

THE MILL MYSTERY

BY ANNE KATHRINE GIBBS.

was an unknown order, coming as much for duty as admiration. A perfect beauty like her brother, she had none of the weakness and fragility that usually accompany their complexion. On the contrary, there was something heroic in her whole appearance, and especially in the peculiar expression of her eyes, that evoked the strongest feelings and produced even in the minds of those who saw her engaged in the most ordinary occupations of life an impression of remoteness that almost amounted to the uncanny. The fact that she affected brilliant colors and clothed both herself and brother in garments of a wealthy fantastic make, added to this impression, and gave perhaps some excuse to those persons who regarded her as being as abnormally constituted as her brother, finding it impossible, I suppose, to associate any connection with industry, and a taste for the rich and beautiful with poverty as respectable, it scarcely made itself known for the reality it was. A blonde grey some called her, a dangerous woman some others, and the latter would undoubtedly have been correct had the girl possessed less pride of independence or been unhampered, as she was unhampered, by the sense of responsibility towards her imbecile brother. As it was, more than one mother had had reason to ask why her son wore such a meekly brow after returning from a certain quarter of the town, and at one time gossip had not hesitated to declare that Dwight Pollard the naughty Doughty Pollard had not been advanced to be seen entering her door, though every one knew that some steps had been taken for the purpose of except their intentions were as honorable as the beauty, if not the poverty, of his cousin demerited.

When I heard this, and heard also that he visited her no more, I seemed to have gained some enlightenment as to the odd and contradictory actions of my famous idiot boy. He loved his sister, and was in some way hampered with a sense that she had been wronged. He was, therefore, jealous of any one who had, or seemed to have gained the attention of the man who had possibly forsaken her. Yet even with this explanation of his conduct, there was much for which I could not account, making my intended interview with the sister a matter to be more of less apprehended.

It was therefore with a deep sense of foreboding that I started for the quiet and stony cottage which had been pointed out to me as the abode of those remarkable twins. I reached it just as the clock struck three, and was immediately impressed, as my informant evidently expected me to be, by the air of mystery and refinement that characterized even the humble exterior. But it was not till I had knocked at the door and been ushered into the parlour by the idiot brother, that my real astonishment began. For though the room in which I found myself did not, as I was afterwards assured contain a single relic, it certainly had the effect of incalculable upon the eye, and had it not been for my inward agitation and suspense, would have produced a sense of prolonged pleasure, scarcely to be pocketed for in the abode of a single working-girl. As it was, I was dimly conscious of a slight relief in the keen tension of a moment, and turned with almost a sensation of hope to the boy who was smiling and grimacing beside me. But here another shock awaited me, for the boy was not the one I had seen at the mill barely two hours ago, or, rather, if it were the same and the identity of his features, figure, and dress with those I knew so well, seemed to contradict me to be at in such a different mood now as to appear like another being, laughing, merry, and hearty, he bore no trace of the gloom and suspicion of the previous day. I had seen, though, nor did his countenance change, though I looked at him steadily and long with a gaze that was any thing but keeping with his seemingly innocent mirth.

It is not the boy I have known, I suddenly decided in my mind, and I cannot say in what wild surmise I might have indulged, if at that moment the door at my back had not opened and a figure stepped in which at the first glance attracted my attention and absorbed all my thoughts. Imagine a woman, thin, blonde, beautiful, intense, with features regular as the carver's hand could make them, but informed with a spirit so generous, passionate, and generous, that you had sight of her beauty in your wander at the formidable nature of the character she betrayed. Then her dress as an other woman ever dressed before in a robe of scarlet and gold and made quite its own, and conceive, if you can, the agitation I felt as I realized that in her I beheld my rival, my antagonist, the enemy of Dwight Pollard's peace and mine.

It was a well-worn shaft, and quivered alive and burning in her heart of hearts. She gave a spring like the panther she seemed at that minute, but instantly recovered herself, and launching upon me the strongest smile, mockingly exclaimed: "You are a brave woman." Then as I did not quite believe her passion, drew up my slight figure to its height and said: "We are worthy of each other, you and I. Tell me what you want."

