was getting on well, and, notwithstanding the small cloud which now existed between her and Sister Kate, Sister Kate knew Effie's value. There are nurses and nurses. Many girls who go as probationers to the great hospitals are thoroughly unsuited to the life; their qualifications are not those essential to the good nurse; they are destitute of tact, of presence of mind, of that tenderness which can be firm as well as gentle. But Effie was an ideal nurse; her soft and gentle ways, her kind yet firm glance, the cleverness she showed, the tact she displayed, all proved to Sister Kate that the young probationer might one day be a valuable help to her. She was angry with Effie at present, but she was determined to leave no stone unturned to help the girl and train her thoroughly in her noble profession.

During that night Sister Kate had thought of Effie. She had noticed her pale face during the past day, the sadness in her eyes, the heaviness in her steps, and her heart smote her a little, a very little.

"I don't believe that girl could do anything mean or underhanded," she reflected. "Of course it is tiresome that she should know any of the medical students, but I believe I can trust her word that she will never speak to this young man except out of the hospital."

Accordingly, Sister Kate met Effie the next morning with much of her old pleasantness. Effie's 143
sad heart bounded again in her breast when Sister Kate spoke kindly to her, and she went about her duties with the determination not to leave even the smallest matter undone. Thoroughly but carefully she went through all the minutiæ of those everlasting cleanings and brushings.

At last her morning's work was over, and now came the crucial moment when she must speak to

Sister Kate. The doctors had gone their rounds, the patients were all settled for the morning. Effie came up to Sister Kate in one of the corridors.

"Can you spare me a few moments of your time?" she asked.

The Sister looked up at the tall clock in the passage.

"Do you want to see me about anything important?" she asked.

"Yes, it is something important."

"Well, come into my private room; I can give you five minutes."

Sister Kate sat down—Effie stood before her.

"I'll try and tell you what I want as briefly as possible," she said. "I wish to know if I can be spared to go out this afternoon?"

"It is not your afternoon out. What do you mean?"

"I wouldn't ask if it wasn't necessary. The fact is, there's great trouble at home, and I—I must see my mother, and perhaps I may have to make another visit."

Sister Kate frowned.

"I don't wish not to sympathize with you, of course," she said, after a pause, "but the fact is, nurses should detach themselves as much as possible from home-life. The nurse who really gives herself up to her splendid calling has to try to forget that she has a home. She has to remember 144
that her first duties consist in taking care of her patients and in learning her profession."

"Then I can't be a nurse," said Effie, the color rushing into her face.

Sister Kate looked at her and shook her head.

"I am very sorry," she said, after a pause. "The fact is, I had great hopes of you—you have many of the qualifications which go to make a splendid nurse; I won't recount them here. I had, as I said, great hopes of you, but your words now make me fear that, excellent as those qualifications are, they are overbalanced."

"By what?" asked Effie.

"By sentimentality—by nervous overworry about matters which you should leave in other hands."

"I have no other hands to leave them in; the fact is, home duties must always be first with me. I've got a mother and several young brothers and sisters. I am the eldest daughter. I cannot let my mother suffer, even to indulge what has been for a long time the great dream of my life. It is very probable that I shall have to give up being a nurse."

"How can you? You are engaged here for three years."

"I must beg of the Governors of the hospital to let me off; the case is a special one—the trouble under which I am suffering is most unexpected. I fear, I greatly fear, that I shall be obliged to leave the hospital for a time."

"I am truly sorry to hear that," said Sister Kate. "Does your friend Miss Fraser know of this?"

"Yes."

"I hope it may not be necessary. As I said, you have the making of a good nurse in you. You want 145
to go away for a few hours? Well, I'll try and manage it. Perhaps when you go home and see your people, you will find that it is unnecessary for you to sacrifice yourself to this extent. Anyhow you can have from two till five to-day. Now go and much in train for the afternoon as you can. You can stay out from two till five. I hope you'll have good news for me when you return."

"I hope I shall," said Effie; but her heart felt low. She had little expectation of being able to continue the life which she longed to perfect herself in. At two o'clock she went out, and did not take many minutes in reaching her mother's door.

Mrs. Staunton looked surprised to see her.

"What is the matter. Effie?" she said. "How white and worn you look! Why have you come back to-day?"

"I wanted to see you, mother, so I got an afternoon off duty. Sister Kate was kind—I begged of her to let me come. I have a great longing to see you."

"Well, my dear, I'm all right. The fact is, I get better and better."

Mrs. Staunton was seated by the window. She was making a pinafore for little Marjory—her needle flew in and out of the stuff. She was trimming the pinafore with narrow lace. Effie took it up and sat down by her mother.

"Your hands tremble, mother; are you really well?"

"Oh, yes, my love; yes! You look at me as if you thought there was something the matter. Have you—Effie, your looks frighten me."

"Don't let them frighten you, dear mother. You know the greatest longing of my heart is to help and serve you. If there is anything worrying you, you'll tell me, won't you?" 146

"I will," said Mrs. Staunton. She paused and looked at her daughter. "There's nothing *exactly* worrying me," she said, after a pause, "but still I feel a little bit anxious."

"You'll tell me, won't you?"

"You won't scold me, Effie?"

"As if I could, mother darling!"

"Well, perhaps I did a rash thing—poor dear George!—You know how devoted I am to him, Effie?"

"Oh, yes, mother darling, anyone can see that."

"Well, the fact is, I—I yielded to his entreaties. Perhaps I ought not to tell you, Effie—perhaps it will displease him."

"Yes, do tell me," said Effie. "There ought not to be any secrets in one's family. I ought to know—I will know. You are worried about something, and I will know what your burden is. What is it, mother?"

"I'll tell you in a few words. There's nothing in it, after all. Shortly after you left us, George persuaded me to put my money into the City Bank in his name. He said it seemed such folly to have two accounts for such very small sums."

"You did it?" said Effie, her face turning white.

"Yes, yes, I knew you would reproach me. I won't be reproached—I won't!"

"I will not say a word, dearest, dearest mother. Take my hand—your hand does shake so. Now tell me all about it."

"Oh, it's nothing, my love, really, only——"

"Yes, mother—only?"

"Only this morning I asked George to fill in a check for me before he went to town. He did so. It 147
was for five pounds. He seemed vexed at my requiring so much, but I said I couldn't do with less, for there was the landlady to pay, and the butcher has been so troublesome with his bills. I couldn't do with less than five pounds, and George drew a check for me for that amount. I sent Aggie with it straight to the bank, and——"

Mrs. Staunton's face became very pale, her hand shook more violently than ever.

"Yes, mother?" said Effie.

"They sent it back. Effie, with 'No *effects*' written across the back. I am sure there must be a mistake, but they told Aggie that George had overdrawn his account, and that they couldn't cash this check—there were no effects, that was it."

"No effects!" said Effie, her face scarlet. "But hadn't you some of your money still left in the bank?"

"Yes, I had over fifty pounds. I put the money into the bank in George's name over a week ago. It was to last us for some time. Oh, Effie, don't look at me with those reproachful eyes! I feel faint."

Effie got up quickly; she poured some sal-volatile into a wineglass, and, filling it up with water, brought it to her mother to drink.

