

FORTUNE FAVORS THE BRAVE; OR, A LOOK INTO THE PAST

CHAPTER II.

Dr. Grantley was busy writing in his study, about two evenings later, when his servant came in and announced that Nancy Hamilton wanted to speak to him—indeed, refused to go away until she had done so.

The doctor put down his pen at once.

"Let her come in," he said, wheeling his chair to the fire.

Nancy came in very quietly, almost before he was aware of it.

"So you want to speak to me, my dear? Don't be nervous, I will—"

"Dr. Grantley!"—the girl's voice was hoarse and thick with much weeping—"I am in great trouble. I have come to you. I—I have no one else—"

The doctor turned round, and his brows met as he saw her face; it was deathly white save for the cruel black circles round her wonderful eyes, and the mark of a blow across one cheek.

She unfastened her cloak at the throat and went on:

"I have left my uncle's house; I will never go back—never! You don't know what my life has been all this time, and what I have had to endure there. When you know all, I am sure you will pity me. It was dreadful before, but since yesterday it has been awful. Uncle Henry has gone away to the funeral of Aunt Matilda's brother, and it has been one long torture during his absence. Aunt Matilda has nearly driven me wild, and—"

"She has struck you?" the doctor finished, pointing to the fair young cheek.

"Yes, not an hour ago. I don't mind that, it does not hurt; but, oh! Dr. Grantley! because I refused to marry Thomas Moss, she was so infuriated that she insulted me before him. She said such terrible things, and he only laughed—coward—coward!"—Nancy clenched her hands—"and when I stood up to defend my dead mother, she—she pushed me from her, till, taunting me with my dependence on her, I fell against him, and—and—her voice was almost choked with pride and disgust—"he dared to kiss me—to kiss me! and I hate him—I loathe him! I have told him this again and again, and—"

And Nancy buried her face in her hands, and burst into tears.

Dr. Grantley had listened to her incoherent words in complete silence; his heart beat with indignation as he saw the shattered condition of her nerves, and realized how great must have been the trials that had crushed her young spirit so utterly. He went across, and, putting his hand on her head, soothed her gently, poured out some wine and water to give her strength, then very quietly he drew the whole story from her. It was of Thomas Moss she spoke most bitterly, and her limbs trembled with indignation as she related how he had persecuted and insulted her.

"And if I go back there, Aunt Matilda will make me marry him—I know it!" she said, hurriedly, lifting her pretty, distressed face to his. "Oh, Dr. Grantley, I shall die if she does this! Won't you help me, please? You have always been so kind, that is why I come to you now."

"What do you want me to do?" he asked, gently.

Nancy rose in her eagerness.

"Don't you remember you said once I should make a good sick nurse? You spoke of a Mrs. Wortley who would teach me. Will you help me to go to her? I will work, you shall see how I will work; and I will never forget your kindness if I live to be a hundred years!"

"But your uncle, Nancy, what of him?"

The girl sighed. "Poor uncle, I am sorry to leave him, but he can't help me, he is not strong enough; and I think he will be glad when I am gone, for then, perhaps, Aunt Matilda will give him some peace."

"I don't know what to say, child."

Dr. Grantley said this after a long pause.

"It is a serious step, you are so young."

"I am not too young to be insulted, or to work like a drudge," Nancy said, quietly. "I have come to you, Dr. Grantley, because I know no one else, but if you can't help me, I shall go away somewhere and be lost; for I am determined that I will never go back to Aunt Matilda."

There was no doubt as to her determination and earnestness.

Dr. Grantley paced to and fro for a while, and then stopped.

"Will you let your uncle know?" he asked.

"I shall write to him when I am settled, wherever it may be; but I shall not give him the address, only let him know I am alive, well and, I hope, happy."

Nancy spoke firmly, there was not a tear, no weakness now; her mind was resolute, and she stood face to face with the world and all its mysteries with a brave and eager air.

"Well, well," said Dr. Grantley, "I suppose I must do as you ask, but I confess I am a little nervous, and I only trust you will not upbraid me in the future, if things should turn out badly. I will write to Nurse Wortley to-night, and prepare her for your coming to-morrow; she will not be surprised—that is one of Wortley's good traits, she is never taken unawares. God bless me, child, what are you doing?"