"What I want?" I repeated. "I want to know how you dare put in language the insinuations which you hang up on the door of the old mill this morning?" Her eyes, narrowed, as I have said, in her seemingly habitual desire to keep their secrets to herself, flashed wide open at this, while a low and mirthless laugh escaped her lips.

"So my labor was not entirely wasted?" she cried. "You saw—?" "Both the lines and the writer," I completed, reluctantly preserving the advantage I felt myself to have gained. "The lines before they were defaced by the storm, the writer as she picked up the useless paper and went away."

"So," she commented, with another echo of that joyous laughter; "there are two spies instead of one in this game?" "There are two women instead of one who know your enmity and purpose," I retorted.

"How came you at the mill?" she suddenly asked, after a moment of silent communion with her own thoughts. "By accident," was all my reply. "Were you alone?" "I was."

"Then no one but yourself saw the paper?" "No one but myself."

"She gave me a look I made no sign of understanding."

arrived at last. "He forced me to love him. Had he left me when I first said 'No,' I could have looked down on his face to-day with contempt. But no, he had a fancy that I was his destiny, and that he would possess me or die. But he would not let me die when I found that my long-sought 'Yes' turned his worship into indifference, and his passion into contempt. But—she suddenly cried, with a repetition of that laugh which now sounded so fearful in my ears—"All this does not answer as to how I dared publish the insinuations I took up on the mill-door this morning."

"No," I shudderingly cried. "Ah! I have waited long," she passionately asserted. "Wrong like mine are very patient, and are very still, but the time comes at last when even a woman weak and frail as I am can lift her hand in power, and when she does life is—"

"Hush!" I exclaimed, bounding from my seat and exiting her upraised arm; for her vivid figure seemed to admit a flame like death. "Hush! we want no trades, you nor I; only let me hear what Dwight Pollard has done, and whether you know what you were saying when you called him and his family—"

"Murderers!" she completed. "I shooed, but bowed my head. She looked her arm from my grasp and stood for one moment contemplating me."

"You are a powerful rival," she murmured. "We will have you just six months longer than he did me."

I summoned up at once my pride and my compassions.

"And that would be just six months too long," I averred, "if he is what you declare him to be."

A smile, which I could plainly see in the mirror before which I stood, passed slowly over her face. She took up her parasol from her lap, then laid it down again, and altogether showed considerable embarrassment. "It did not last long, and in another moment she was saying, in quite a bold way: "I loved, but I do not love you as you would have me love you. On the contrary, I would do you a good turn; for what are we here for, miss, if it's not to help one another?"

As I had no answer for this worthy sentiment, she lapsed again into her former embarrassed state and so speedily recovered from it. Stammering in a manner that unconsciously put me on my guard, she remarked: "You left us very suddenly yesterday, miss. Of course that is your own business, and I have nothing to say against it. But I thought if you knew what might be gained by staying—"

"Why," she went on desperately, with a backward look of her head, "you might think as how we was not such very bad folks after all. I am sure you would make a very nice mistress to work for, Miss Sterling, she stammered; "and if you would just let me help you with your hair as I did old Mrs. Pollard—"

"Angry, mortified, and ashamed of myself that I had listened to her so far, I turned on her with a look that seemed to make some impression even upon her."

"How dare you!" I began, then paused, shocked at the depth of the feelings she had betrayed. "Forgive your pardon," I immediately added, recovering my composure by a determined effort; "your doubt did not consider that you are not in a position to speak such words to me. Even if your situations meant anything serious, which I will not believe, our acquaintances—I am afraid I threw some sarcasm into that word—"

"I have scarcely been long enough to warrant my personal nature, least of all one that involves the names of those you live with and have served so long. If you have nothing better to say—"

She rose with a jerk that seemed to my eyes as much an expression of disappointment as anger, and took a reluctant step or two towards the door.

BLOWN TO FRAGMENTS.

The result was civil war, and the latter, as commander of a battalion of the national guard, was obliged to attack the place of his birth.



THE TULLERIES.