Mrs. Staunton was soon better. The passing weakness went off quickly.

"What is to be done?" she said, raising her eyes to her daughter. "Oh, I am so glad you don't scold me, Effie."

"Of course I don't, mother darling. You must have money, you can't get on without it."

"That's just what I say. I am sure I am as saving as woman could be, but the expenses are so heavy."

"Yes, of course." 148

"I'm expecting George in every minute," said Mrs. Staunton. "He has very likely put the money back into the bank now. He is doing such a splendid business that perhaps he drew the fifty pounds—meaning to return it at once. He has such a capital head for making money—really, I never knew such a boy. I dare say he has put it back *doubled*."

"Oh, mother, don't you know better?—how can he do that? But now let us talk of something else. Here's Agnes, that's right. Agnes, will you get some tea for mother? She's quite weak and upset. I'm going out. I must hurry, for I've to be back at the hospital at five. I'm going out, but I'll come to see you mother, before I return to the hospital. Get the tea, Agnes; don't be long about it."

Agnes put a little kettle on the fire.

"Do you know about—about the check?" she asked Effie in a whisper.

"Oh, yes; don't make a fuss over it—it will be all right."

"Mrs. Robinson says she must be paid—she is owed four weeks' rent, and she won't let it go on any longer."

"I'll see her when I come back," said Effie. "Now, do take care of mother. I won't be away a minute longer than I can help."

"Won't you have a cup of tea first, Effie?"

"No, no; I've no time."

Effie ran downstairs, and went out into the street. She felt nerved and braced now. The moment of indecision was past—the moment for definite action had arrived. There was no question with regard to her duty. It lay plain and straight before her.

She happened to know that the Harveys were in town. They were staying in Eaton Place. She took an omnibus, which presently brought her into the neighborhood of Victoria; a few minutes afterward she rang the bell at their hall door. 149

A man-servant, whom she did not know, opened it.

"Is Mrs. Harvey at home?" asked Effie.

"I believe so," he replied, "but I'm not sure if she can see anyone."

"Perhaps she will see me if you give her my name," said Effie in a gentle voice. "Say Miss Effie Staunton, please, and that I am anxious to see her on pressing business."

The man withdrew, inviting Effie as he did so into the hall.

"He takes me for a servant," she said to herself. "Well, what matter? That truly is only a pinprick."

In a minute or two he returned, with a changed expression on his face.

"Follow me upstairs, please, miss," he said. "My mistress will see you."

Effie followed him up some low stairs—her feet sank into the rich carpets. The contrast between this luxurious house and the severity of the hospital sickened her.

"I shall choke if I live here," she said to herself. But then she crushed all thought of self.

The men led her up two or three short flights of stairs. At last he knocked at a door, before which a rich curtain hung. A voice said "Come in," and Effie found herself in Mrs. Harvey's presence. She was seated in a deep armchair; her maid stood before her, holding out different rich brocades and silks which had just been sent round for her to see.

"That will do, Carey," she said, when she saw Effie. "You can take all those things away. Tell Madam Miller that I have decided on this blue silk crépon, and this rose-colored silk. I'll call round to be fitted to-morrow morning. Now, Miss Staunton, I'm sorry to have kept you waiting. How do you do? I am so glad to see you." 150

Mrs. Harvey was not so impulsively glad as she had been the last time she saw Effie. The doctor's death—the death he had died for her—seemed removed into the background; her existence was absorbed in pleasure, in gayety and excitement. She had an affectionate, kindly nature, however, and one glance into Effie's sad eyes softened her toward the poor girl.

"Well, what can I do for you?" she said. "How are you? Why, you are a nurse—you are in nurse's dress—how capital! What a splendid idea!"

"Yes, I am a probationer at St. Joseph's," said Effie.

"Oh my dear child, that's splendid for you, of course; but I trust you have brought no infection in your clothes."

"No," said Effie, with the faintest of smiles. "I have nothing to do with any of the infectious wards. I am quite safe. I want to speak to you."

"I shall be very glad to listen to you, my dear. You know, of course, that the Squire and I take the deepest interest in you and in your family. By the way, how is your dear mother, and how are all those pretty girls and boys getting on?"

Effie could not remember that Mrs. Harvey had ever seen her mother—why, therefore, should she speak of her as "dear"? and as to the boys and girls, they were not specially remarkable for their good looks, and if they were, Mrs. Harvey knew nothing about it. She answered these conventional inquiries in a quiet voice.

"I hope you'll forgive me," she said, at the first possible pause, "but I am in a very great hurry. I have promised to be back again at St. Joseph's at five o'clock, and it's nearly four now. May I tell you what I really came about?" 151

"Oh, yes, of course, of course!"

"Do you remember, before I came to London, the very kind offer you and the Squire made me?"

"Of course," said Mrs. Harvey, "if you mean our wish that you should become governess to little Freda. But Freda goes to a kindergarten now. Carey takes her around every morning, and Rhoda goes to fetch her at dinner time. The life seems to suit her very well. Of course we did wish for you very much, but as you could not come—oh, no doubt you have chosen wisely."

Mrs. Harvey yawned; she stretched out her hand and rang the bell. The servant appeared almost immediately.

"Tea for two," she said, "and be quick, Andrews."

"I can't wait for tea," said Effie, rising. "I am very much obliged. I only came to say that circumstances would make me inclined to accept your offer now, but as you don't want a governess there's nothing more to be said."

"Oh, it's so sweetly good of you, Miss Staunton, and had matters been different we should have been pleased. Well, good-by, if you must go. Where did you say your mother lived?"

"A long way from here."

"But do give me her address. I should be so pleased to drive round and see her some day. Perhaps she would go for a drive with me. What a good idea! Yes, I'll come. Where did you say you lived?"

Effie had not said anything. 152

Mrs. Harvey held out her limp, long hand. "Good-by, Miss Staunton. You know I take a great interest in you," she exclaimed.

CHAPTER XX.

Just at this moment the door was opened, and the Squire came in. He was of different stuff from his wife. When he saw Effie, his face beamed with pleasure, and he held out a big, hearty hand.

"Miss Staunton!" he exclaimed. "Why, this is a pleasure! Oh, you must not run away; you must sit down and tell me all about yourself—I've been longing to hear about you. How is your brother in the City, and your mother? I do hope she is a little better. And all those other lads and lasses? Sit down, my clear child, I insist on it—I have lots of things to say to you."

Mrs. Harvey, who was standing near the mantelpiece, came gently forward when the Squire began to speak. She looked at Effie with new interest. Her face was long and pale, she had no color in her lips, her light hair was very fashionably dressed. She wore a dress of the latest mode, and her thin fingers were loaded with rings, which flashed and shone whenever she moved her hand.

Effie hated those flashing rings—she turned her head so that she need not see them.

Mrs. Harvey began to talk in a high falsetto voice to her husband.

"Do you know, my dear," she exclaimed, "that Miss Staunton has just been so kind? She came here to offer her services for Freda; but you know dear Freda is getting on so capitally at the 153
kindergarten, that—— Why, what in the world is the matter, Walter?"