For Nancy had gone down on her knees, and was putting her soft, fresh young lips to his hand.

"I can't thank you, I—I can't," she said, brokenly, "but I will do all I can to show my gratitude, indeed—indeed, I will!"

"Of course—nonsense; yes, I know all about that! There—there, my dear; be calm; you are a good child, and I am glad to help you. Now let us ring the bell for Mrs. Deamer, my housekeeper. What! keep your secret? Of course I will; I never do things by halves. Ah! here comes Mrs. Deamer."

And in two minutes Nancy was led away up to one of the old-fashioned bedrooms and tended most pleasantly by the prim housekeeper, who had served Dr. Grantley for over twenty-five years, and who was used to her master's frequent and eccentric fits of generosity and charity.

And down in the study the good doctor was trying to write, but his thoughts would stray to the picture of that distressed young face, with its eyes of wondrous depth and beauty, and its tremulous lips.

"Yes, I'm glad," he declared, after a while. "She has been out of her element; she is too delicate a flower for blows and coarse words. How her poor little heart has been hurt! I should like to give that fellow Moss a good hiding! Well, she shall be looked after, and if she does not rise above all this, then I am a Dutchman, that's all!"

CHAPTER III.

Laburnum Cottage was just outside Ripstone village; it was a tiny, neat abode, with a moderate-sized garden surrounding it, which in the summer was always a sight to behold, for Nurse Wortley was a bit of a gardener, and took tremendous pride in her flowers.

Nancy Hamilton thought she had never seen so sweet a place, even in her dreams, as Laburnum Cottage, when the village fly, containing herself and Mrs. Deamer, drew up at the gate, and she won her way right into the owner's heart by her few exclamations of genuine delight. Dr. Grantley had helped the girl both nobly and well. He had despatched her away from his house very early in the morning, under Mrs. Deamer's care, first putting a sum of money in Nancy's hand, and bidding her get such clothes as she would need, and keep the rest, and then before she could utter a word of thanks he was gone.

So while Mrs. Chaplin sat behind the counter, wondering unceasingly what had happened to her

husband's niece, and Thomas Moss was wandering about half out of his mind with rage and fear, Nancy and Mrs. Deamer were not far away, making the necessary purchases, and then going comfortably to the station, to travel down to Ripstone by a midday train.

She was welcomed heartily by Nurse Wortley, and when she stood alone in the neat, fragrant, though simple room that would henceforth be her home, she went down on her knees and thanked God from the bottom of her heart.

Mrs. Deamer returned to London almost immediately, and Nancy gave her a letter she had written to her uncle, which the housekeeper was to post in town, so that there should be no possibility of their finding a clue.

She wrote only a few simple words.

"Dear Uncle Henry: When you receive this I shall have left your house for ever. You must forgive me, dear, if I seem ungrateful; indeed I am not. I can never forget how good you have been to me, and that you took me when no one else would own me, but, dear Uncle Henry, I am not happy in your house, and I know if I stay there until I die it will never be better. I am quite safe, and about to earn my living. I cannot tell you more, only believe that I shall never forget that I am the daughter of a soldier and a gentleman, and that I shall pray to grow more like my sweet, dead mother, whose memory shall never be disgraced by her child's doings. God guard you, dear uncle, and grant that you may have health and happiness.

"Your loving niece, Nancy."

She stood at the gate and watched the fly, with kind-hearted Mrs. Deamer, roll out of sight, and then she turned back to the house.

"You must come and have some tea, miss," Nurse Wortley said, as the girl entered the house again; "and I hope you will be comfortable with me."

She took the doctor's protegee to be what she really was, a lady, and in the simple brown dress which she had bought scarce an hour ago, with a white collar at her throat and cuffs at her wrists, Nancy looked the embodiment of a refined gentlewoman, thoroughly justifying the respectful courtesy Nurse Wortley bestowed on her.

Nancy at once offered to get tea ready, but a neat little handmaiden was summoned from the kitchen, and for the first time since her childish days her heroine found herself waited on, instead of waiting. "But you must let me do some work; I am used to it," she said, as she sat down to the fragrant tea, and she held out her small, roughened hands.

Nurse Wortley shook her comely head.

"No, no, Miss Hamilton. Dr. Grantley tells me that you will study with the schoolmistress down in the village; so, between that and

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EGOTISM.