At first successful, he was besieged in turn, and his communication with a vessel which had landed him there being cut off, he was constrained to take refuge in the tower of Capella. He and his fifty followers nearly starved there, but they were released by some sympathizers and the Bonaparte family driven from Corsica by the advent of Napoleon. The members were exposed to great peril from the popular rage, and finally got off to Marseilles in a chance ship. There is strange inconsistency in the future hero of Marungo, Wagram and Austerlitz being obliged to fly from his native land, with his mother, brother and sisters, to save his life, on account of hatred of the enemies of France.

During Napoleon's stay at Marseilles he was engaged by a French general to negotiate with the insurgents of the region round about. He issued a pamphlet in which he pointed out to them the strength and temper of the revolutionists and the folly and danger of exciting the wrath which would certainly be their ruin. His sentiments were indignantly republished, but not radical, for he had no rebuff of popular clamor or disturbance. He was speedily transferred to Paris, and, after remaining there some months, was entrusted with the command of the artillery sent against Toulon, then in the hands of the Spanish and English. He managed his guns so admirably that the town was constrained in a few weeks to surrender, thus winning (December, 1793) his first decided success, and laying the basis of his surpassing military fame. Gen. Dugommier, in recommending him to the committee of public safety, said significantly: "Promote this young man, if he should be neglected, he will promote himself."

He was made a brigadier, joined Dumeroy's army and participated in the Piedmont campaign. After the destruction of the triumvirate, he was arrested in Paris by the Moderates on suspicion of having been a partisan of Robespierre. If this had happened during the Terror, he would, in all likelihood, have been guillotined. An indignant remonstrance from him to the authorities procured his release in a fortnight. He then sought for some new military position, which, despite his acknowledged abilities, was not granted him immediately. At this time he was very young—Taine, the tragedian, is said to have lent him money to redeem his sword—disesteemed, downcast, full of anxieties. "Life," he says in one of his letters, "is but an empty dream of brief duration." How unlike the man of unassuming, marvelous performance in this shadowed sentiment! He was so dependent, so troubled with compulsory illness and want of appreciation, that he contemplated offering his services to the sultan of Turkey.

CLOSING SCENES. But the man having come, the hour did not long delay. The convention was sorely in need of a resolute, efficient commander for its 5,000 regular soldiers, abundantly provided with cannon. Barras, president of that body, had general control of the troops, but hardly felt adequate to the responsibility of pitting them against the 30,000 national primary assemblies of Paris who were called. Gen. Menou was at first selected for the position, but he lacked decision and was set aside. Barras, who had been with Napoleon at Toulon, declared that he was eminently the man for the emergency, and the committee appointed him to the important office.

The convention is sitting in the Tuilleries, and the guards, backed by the populace, advance Oct. 5, 1793, confidently along the quays of the Seine and the Rue St. Honoré to the palace, confident of expelling the assembly as they had done before. Napoleon, with but one night for preparation, has secured the best positions and calmly awaits their coming. They represent the people, in whose sacred name the wholesale, promiscuous throat cutting has been waged for six years and more, the people who had rioted and triumphed in blood. Will the young Corsican dare to defy their overwhelming numbers and consecrated prestige? He is not the man to flinch from odds or responsibility, to be deterred by names or precedents. He has divine faith in artillery; he opens with it heavily and resolutely; mows down the marching columns; keeps up the thunderous fire incessantly. In one hour's actual fighting the mighty monster that had devastated France and terrified the Old World is shattered into atoms; is no longer to be seen or felt. Marengo, Charenton, Desmoulin, Danton, St. Just, Couthon, Robespierre, all the demons of democracy, might have stirred in their bloody graves if they had concluded that they had died in vain. On the needless graves of 35,000 Frenchmen a stolid, unimpaired intellect, without morals or without conscience, builds the glimmering though false military absolute government. Thus again it happened in Europe that liberty leads to anarchy, anarchy to despotism, and despotism back to liberty. How long is this to be the cycle of political events? How long is humanity to suffer and be sacrificed before liberty shall be universally and permanently attained?

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