"Matter!" exclaimed the Squire in his hearty voice. "Why, that we won't be such fools as to reject Miss Staunton's offer. I was told only a few minutes ago that that kindergarten is simply full of whooping-cough and measles—children sickening with them and going home almost every day. I was going to say that Freda must be moved."

"Oh, I should think so, indeed," said Mrs. Harvey. "Whooping-cough and measles! how terrible! and I never had whooping-cough—why, I shouldn't be able to go out for the whole season. I do hope and trust the dear child hasn't contracted the infection. Dear Miss Staunton, of course you'll come. It is exactly what we'd like best. How soon can you come?—to-morrow?—to-night?"

"Neither to-morrow nor to-night," said Effie. "But if you really wish for me, and if we agree as regards terms, the day after to-morrow."

"What do you mean by saying if we agree as to terms?" asked Mrs. Harvey.

"I want a big salary," said Effie, looking up bravely at the two, who were watching her with half-amused, half-anxious expression. "I want to come to you, and to leave the work which I love best, because I hope you may be induced to give me an exceptional salary. I want the money because my mother and my—my young brothers and sisters are almost—at least they will be, if I don't get it, almost starving."

Effie spoke in jerks. She had the greatest difficulty in keeping back her emotion. It was dreadful to have to plead with these rich people—these people who knew nothing whatever of her sore need—to whom money was so plentiful as to have lost its freshness, its desirability, its charm. It 154
was awful to look into their faces—to see the blank, non-comprehending stare which came into Mrs. Harvey's pretty blue eyes, and to notice the puzzled expression on the Squire's face.

"You can't mean that?" he exclaimed. "You can't mean there's any chance of that?"

"There is a chance of it, but not if I come here. I know how kind you are, how noble you have been to me. I'll come to Freda. I'll do everything for her; I'll teach her, and I'll play with her, and

I'll love her, and I'll nurse her if she is ill, but oh, do please be generous and give me as big a salary as you can."

"What do you expect—what do you think fair?" asked the Squire.

"I thought—I know it seems a great deal, but I thought you might be willing to give me sixty pounds a year."

"Bless you, my dear child!" exclaimed the Squire; "if you'll accept it, we'll give you a hundred and fifty."

"No, I couldn't accept that," said Effie. "It is not fair."

"Why not? We couldn't get anyone else to exactly take your place for the money; and remember we have plenty of money."

"I'll take a hundred a year, because I am in sore distress," said Effie, after a brief pause; "and—and will you pay me monthly, and may I have my first month's salary in advance? I wouldn't ask it if they didn't want it *terribly* at home. Will you do this?"

"Yes, with pleasure," said the Squire. "I insist on your accepting ten pounds a month—that will be one hundred and twenty a year. Now, will you have a check, or shall I give you the money in gold and notes?" 155

"The gold will be the most acceptable," said Effie. "Oh, I feel so ashamed!" she added.

"Why should you? You give us an equivalent. Besides, it makes matters more tolerable. I cannot forget——"

"Oh, don't, Walter—don't allude to that awful time!"—cried Mrs. Harvey.

The Squire shut up his lips. He took a little bundle of gold out of one of his pockets and put ten sovereigns into Effie's hand.

"It is a bargain," he said. "I cannot tell you how relieved we are. You'll be with us the morning after next? Elfreda, my love, we must tell our little Freda what a pleasure is in store for her."

"Yes, I am more than delighted," exclaimed Mrs. Harvey. "This plan suits me in every way. You won't fail us, Miss Staunton? for, in case Freda by any chance has taken that awful whooping-cough, you can keep her in isolation from the very first."

"Oh, yes!" said Effie, smiling; "but I dare say she is all right."

She shook hands with her new employers and left the house.

The gold was in her pocket. She felt that she had sold herself and her mission in life for ten sovereigns. "It is the present need which makes the thing so desperate," she said under her breath. "If George has drawn all the money, they have absolutely nothing to live on; but more will come in, and there's this to go on with. We'll manage somehow now."

She returned to the lodgings, but before she went upstairs she had an interview with the landlady.

"What do you charge my mother for rent?" she asked. 156

"Well, Miss Staunton," exclaimed the woman, "with the dinners and one thing and another, I am obliged to make it a pound a week."

"That is a great deal too much," said Effie. "I don't suppose it is too much for your rooms, but it is more than we can afford just now. When we first came to you, you agreed to let us the rooms without attendance for fifteen shillings a week. We cannot by any possible management afford to pay more."

"But Mrs. Staunton wished for attendance, miss—she said it made all the difference; there was half a crown for attendance and half a crown extra for kitchen fire."

"But the kitchen fire was included in the fifteen shillings a week."

"Then there wasn't late dinner."

"Surely there is no late dinner now?" exclaimed Effie.

"Oh, yes, miss; every evening Mr. Staunton requires a nice little bit of dinner sent up when he comes home. You see, miss, it is quite impossible for me to have extra fires without charging for them."

"Certainly. Well, I don't think there will be any extra dinner in future. And now please tell me exactly how much is due to you."

"Four pounds, miss; but if I'm paid one, on account, I shan't mind waiting. I'd be really sorry to dislodge such a nice lady as your mother, Miss Staunton."

"Here is the money in full," said Effie. "Will you give me a receipt?"

"Oh, with pleasure, miss. Won't you sit down? I hope, Miss Staunton, nothing will induce your

good mother to move from here. I will do everything in my power to make her comfortable."

"You must understand," said Effie, "that in future she only pays fifteen shillings a week without extras. My sisters Agnes and Katie are quite old enough to do all the waiting which my mother requires. In fact they must do so, for we can't afford to pay a penny more."

"Am I to understand, miss, that there's no late dinner?"

"Certainly not."

"Very well; I am sure I'll do all in my power to oblige."

Effie left her, putting her receipt carefully in her pocket as she did so. She went upstairs and entered the little sitting-room where her mother was now pacing quickly and restlessly up and down. There was a deep flush on her cheeks, and a look of despair in her eyes.

"Oh, Effie, you've come!" she exclaimed, the moment she saw her daughter. "George has been in. There's something wrong, I know—I know there is. He came in just for a minute and he kissed me, and said he wasn't coming home to-night, and he—he looked *wild*. He stuffed a few things into a bag, and said I wasn't to expect him back to-night. I didn't dare ask him about the money. What—what can be the matter, Effie?"

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CHAPTER XXI.

Effie did all in her power to soothe her mother. It was past the hour for her return to St. Joseph's, but under the present circumstances she could not give this matter a thought. Mrs. Staunton was strung up to a terrible condition of nervousness. She walked faster and faster about the room; 158 she scarcely spoke aloud, but muttered words under her breath which no one could hear. At every footfall on the stairs she started. Sometimes she went to the door and flung it open—sometimes she went to the window and pressed her face against the glass. Darkness set in, and the lamps were lit in the street. Katie went to the window to pull down the blinds.

"No, don't touch them," said Mrs. Staunton fretfully—she still kept staring out into the street. Presently she called Effie to her.

"Doesn't that man turning the corner look something like George?" she exclaimed.

Effie looked eagerly.

"No, that's not George," she said.

