



...nored," cried she. "I am going to F— to marry Mr. Clavering. Now do you wish to accompany me?"

other word, but I caught her by the arm. "O, miss—" I began, but she gave me such a look I dropped her arm as if it had been hot steel.

"I have nothing to say to you," she cried in a low, thrilling voice. "Do not detain me." And with a glance to see if Hannah were following her, she went out.

For an hour I sat crouched on the stairs, just where she had left me. Then I went to bed, but I did not sleep a wink that night. You can imagine then, my wonder, when with first glow of the early morning light, Mary, looking more beautiful than ever, came running up the steps and into the room where I was, with the letter for Mr. Clavering trembling in her hand.

"Oh!" I cried in my joy and relief, "didn't she understand me, then?" The gray look on Mary's face turned to one of reckless scorn. "If you mean Eleanor, yes. She is duly initiated, Mamma Hubbard. Knows that I love Mr. Clavering and write to him. I couldn't keep it secret after the mistake she made last evening, so I did the next best thing, told her the truth."

"Certainly not. I don't believe in unnecessary communications." "And will she not tell your uncle?" I gasped.

"No, I suppose not." "I leave him immediately after the ceremony." Eleanor bowed her head. "He goes to Europe." "A pause." "And I return home."

"There was to wait for what, Mary?" "There was to wait for what, Mary?" "There was to wait for what, Mary?" "There was to wait for what, Mary?"

"The native expression on Mary's face quickly changed." "No," said she. "I felt a heavy hand hot with fever, lifted from my heart. "And we can still go on?"

"The curling of Mary's lip was her only reply." "Mr. Raymond, I do not wish to weary you with my feelings, but the first great distrust I ever felt of my wisdom in pushing this matter so far, came with that curl of Mary's lip."

"There now, Mamma Hubbard, don't you go and acknowledge that you are frightened, for I won't keep it. I have promised to marry Henry Clavering to-day, and I am going to keep my word."

being known?" I inquired. "Were you seen or followed?" "No," she murmured. "It all went off well, but—"

"Where is the danger then?" "I cannot say; but some deeds are like ghosts. They will not be laid; they reappear, they gibber; they make themselves known, and we will or not. I have destroyed my happiness."

"I looked at her in uncontrollable emotion." "O, Mary," said I, "that she succeeded, then, in making you miserable!"

"If I had not been taught to love money so," she said at length. "If like Eleanor, I could look upon the splendor which has been hers from childhood, as a mere accessory of life, easy to be dropped at the call of duty or affection! If prestige, adulation and elegant belongings were not so much to me, or love, friendship and domestic happiness more! If only I could walk a step without dragging the chain of a thousand luxurious longings after me. Eleanor can do that, and she is in her beautiful world."

"I endeavored to calm her by saying that if Eleanor was without malice, such fears were groundless. But she would not be comforted. "I am seeing her so wrought up, I suggested that she should ask Eleanor to deliver it into my keeping till such time as she should feel the necessity of using it. The idea struck Mary favorably."

"It was as if a draught of icy air suddenly let loose in a room heated up to fever point. Eleanor stiffened immediately and drawing back pale and composed, turned upon her cousin with the remark, "The curling of my lip was her only reply."

filled with a vivid appeal to tell him something of the woman who in spite of her vows, doomed him to a suspense so cruel, and when on the evening of the same day, a friend of mine who had just returned from New York, spoke of meeting Mary Leavenworth at some gathering, surrounded by manifest admirers, I began to realize the alarming feat she had performed, cradling a dirty child on her knees, and feeding with her own hand an impatient old woman whom no one else would consent to touch. Oh, oh, they talk about repentance and a change of heart, but that without it, some thing would only change mine! But there is no hope of that! No hope of my ever being anything else than what I am a selfish, wilful, mercenary girl."

"Nor was this mood a mere transitory one. That same night she made a discovery which increased her apprehension almost to terror. This was nothing less than the fact that Eleanor had been keeping a diary of the last few weeks. "O," she cried in relating this to me the next day, "what security shall I ever feel as long as this diary of hers remains to confront me each time I look into her room. And she will not consent to destroy it, though I have done my best to show her that it is a betrayal of the trust I reposed in her. She says that it is all there is to show her reasons for doing as she has done, and that without it she would lack means of defence, if uncle should ever accuse her of treachery to him and his happiness. She promises to keep it locked up, but what good will that do! A thousand accidents might happen, any of them sufficient to throw into my uncle's hands. I shall never feel safe for a moment while it exists."

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Interest in the matter which is given by the letter I received from her yesterday, and which you say you have now in your possession?" "O that letter!" "I know," Mrs. Belden went on in a broken voice, "that it is wrong in a serious case like this, to draw hasty conclusions; but O, sir, how can I help it, knowing that I did?"

"I did not answer; I was revolving in my mind the old question: was it possible, in face of all these later developments, still to believe Mary Leavenworth's own hand guilty of her uncle's blood?" "It is dreadful to come to such conclusions," proceeded Mrs. Belden, "and nothing but her own words written in her own hand would ever have driven me to them."

"Mrs. Belden," I interrupted, "pardon me, but you said in the beginning of this interview that you did not believe Mary herself had any direct hand in her uncle's murder. Are you ready to repeat that assertion?" "Yes, yes, indeed. Whatever I may think of her influence in inducing it, I never imagine her having anything to do with its actual performance. O, no, while she was doing one of those dreadful things, Mary Leavenworth never put her hand to pistol or ball, or even stood by while they were used; that you may be sure of. Only the man who loved her, longed for her, and felt the impossibility of obtaining her by any other means, could have found nerve for an act so horrible."

"When you think—" "Mr. Clavering is the man? I do, and O, sir, when you consider that he is her husband, is it not dreadful enough?" "It is indeed," said I, rising to conceal how much I was affected by this conclusion of hers. "By some indefinable impulse I went immediately upstairs, and took my stand at the western window of the large room directly over Mrs. Belden. Was it utterly impossible to find out anything yet, that Henry Clavering was, after all, the assassin of Mr. Leavenworth?"

"Filled with the thought, I looked across the room to the closet where lay the body of the girl who, according to all probability, had known the truth of this matter, and a great longing seized me. O why could not the dead be made to speak?" "Carried away by the fervor of the moment, I made my way to her side. Ah, God, how still! With what a mockery the closed lips and lids confronted my demanding gaze. A stone could not have been more unresponsive."

"With a feeling that was almost like anger, I stood there, when—O, what a shock! I felt something from beneath her shoulders where they crushed against the bed a envelope? A letter? Yes."

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