Of all the bores about the worst Is he who tells his troubles first.

Who will insist on being heard, And you cannot get in a word.

Whose tale of woes for hours endures, While you are aching to tell yours.

Who talks and talks about himself And puts you meanwhile on the shelf.

Nor thinks of giving way to you, Although you have some troubles too.

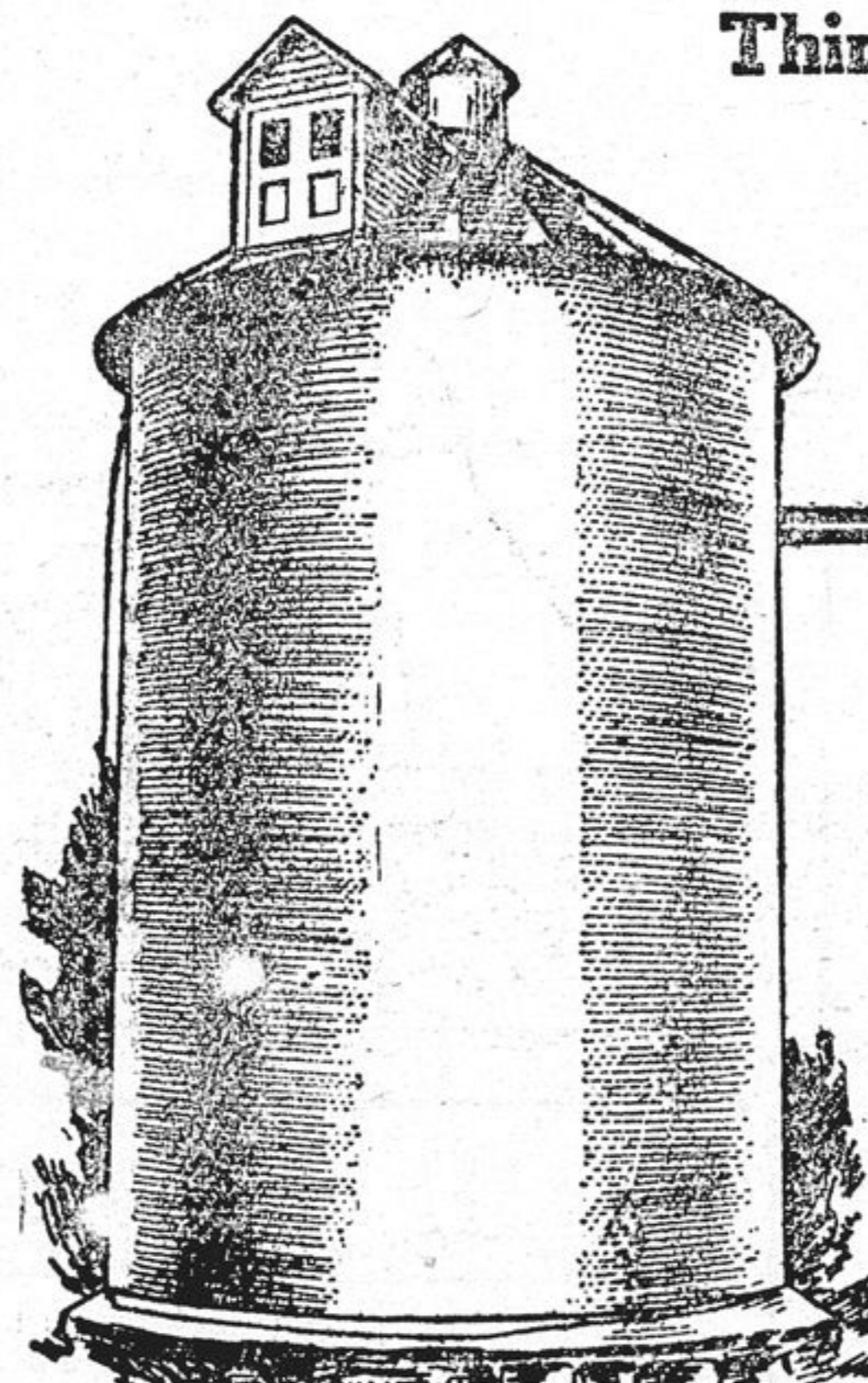
Of all the bores he heads the list— Confound the blooming egotist!

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