"Agnes, you have better sight," called Mrs. Staunton to her next daughter; "come and watch with me—we are sure to see him soon. It can't be that he has gone away for the night—for the whole night. Isn't that him? Look at that man,—that one crossing the road—that one in the waterproof. Oh, how hard it is raining! If George is out much longer, he'll be drenched to the skin. Aggie, look; and you, Katie, can't you watch? Now, *that* man, isn't that George?"

"No, no, mother!" answered the poor children, in affright.

Mrs. Staunton kept on making exclamations. Again and again she cried out hopefully that surely George was coming now; but George himself never really appeared. Effie knew that she would get into hopeless disgrace at St. Joseph's. No matter! she could not leave her mother at such a moment. Each instant she became more anxious about her. She called Agnes aside, and told her that she had put a stop to the late dinner, and also to the extra attendance, but as probably some 159 dinner had been ordered for that evening, she had better go down and bring it up, as Mrs. Staunton must be forced to eat at any cost.

Agnes tripped out of the room, and presently returned with a couple of pork chops and some baked potatoes. She flung them down on the table, exclaiming that the tray was heavy. She looked cross, and evidently seemed to think that Effie was making a great fuss over nothing.

"Why can't George be away for a single night without everyone getting into such a state?" she murmured.

Effie took the tray from her and gave her a look of reproach. She laid the cloth herself, and made the table look as pretty as she could. She then went to her mother, drew her gently but firmly away from the window, and, making her sit down, tried to coax her to eat.

Mrs. Staunton looked at the chops with dazed eyes.

"Those were for George," she exclaimed. "What a shame to bring them up before he has come into the house! They'll be cold and sodden, and he hates his food sodden. You don't suppose I'm going to touch my boy's dinner? No, not I! Put the chops down in the fender, Aggie. When George comes in, I always ring the bell twice. How careless of Mrs. Robinson! Effie, my dear, I don't think we can stop with her if she treats us in this fashion. It's perfectly disgraceful to cook

George's food before he is ready for it."

Agnes began to explain that George was not coming home, but Effie silenced her with a look. She saw, to her horror, that her mother's mind was beginning to wander. She was really expecting 160
George—who had not the faintest idea of coming back. Poor Effie saw there was nothing for it but to humor her mother. She put the food inside the fender, and then, going to a davenport in a corner of the room, wrote a hasty letter to Dorothy Fraser.

"We're in great trouble," she wrote. "I know you can't come. I know it is absolutely impossible for you to come, but neither can I go back to St. Joseph's this evening. Please tell Sister Kate, make any excuse for me you like—say anything that comes into your head. My career as a nurse is ended."

A big tear dropped from Effie's eyes as she wrote these last words. She folded up the letter and gave it to Agnes.

"Agnes," she said, "you must take this at once to St. Joseph's Hospital."

"Oh, I don't know how to get there," said Agnes, "and I was never out so late before in the evening."

"I am sorry to have to send you—stay, you had better take Kate with you. It would be better for the two of you to be together. Put on your hats and your warm jackets; don't be longer away than you can help—you have just to give this note to the hall porter and come straight back. You must take the red omnibus that goes along Oxford Street, and——"

Effie added a few more practical directions. Agnes' eyes sparkled at the thought of a little variety in her dull life. Katie ran willingly into her room to fetch her own and her sister's hats and jacket's. They were dressed in a very short time. Effie heard them running downstairs, and listened to the slam of the hall door. She had now set the irrevocable seal to her own act. She had deliberately turned her back on the life that she loved. She stood for a moment with a dizzy 161
feeling in her head; then, with a little prayer which she sadly needed, to help her, she put aside all regret, and turned with a brave heart to face the dark present and the gloomy future.

Mrs. Staunton stood near the window, with her back to her daughter. Effie listened with a sick heart to her mutterings. She knew that her mother could not possibly get better if she refused to eat.

She was wondering what to do, and how she could dare to leave her, when a quick step was heard running up the stairs, and the next moment Fred Lawson came in.

Effie never to her dying day forgot the feeling of relief, of almost joy, which ran through her heart when she saw his clever, resolute face. He came in, in his usual quick, brisk, determined way—stopped short a little when he saw her, and then glanced significantly at her mother.

Mrs. Staunton had turned as eagerly as Effie when she heard the quick footsteps. Now her face was an absolute blank—she had come a step forward,—her hands suddenly fell to her sides.

"My mother is not well," said Effie. "She's upset."

"No, I'm not upset; you're greatly mistaken," said Mrs. Staunton. "Why should I be upset? There's not a happier woman in Christendom than I am. It's true my beloved husband has left me, but then I have got my boy—there never was a braver boy. How do you do, Mr. Lawson? Pray forgive me for not shaking hands with you when you came into the room—the fact is, I have been expecting George. His dinner is in the fender. The landlady did very wrong indeed to send it up before I rang for it. I always ring twice for George's dinner, don't you understand? It is a good 162
plan. George likes his meals hot and tasty. No wonder—he earns them; he is a dear, good, *clever* fellow—he is getting a fine salary. Did you happen to meet him on the stairs? Perhaps you passed him—he is a little late, just a little late. Effie, can you tell me if Mr. Lawson has good sight? If he has, perhaps he'll come and watch by the window. I'm watching, but my eyes are a little weak at times. I might not see George when he is really there. Will you come and see, Mr. Lawson? He ought to be coming now, my dear boy,—my dearest,—my boy!"

Lawson gave Effie a glance. In a moment he read the true position. The poor weak brain had suddenly given way. He went up gently to Mrs. Staunton, and took one of her hot hands in his.

"When George comes in," he said, "I'll be here, and I'll tell him about his dinner. I know he'll be late to-night, and you mustn't wait up for him any longer. Come, Miss Effie will put you into bed. When you are in bed I'll give you something to make you sleep. Come now, don't delay; you're quite worn out. If you don't go to bed you'll be ill, and then you'll be of no use to your son."

"Do you really think so?" said Mrs. Staunton. "Yes, I mustn't be ill; George doesn't like it—it quite frets him. He is not like his dear father. He wants a cheerful home—no wonder, he is young, dear lad, he is young. Yes, I'll go to bed, and then I'll be all right in the morning. Come, Effie, help your mother to bed."

Effie took the poor woman out of the room. They went into the little bedroom. She helped her mother to undress. When she saw her lay her head on the pillow, she went back to the sitting room, where Lawson was quietly standing. 163

"I happened most fortunately," he said, the moment he saw her, "to have some packets of

bromide in my pocket. There is sal-volatile in the room. I have made up a rather strong composing-draught for your mother. If she takes it, she will sleep peacefully and will not be likely to wake until the morning. Give it to her at once, and then come back to me—I have something to tell you."

Effie's trembling knees could scarcely support her as she went back to the next room.

"Has George come yet?" asked the mother.

"Not yet, mother; won't you take this medicine, please?"

"Yes, my love, yes. Effie, you are a very good girl—a great comfort to me, my darling. I'm glad you never went to the hospital; it was a mad, foolish scheme, and George never liked it. You are a great comfort to me, and a great comfort to your dear brother. You'll be sure to give him his dinner comfortably when he comes back, Effie?"

"Yes, mother, yes. Now do go to sleep, dear mother."

