

THE EVENING NEWS.

Tuesday, JUNE 19, 1871.

[From the Lakeside Monthly.]

SUBSCRIPTION.

[CONTINUED.]

But when her vision was gone, she paced up and down in the old fashion, in an agony of doubt and apprehension. "Crus! crus!" she murmured over and over again, as if the low sound were a relief. "If he has really grown tired of me, why, why does he not come and tell me so at once, instead of leaving me to find out in this tortuous way? But no—it can't be, can't be."

So, struggling between hope and fear, she passed the long, weary day. Even the dull eye of her grandfather, accustomed as it was to be cared for rather than to care for others, noticed a change in her looks.

"What's the matter with my Queen Rose-to-night?" he asked tenderly.

"A terrible headache, grandpa," said she, "but I'm telling the truth, though only a part of it."

"Poor darling! I don't remember your ever having a headache before! You must have taken cold or over-exercised yourself!" And he proposed a host of useless remedies, which the young girl parried as well as she could.

She sat with him until he retired for the night, and just as she left him Mr. Rainsford was returning, a full hour later than his usual time.

Her heart thrilled in a wild tumult. Now, at least she should learn her fate, whether for good or evil. Rainsford met her as usual—put his arm around her and kissed her. Her tenderness for him all came back in a moment, and she was ready to forget and forgive everything.

"What a long, long time it is since I have seen you!" said she, with moist eyes and cheeks glowing with pleasure. "Why, yes," he replied in a careless way. "I have been a good deal engaged lately. What have you been doing with yourself all this time?"

An involuntary shudder ran through her frame at this tone. Was this then what she was waiting for? Was this the meeting she had been looking forward to? She felt that the time had come when she must act.

"What's the matter?" asked Rainsford, seeing her shiver, and attempting to take her hand. "You're not cold are you? I should say that the thermometer here stood at ninety-eight degrees, or thereabouts."

She withdrew her hand gently. "I want to ask you something, St. Clair. Perhaps it is only my fancy, but do you ever feel tired of our engagement, and want to break it off?"

"Phew!" he exclaimed, somewhat impatiently. "Who's been putting such nonsense into your head? Are you jealous because I talk to other girls sometimes when you're not by?"

"No, indeed!" she answered vehemently. "You know I'm not jealous. If you will say truly that you love me best of all in the world, and that you don't feel the least interest in any other woman, except in the way of friendship, I'm perfectly satisfied; I will never ask what you say to others, or what you do; if I am sure you love me best!"

St. Clair was visibly embarrassed by this straightforward appeal. He would have liked to go on for a while flirting with both girls at once, and then to marry either one, but he liked neither; but he was not willing to confess so much as the statement she craved, when he felt he was yielding her but half-allegiance. He knew she was a very fine girl, but she was almost too intense for him, and he found it a relief to idle away his time and give about half his heart to a brainless chatterbox.

"Of course, Lottie," said he, after a short pause, "if you wish to break it off, it must be just as you say."

"I wish to break it off, St. Clair," she exclaimed, almost maddened by her emotion. "I love you with my whole heart! There is not a thought or a wish I have in the world that is unconnected with you! I live and breathe so much on the thought of you that there is hardly room for anything else in my mind. I dream of you by day and sleep of you only on your account I spoke. If you leave me as I love you, I ask nothing more."

Rainsford remained silent, with his eyes fixed uneasily on the boot with which he was tapping the carpet. He was utterly at a loss how to answer.

"Tell me truly, dearest!" said Charlotte, who had not taken her eyes off him for a moment. "would you rather be free?"

"Perhaps it would be as well, if you think so, Lottie," he answered, still looking down.

"That settles the question, then," said the young girl with dignity. "I only wish you had told me so, instead of leaving me to find it out for myself. Good-night, St. Clair!" and before he could frame words for a protest, she was gone.

She waited till the hand that outer door shut, and then descended once more to the drawing room, the scene of so many happy meetings, to throw herself on the floor in a tearsless agony which had no parallel in his experience.

"Is this the end? Is this the end?" was all she could say on. "Oh, God! if I could but die now!"

It was a selfish wish, and she did not often let it cross her thoughts of the old man whose life was being cut in two, softened her heart, and made her willing to live for his sake. For himself she had no longer a wish. All that could henceforth make existence endurable would be an absorbing devotion to duty.

From that day life seemed to have but one object—returning to her—that of doing good. Her desire was for her grandfather, however, space for man was filled with some work of benevolence. The Christmas gift, now finished, was laid away in aasket, with a beautiful chain of her own hair which she had given to Rainsford at the time of their engagement, and a few unimportant notes from him, not worth restringing but which she could not bear to destroy. All else she sent back to him, and when he returned in return, when he sent, with the chain. The letters were now moved into the fire; the basket was locked and the key put away with other relics of a past dead and gone, and the new life began.

To be continued.

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