Mrs. Staunton drank off the medicine, laid her head on her pillow, and closed her dim, dark eyes. Effie watched by her until she thought she was dropping asleep. Pretty little Marjory was lying sound asleep in the same bed. Phil opened his big eyes as his sister passed.

"Is anything the matter?" he whispered. "Is anything wrong with George?"

"Pray for him, Phil," said Effie, tears suddenly filling her eves.

"Yes, yes," said the little fellow. "I always do."

Effie went into the next room.

"You have plenty of pluck, haven't you?" said Lawson, when he saw her. 164

"I hope so—I had need to have."

"Yes, I know that. Well, that unfortunate boy has put his foot in it at last,—he is in trouble,—detectives are after him."

"Detectives after George!" exclaimed Effie. "What can you possibly mean? Oh, do tell me at once—don't leave me in suspense."

"Sit down and I will tell you. Try not to agitate yourself, try to listen to me quietly. Remember that a brave woman can always control her nerves."

Effie sat down when Lawson bade her. Something in his quiet but resolute voice soothed her impatience; she looked up at him as he stood by the mantelpiece, resting one arm on it.

"The facts are these," he began at once; "Staunton has been going wrong for a long time——"

"I know it—I know it well," interrupted Effie.

"Yes, I feared that you knew it. Poor fellow, soon after his arrival in London he got with bad companions. He has naturally extravagant tastes—they introduced him to some of those gambling saloons. Given a weak nature, the love of money for the pleasure it can give, a will weakened with self-indulgence, and the result is easy to forecast. George has been going from bad to worse for months past. He has sometimes won considerable sums of money, and these successes have excited him to try again—with this devil's luck, as the saying is. Of late, however, that luck has turned against him, and the events which took place to-day are only the natural consequences."

Effie rose slowly from her seat.

"Go on," she said, coming up to Lawson. "What took place to-day? Go on, please,—I am quiet,—I am prepared for anything."

Lawson gave her a look of admiration. 165

"You are a brave girl," he said briefly. "The world would be a better place if there were more like you in it. Well, what took place is this. Staunton won heavily at cards the night before last. Not content with his gains, however, he persevered until the luck turned against him. Before he left the gambling saloon he had lost all his gains, and was in debt fifty pounds. To meet that debt he drew your mother's money from the bank yesterday morning."

"I know," said Effie, with white lips—"mother told me. She sent Agnes to the bank to cash a small check. Agnes was told that George's account was overdrawn. Yes, I know that. Is there more behind? Surely that must be the worst."

"Alas! I wish it were. This morning the poor fellow, while engaged in his duties at Gering's office, met with the temptation for which he was so ripe. It was a horrible one. He knew that your mother had not a penny. His feeling for her I need not enter upon. He found himself in the room with an open till, and took fifty pounds out of it. Soon afterwards, he made an excuse to leave the office. He wandered about all day in an indescribable state of misery. At last he summoned courage to go to the bank and deposit forty-five of the fifty pounds. He then rushed home, and, packing his things, prepared to run away. He said he was certain to be taken if he stayed, and simply could not bring himself to face the risk. He went to Waterloo, and to his horror discovered that he was watched. A man, undoubtedly a detective in plain clothes, was following him from

place to place. The man watched him take his ticket for Southampton, and noticed the corner in which he deposited his bag in a third-class carriage. George seemed to lose his head at this crisis. 166
He managed to elude the detective, slipped out of the station, took a hansom and drove straight to my rooms. Luckily I was at home. He made a clean breast of everything to me. He is in my rooms now, and safe for the time being, for no one will think of looking for him there. I want you to come with me at once to see him, for there is not a moment to be lost in deciding what is best to be done."

"Yes," said Effie, "I will come."

She felt stunned—her keenest feelings of anguish were lulled into momentary quiet by the greatness of this blow.

"I will write a note to Agnes," she said; "she is out—I had to send her to the hospital to say that I could not return there to-night." Then she added, her face turning whiter than ever, "If my mother knows of this, it will kill her."

"Your mother is the person to be considered, of course," said Lawson. "But for her, I should say that the best thing possible for George would be to undergo the punishment which he merits. As it is, however, matters are different. Well, write your note, and let us be quick. That strong opiate will keep your mother sleeping quietly until the morning. All your sister has to do is to watch her."

Effie drew a sheet of paper toward her, scribbled a few hasty lines on it, folded it up, and left it where Agnes could see it the moment she returned; then she followed Lawson into the street.

He hailed a passing hansom, and they drove straight to his rooms on the Embankment.

The feeling of a dream remained with Effie all during that drive; she kept rubbing her eyes and saying to herself, "It's only a dream—I shall awaken presently and find myself back at St. Joseph's."

The hansom drew up at the lodgings, and Lawson preceded Effie upstairs. He threw open the 167
door of his little sitting room.

"Come in," he said. "Here is your sister, Staunton," he sang out.

Effie entered. She found herself in a small bright room. The gas was turned full on; one of the windows was open—a fresh breeze from the river came in. George was seated on a horse-hair sofa at the farthest end of the room. He held a small walking-stick in his hand, and was making imaginary patterns with it on the carpet. His shoulders were hitched up to his ears, his eyes were fixed on the ground. Effie looked at him. She said:

"George, I am here—I have come."

He did not make any response. She gave a little cry when he took no notice of her, and sank down helplessly on the nearest chair.

Lawson strode across the room and grasped George's shoulder.

"Look here, Staunton," he said; "you have got to pull yourself together. I have brought your sister here to consult what is best to be done. Look up, old chap! Take courage—all isn't lost yet. Now try and tell your sister everything."

"I have nothing to tell her," said George—he raised two lackluster eyes and fixed them with a sort of dull stare on Lawson's face.

"Don't talk folly—you have to tell her what you told me. You know the position you are in—you may be arrested at any moment. No one can help you but your sister; don't turn away from her."

"Oh, I understand all that," said George, shrugging his shoulder out of Lawson's grip. "I know well enough what has happened—I have gone under. I'm only one more. I—I can't help it—I have nothing to say." 168

Lawson looked at the big fellow almost in despair. He was really puzzled what to do. This was the moment, however, for Effie to take the initiative. She sprang suddenly to her feet, dashed the tears from her eyes, and went up to her brother. She fell on her knees by his side, and put her soft arms round his neck.

"Think of the old days, Geordie," she said, "when we were both little children. Think of mother and father, and the little old house, and the apple tree in the garden. Don't you remember the day when that ripe red apple fell, and we ate it bite about?"

When Effie began to speak, George trembled. He avoided her eyes for a moment longer, then he gave her a quick, furtive glance.

changed voice. "Before God, I couldn't help it."
a changed voice. "Before God, I couldn't help it."
[Transcriber's note: These two fragmented lines appear, as shown, at this point in the original text.]

Lawson stepped softly out of the room.

The moment he had done so, George said eagerly:

"He has told you, hasn't he?"

Effie nodded.

"Then I needn't go over it. Let's talk of something else. How is mother?"

"She is very ill indeed—she watched for you all the evening."

"Watched for me? But I told her I shouldn't be back to-night."

"Yes; but she didn't believe you, or she forgot it—anyhow, she watched for you, and when you didn't come, her mind began suddenly to wander; she is in bed now—she is very, very ill."

"Go on," said George; "hammer it in hard—I deserve it all."

"Oh, George, why will you talk like that? Don't you believe in my love for you?"

"I believe in mother's love. It's the only thing I have left to cling to. I believe she'd go on loving me even after this—I do truly."

"Of course she would—nothing could turn her love from you. Now, won't you let us consult together when Mr. Lawson comes into the room?"

"There's nothing to be done—nothing; I'm perfectly safe to be committed for trial, and then I shall get at least two years. Mother will die. And I shall have gone under forever."

"Nonsense! I have a thought in my head."

"You?" George spoke with almost contempt. "You always thought a great deal of yourself, Effie, but even you can't pull the ropes on the present occasion. I'm a thief, and I must suffer the penalty. That's the long and short of it."

Effie rose suddenly and walked to the door. She called Lawson—he came in at once.

"I think George will talk over matters now," she said. "But before we begin any discussion, I wish to say what I have made up my mind to do. I don't know Mr. Gering, but that does not matter. I mean to go to see him the first thing to-morrow morning, and beg of him not to prosecute George. That is the only chance for mother's life, and I mean to try it."

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CHAPTER XXII.

When Effie said these words, Lawson gave her a startled glance, and George's sulkiness seemed to vanish magically. He opened his lips as if to speak, then closed them again; a rush of color spread over his face, and he turned his head aside.

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"I fear it is impossible that you can do the least vestige of good, Miss Staunton," said Lawson. "All the same it is a brave thought, and worthy of you."

George looked round when Lawson said this; he fully expected Effie to explain herself more fully, to argue the point, and to give her reasons for approaching Mr. Gering. To the surprise of both the men, however, she was silent. After a little pause, she said, turning to Lawson:

"Do you think George will be safe here until the morning?"

"I do—perfectly safe," answered Lawson.

"Then I will say good-night. I will come to you, George if I have news, in the morning."

"Oh, you won't have news," replied George; "there never was such a hard nut to crack as old Gering."

Effie made no reply.

"Good-night," she said to her brother.

He did not offer to kiss her, but he took her hand and gave it a silent squeeze. It seemed to Effie then that she got near his heart.

Lawson took her downstairs and put her into a cab.

"You are only wasting your time in going to Mr. Gering," he said, as he stood for a moment at the cab door.

"I must waste it, then," replied Effie; "for, whatever the consequence, I am going."

"Then, if you will go, you had better do so early. Gering is always at his office by nine o'clock.

George may quite possibly be arrested to-morrow morning, and brought before the magistrates at Bow Street at ten or ten-thirty. When once he is arrested, Mr. Gering can do nothing. The law then takes up the case, and prosecutes on its own account. You will see, therefore, that if you wish to save your brother you must be astir betimes." 171

"I quite see, and thank you very much," said Effie.

Lawson said good-by, the cab rolled away, and Effie soon found herself back again at her own lodgings.

She ran upstairs, to find that her mother was still sound asleep. She sent the two tired girls to bed, and, lying down on the sofa in the sitting room, tried to sleep. She had left her mother's door slightly ajar, and knew that she would hear the least movement in the room. All was perfect stillness, however, and presently Effie fell into a light doze.

She awoke long before the dawn of day, thought carefully over the whole complex situation, and then rose and dressed herself. She slipped softly into her mother's room. The opiate was still taking effect. Mrs. Staunton's face looked pinched and drawn as it lay on the pillow, there were blue lines under the eyes, and a blue tint round the lips which spoke of heart trouble; but just at the present moment the spirit was at peace, and the body resting calmly.

"Poor mother!" murmured Effie; "poor, tried, faithful heart! If you really knew what I know, you could not survive the shock. Oh, George! who could have thought of this who remembered you in the old days? Yes, I will do what I can to save mother and to rescue you. It is true that I am only a weak girl, but sometimes girls like me have power. I will not be afraid; I will go now to exercise all the power that is in me."

Effie left the room; she went to the one where her sisters slept, changed her dress and washed herself, and then waking Agnes, to tell her to be sure to look after her mother, she ran downstairs. 172

The landlady, Mrs. Robinson, met her in the passage.

"Why, surely, Miss Staunton," she said, "you are not going out on a raw, foggy morning like this without breakfast?"

"Oh, I can't wait for breakfast," exclaimed Effie.

"I have some tea in my sitting room—do come in, and let me give you a cup, miss. Do, now—you're so white, you look as if you'd drop."

"Thank you," said Effie, after a little pause. "I should be very glad of a cup of tea," she added.

The landlady bustled her into her little sitting room, seated her by the fire, and would not leave her alone until she had swallowed a cup of tea and a piece of toast.

"I'm all the better for the tea," said Effie; "thank you very much."

The unlooked-for kindness cheered the poor girl; she looked upon it as a good omen. She walked quickly up the narrow street which led into the larger thoroughfare, and was soon on her way to Mr. Gering's office in Leadenhall Street.

She arrived there just as the clock was striking nine. She did not allow herself even to feel nervous, but, walking boldly in, asked to see Mr. Gering at once.

"Have you an appointment with him?" asked the clerk whom she addressed.

"No; but I hope he will see me without that; my business is very pressing."

"What is your name, miss?"

"Staunton." Effie hesitated for a minute, then she said abruptly, "I am the sister of George Staunton, who is a clerk here." 173

The moment she uttered the words every clerk in the place looked up with interest, and one, coming up in a somewhat familiar way, said cavalierly:

"I don't think there's the least use in your troubling Mr. Gering; I may as well tell you beforehand that he certainly won't see you."

At this moment a man came out of an inner room. He spoke to the head clerk, who gave him a bundle of letters.

"Take these to Mr. Gering at once," he said.

Effie followed this man with her eyes.

The other clerks stared at her, expecting her to go.

She looked at the one to whom she had first spoken.

"Will you take my message to Mr. Gering?" she said. "Will you tell him that Effie Staunton—George Staunton's sister—wishes to see him on most important business?"

There was much distress in her tone, but withal such firmness that the clerk could not help

looking at her with admiration.

"I would gladly take your message, Miss Staunton, but it would be useless. I know beforehand that nothing will induce Mr. Gering to see you."

"He must see me," replied Effie in a firm voice. "If no one here will be polite enough to take him my message, I will go to him myself."

Before one of the clerks could prevent her, Effie walked across the large room, opened the door where the clerk who took Mr. Gering his letters had vanished, and found herself the next moment in a handsomely furnished room, where a portly old gentleman was seated at a desk.

He looked up in unfeigned astonishment when he saw a pretty girl standing near the door. 174

As she did not speak for an instant, he raised his voice with an inquiry.

"May I ask what you are doing here?" he said.

"I have come to speak to you about my brother," said Effie.

"Your brother! What do you mean? Who is your brother?"

"George Staunton."

"Then, Miss Staunton, let me tell you that you have taken a great liberty in coming to see me. You have forced your way into my room unannounced. I must ask you to have the goodness to retire as quickly as you came. If you do not leave my room this moment, I shall be forced to compel you to go."

"No, you will not," said Effie—"no, that is not like you. You would not willingly be unkind to a suffering and innocent girl, when she forces herself, against her true inclinations, against her real modesty, to seek an interview with you. I come in great sorrow and despair, and you are not the man who will treat me roughly—I don't fear it. You like to say harsh words, but your heart is not harsh. I beg of you, therefore, to listen to my story. I will not keep you long."

"You are a very queer, courageous sort of girl," said Gering, after a pause. "As you have come, I suppose I may as well listen to you; but please understand at once that I have no mercy for your brother; that his career here is ended."

"That is only just and right. I have not come to plead with you to take George back—I know that that would be asking too much. What I have come to say I can say in a very few words."

"They must be very few if you expect me to leave my business to attend to them." 175

Effie came close to where Mr. Gering was seated; he did not rise, nor motion her to a chair. At this moment the clerk who had refused to take her message entered the room.

"Leave us for a moment, Power," said Mr. Gering. The man withdrew immediately.

"Thank you," said Effie. Then she added abruptly, "I won't keep you a moment. I will tell you quite simply what I want. My brother George has behaved very badly."

"To put it plainly," interrupted Mr. Gering, "your brother George is a scoundrel."

"You may call him any names you please," said Effie; "I have not come here to defend him. I know that he stole fifty pounds from you yesterday."

"Oh, you know that, do you?"

"Yes. Forty-five pounds of that money he put into the City Bank in my mother's name. That forty-five pounds you can have back within an hour. We shall then be in your debt five pounds, which I want you to let me pay you back. I have just secured a very good situation as a governess, and am to be in receipt of one hundred and twenty pounds a year. I can pay you back the money in about a month's time out of my own salary."

"You are very conscientious," said Mr. Gering, with a slight sneer, "and I shall be glad to have my money back. If that is all your business, perhaps you will leave me."

"No, it is not all my business. I want you to forgive George,—not to prosecute him,—not to give him up to the law."

"Ah! I thought that was coming. And why, pray, should I not prosecute the young rascal? Don't you think he richly deserves punishment?" 176

"Honestly, I do."

When Effie said this, Mr. Gering's eyes twinkled for the first time.

"Eh, eh!" he exclaimed. "I am glad we're of one mind on that point. We both doubtless believe that punishment would be good for him."

"We do."

"Then why deprive him of anything so beneficial?"

"Because of my mother."

"Your mother! Is there a mother in the case?"

"There is—a mother who lies now at the point of death. Let me tell you her story."

"I haven't read my letters yet, Miss Staunton."

"Oh, never mind your letters! Let me tell you about my father and my mother. Four months ago my father was alive. He was a country doctor. He was very good, everyone loved him. He caught diphtheria, and died. My mother has heart disease, and my father felt sure that the shock of losing him would kill her. He loved her most tenderly. When he lay dying he was certain that God would allow them both to leave the world together. My mother was kneeling by his bedside; and George, my brother, knelt there too. And my brother said. 'Don't take mother away, father;' and then father said to mother, 'Stay with George.' At that moment something strange must have happened—all my mother's great love seemed suddenly directed into a new channel. Her love for George since that moment has been the passion of her life. He was not strong-minded."

"No, indeed," interrupted Mr. Gering.

"No; and he yielded to temptation and got into trouble, and—and lost money. But all the time my mother has been imagining that he is the best and steadiest fellow in London. She lives in a sort of golden dream about him. If she learns the truth she will certainly die, and George will be lost. 177
He will then, as he himself expresses it, 'go under' forever. He won't be able to stand the thought that through his sin and weakness he has killed his mother."

"I should hope not," interrupted Mr. Gering.

"Therefore I want you to forgive him—it is your duty."

"My duty, child! What right have you to come and talk to me about my duty?"

"Every right, if I can only make you perform it."

"You are either impertinent or very brave, young lady. I was never spoken to in this strain before."

"Well, you see, it is a matter of life and death," said Effie. "I can't mince words when life and death hang in the balance."

"You're a queer girl—a queer girl; I don't know what to make of you. 'Pon my word, I'm sorry for that mother of yours—poor soul, poor soul! It's a pity she didn't bring up her son as conscientiously as she did her daughter. Now, you wouldn't have taken fifty pounds out of my till?"

"No," said Effie.

"I wish you were a boy—I'd give you that lad's place within an hour."

"Thank you, but I don't think I should care to have it. Will you come now and do your duty?"

"Come! Where am I to come?"

"To see George."

"The rascal! Where is he?"

"I'll take you to him."

"Do you know that you are bullying me in the most shameful way, Miss Staunton?"

"I know that you have a very kind heart," answered Effie.

At this moment the room door was opened, and Power came in again.

"Mr. Fortescue has called, sir."

"Tell Mr. Fortescue that I can't see him."

"And Ford has sent round about that shipping order. When can you give him his answer?"

"Some time this afternoon."

"But they want it this morning."

"Well, they can't have it; I'm going out for a bit. Come along, Miss Staunton; we can't let the grass grow under our feet."

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CHAPTER XXIII.

There come moments in the lives of all of us when we feel as if a restraining and powerful hand were pulling us up short. We have come to a full stop; we cannot go back, and we do not know how to proceed. These full stops in life's journey are generally awful places. We meet there, as a rule, the devil and his angels—they tear us and rend us, they shake us to our very depths with awful and overpowering temptation; if we yield, it is all over with us, we rush at headlong speed downhill.

But, on the other hand, if in this pause we turn our back upon the devil, good angels come in his place—they whisper of hope and a new chance in life even for us.

When Effie left George on that miserable evening, and when Lawson retired presently to his room, the young man found that he had come to such a fearful place of trial as I have just described. He was pulled up short, and the devil was tempting him. At one side was the devil, at 179
the other he saw the face of his mother. It was impossible for him to lie down and sleep. He fought with the devil all night. In the morning there was neither victory nor defeat, but the young, smooth face looked haggard and gray, and the upright, well-knit figure was bowed.

Lawson came into the sitting room for a moment.

"I am sorry I can't stay with you, George," he said. "I am due at St. Joseph's at nine o'clock. Have you made any plans for yourself?"

"No—at least, yes. I've had an awful night, Lawson, and there seems to be but one end to it."

"What is that?"

"I must give myself up. I'm not the sort of fellow to play the hiding game successfully. I'm safe to be caught sooner or later. I deserve punishment, too—I've been doing badly for months. What I deserve, it seems likely I'll have. In short, I think I'd better make a clean breast of everything, and take my—my punishment like a man."

"Do sit down for a minute," said Lawson. "There's a good deal in what you say, and if you had only yourself to consider, I'd counsel you to do it—I would, truly; but there's your mother to be thought of."

"My mother! Don't you suppose I've been thinking of my mother all night? It is the thought of my mother that maddens me—maddens me, I say. Look here, Lawson, there's only one thing before me: I'll go first to mother and tell her everything straight out, and then I'll give myself up."

"You will?" said Lawson, with a start of sudden admiration. "Upon my word, George, old chap, I 180
didn't think you had the grit in you—I didn't, truly."

"Then you approve?"

"It is the only thing to be done; she must hear it, sooner or later, and no one can tell it to her as you can."

"All right; I'll go to her before my courage fails me."

George left the room without even saying good-by to his friend.

When he left the house, he turned round and saw the man whom he had noticed watching him the day before at Waterloo Station.

"I'll be ready for you soon, my friend, but not quite yet," muttered the young man.

He walked quickly—the man followed him at a respectful distance.

George let himself into his mother's house with a latch-key. He ran up to the little sitting room. Agnes was bending with red eyes over a kettle which was boiling on the fire. She was making a cup of tea for her mother, who had just awakened. Katie was cutting bread and butter, and Phil and Marjory were standing by the window. Marjory was saying to Phil, "I 'spect George will be turning the corner and coming home in a minute."

"Hush!" whispered Phil: "hush, Marjory! George isn't coming back any more."

At this moment the door was opened, and George came in. Marjory gave Phil a scornful glance, and flew to her big brother. Katie flung down the piece of bread she was buttering and Agnes turned from the fire. George put out his hand to ward them all off.

"Where's mother?" he asked.

"She's awake, but she has been very ill," began Agnes. "Oh, George, George, do be careful; where 181
are you going?"

"To my mother," answered the young man. "Don't let anyone come with me—I want to be alone with her."

He went straight into the bedroom as he spoke, and shut the door behind him.

Mrs. Staunton was lying propped up high by pillows. The powerful opiate had soothed her, but the image of George still filled all her horizon. When she saw him come into the room, she smiled, and stretched out her weak arms to clasp him. He came over, knelt by her, and, taking her hot hands, covered his face with them.

"You've come back, my boy!" she said. "I'm not very well to-day, but I'll soon be better. Why, what is it, George? What are you doing? You are wetting my hands. You—you are crying? What is it, George?"

"I have come back to tell you something, mother. I'm not what you think me—I'm a scoundrel, a rascal. I'm bad, I'm not good. I—I've been deceiving you—I'm a thief."

"Hush!" interrupted Mrs. Staunton. "Come a little closer to me. You're not well, my dear boy—let me put my arm round your neck. You're not well, my own lad; but if you think—–"

"I'm as bad as I can be, mother," said George, "but it isn't bodily illness that ails me. I said I'd make a clean breast of it. It's the only thing left for me to do."

A frightened look came into Mrs. Staunton's eyes for a moment, but then they filled with satisfaction as they rested on the dark head close to her own.

"Whatever you've done, you are my boy," she said. 182

"No, no; a thief isn't your boy," said George. "I tell you I'm a thief," he added fiercely, looking up at her with two bloodshot eyes. "You've got to believe it. I'm a thief. I stole fifty pounds from Gering yesterday—and I was bad before that. I won money at play—I've won and lost, and I've lost and won. Once Lawson gave me two hundred and fifty pounds to invest, and I stole it to pay a gambling debt, and Effie got it back for me—she borrowed it for me. My father wouldn't have given you to me if he had known that. I had it on my conscience when I was kneeling by his deathbed, but I couldn't tell him then; and when he gave you to me, I felt that I never could tell. Then we came to London, and I began to deceive you. I told you a false story about that rise of salary—I never had any rise; and I took your fifty pounds two days ago out of the bank, and I stole money to pay it back again. That's your son George, mother—your *true* son in his *real* colors. Now you know everything."

George stepped a pace or two away from the bed as he spoke. He folded his arms.

Mrs. Staunton was looking at him with a piteous, frightened expression on her face. Suddenly she broke into a feeble and yet terrible laugh.

"My son George," she said. "That explains everything. My son still—still my son!" She laughed again.

There came a knock at the outer door.

"Don't go, George!" said his mother.

"George, you're wanted," said Agnes. "Effie is here, and Mr. Gering—they want to see you. Come at once."

"Mr. Gering!" exclaimed the mother. "He was the man you took the money from. He's coming to—
punish you, to—George, you're not to go. Stay here with me. I'll hide you. You're not to go, 183
George—I won't let you, I won't let you!"

"Dear mother! dear, dearest mother! you must let me—I must take the punishment. I've deserved it and I'm determined to go through with it. Just say a wonderful thing to me before I go, and I'll be strong enough to bear it—and to—to come back to you when it's over. Say you love me still, mother."

"*Love* you!" exclaimed Mrs. Staunton.

"Yes, mother, although I'm a thief."

"Bless the boy! that has nothing to do with it. You're my boy, whatever you are."

"Then you do still love me?"

"Yes, yes, yes! Of course I love the lad!"

George went straight to the door and opened it. He walked straight into the other room.

"I'm ready to take the punishment, sir," he said, going straight up to Mr. Gering.

His manner and the look on his face amazed his late employer.

"Eh—eh—well, young sir," he said, backing a step or two. "And so you confess that you robbed me?"

"I do."

"And you know what lies before you?"

"Yes."

"Have you been deceiving that mother of yours again?"

"No; I've been telling her the truth at last."

"Effie, Effie!" called Mrs. Staunton from the bedroom.

Effie ran to her mother.

"Do you know, young man," said Mr. Gering, "that you have got a very remarkable sister?"

"Do you mean Effie? Oh, I always knew she was a girl in a thousand."

"A girl in *ten* thousand, more like. Do you know, young rascal, that she has been pleading with me for you, and—'pon my word, it's true—melting my old heart till I don't know what I'm doing? In short, I've made her a promise."

"A promise! Oh, sir, what?"

"A promise that I'll let you off—all but the moral punishment. That, of course, you'll have to bear."

"Mr. Gering, is this true?"

"Yes, it's true. I'm doing it all on account of your sister. You may come back to the office to-morrow, and consider that you've got a fresh start. Now, for goodness' sake, don't keep me any longer. Open the door, one of you children, can't you? I must hurry back to my work."

That is the story, for George really did learn his lesson, and in his case the new leaf was turned. He will carry the scars, however, of that time of sin and suffering to his grave.

Effie kept her promise, and went as governess to little Freda Harvey for a time, but only for a time. When money affairs were straight again, she gladly returned to the life which she really loved, and is now superintendent of one of the wards at St. Joseph's.

It is true that there are whispers afloat with regard to her and Lawson—whispers which always give a feeling of consternation in the ward which she manages so skillfully—but only Effie herself can tell if there is truth in them or not.

THE END

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Transcriber's Notes

1. Punctuation has been normalized to contemporary standards.
2. Missing text, truncated by printer:
   p. 131: "mother has gone far beyond our means. She hasn't"
3. Several places in the text suggest missing or incorrect text:
   p. 15: "I met Effie the night a came home"
   replaced with "I met Effie the night I came home"
   p. 145: "Now go and much in train for the afternoon as you can."
   No replacement made.

p. 120: "but she for certain that he would come"
Replaced with "but she knew for certain that he would come"

4. Superfluous, repeated disconnected text on two sequential lines on page 168:
changed voice. "Before God, I couldn't help it."
a changed voice. "Before God, I couldn't help it."
5. Typographic errors corrected:
seventh page of advertisements:
"terrestial" to "terrestrial." ("stumbling-blocks in their terrestrial path")
p. 24: "undestad" to "understand." ("Now you understand")
p. 111: "helds" to "held." ("when she held the purse strings.")

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