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LADY NORA

(Continued from page 3.)

them again - "to a masked ball. What a place for a respectable matron to go! A masked ball!" "Can't I go up and see uncle?" Yolande asks hurriedly. "Is the doctor with him now? What does he think? Mightn't I go up, aunt?" "Of course you can if you please, child," Mrs. Sarjent answers, with gloomy assurance. "He won't know you from Adam! He's quite unscientific, you know - an apoplectic seizure, Doctor Corder says. Well, well, go if you wish."

"Oh, aunt, you don't think poor uncle will die, do you?" Yolande asks, crying. Mrs. Sarjent stands on the step above her, and looks down at the weeping girl. "Indeed, my dear, there's every probability that he'll die!" she replies, with grim decisiveness. "I've seen several taken like him, and I never saw but one taken this way recover. I said so to Wilmot."

"Hadm't I better telegraph for aunt Keren?" Yolande asks sobbing. And then Mrs. Sarjent, thinking that perhaps the girl is "brought down enough," as she phrases it to herself, says, with blunt kindness - "No, child, not I have written to her to say that uncle Silas isn't well, and that she had better come up to town to-morrow morning, and Wilmot will meet her at the station and break the news to her."

"Thank you," poor Yolande says meekly, realizing how greatly she needs one to feel for her individual sorrow and distress. He who ought to be by her side is far distant, knowing nothing, caring nothing for her sadness and unreasoning, rises against him in her heart, making her yet more wretched than she is.

"Unless he writes lovingly to me - unless he comes to see me - I will not even tell him of my trouble until it is all over," she decides in passion. "He will be sorry for me and angry with himself, then - perhaps!"

And then they go into the quiet room, with the shaded lights showing the lividly-pale disfigured face lying on the snowy pillows. With sad fixed eyes she gazes at him, unable even to speak, and conscious only of a dull longing to be left alone with him, to nurse him, and lay those iced bandages on his head, and try to relieve that terrible labored breathing. But there is a grave business-like nurse already at her uncle's bedside, and Yolande has no place there.

"Might I stay and help you?" she asks timidly. The nurse looks surprised, but says politely - "I don't require any help to-night, madam."

"But might I just sit up with you," persists Yolande, "in case uncle came to his senses?" "My dear, there isn't the slightest necessity for you to do anything of the kind!" Mrs. Sarjent interposes curtly. "Is there, nurse? Of course not! I am going to sit up until after the turn of the night."

"Then I shall sit up too!" Yolande declares obstinately. "You do not suppose I am going to bed to sleep comfortably when uncle may be dying?" "My dear," rejoins Mrs. Sarjent, with a pitying smile of superior knowledge, "unless there is a favorable change, he won't know anyone again. You had better go to bed, Yolande. You will only make yourself ill, and become another invalid to be nursed in the house!" concludes Mrs. Sarjent, in a satisfied business-like tone. "Isn't it so, nurse?"

"Yes, ma'am," the nurse answers, evidently seeing the wisdom of agreeing with Mrs. Sarjent. Yolande offers no further opposition, but goes away to her own room, changes her dress for a warm cashmere loose gown and a thick vicuna shawl, and about twelve o'clock quietly comes downstairs once more.

From the dining-room, the door of which stands ajar, comes the sound of voices in low earnest conversation - her cousin Wilmot is speaking, Yolande can tell. She fancies she hears her own name uttered, but does not heed it, as she pauses under the hall lamp to read again the letter she has just written to her husband.

She has repented of her first resolution, unable to deny herself the happiness and comfort of even telling him her troubles on paper, knowing too that, now he is so near, he will surely come at once to see her, if but for a short visit, and she thirsts and hungers for a sight of his face. She has not asked him to come, or even hinted a wish that he may come unless his inclinations bring him. It is only a letter of love, of tender regrets that their interview was so short, and the recital of poor uncle Silas' sudden seizure.

"I know you will feel for me, dear-est," concludes this gentle little letter from a wife to a husband whose conduct has been far from faultless, containing not one word of reproach, expressed or implied - "you know dear uncle was like a father to me."

"Your loving wife, Yolande." She slips it back into the envelope, kisses the place his fingers will touch in drawing it out, and fastens down the flap before dropping it into the post bag each morning to carry to the pillar post; and then quite suddenly the memory of that other letter starts up before her vividly - the first letter she ever wrote to her husband - just as wifely and tender, just as loving and submissive as this one, pleading humbly too for his love and his protection, which he utterly disregarded.

A sigh which is almost a sob rises from the depths of her heart, she draws back her letter irresolutely, and puts it into her pocket. "I will wait until to-morrow," she says.

dad as they are, - Mrs. Sarjent is saying in those self-satisfied tones of hers, as Yolande softly enters the room. "It's a good thing now that she hasn't a drag on her in the shape of a good-for-nothing fine gentleman. Oh, my goodness, Yolande, what a fright you've given me! I thought you were in bed and asleep long ago, child!"

"What reason had you to think so, aunt Sarjent?" Yolande asks gravely. And Mrs. Sarjent's eyelids, with their scanty lashes, blink nervously beneath the cold light of the dark clear eyes.

"Well, my dear, I'm only afraid you'll mock yourself up," she answers in a conciliating tone, fidgeting a little; "and-and-you may have a good deal to try you yet, dear."

The tone is curiously pitying, and Mrs. Sarjent's broad face is full of good nature and sympathy; but Yolande is too resentful of her words and her sympathy to care even to look at her just now. She hears Wilmot speak, and she grows angrier.

"Sit in this chair, cousin, won't you?" he says, jumping up and drawing a large easy chair forward. "It's the nicest chair in the room, I think. We told the housemaid to light the fire before she went to bed - wasn't it a good thought? One gets so chilly sitting up at the turn of the night."

"I am very sorry you and aunt should both think it necessary to sit up and lose your night's rest," Yolande responds stiffly. "I am quite warm, thank you, I do not care to sit so near the fire."

She gets as far away from the big easy chair as she can, her heart swelling with pain and indignation against Wilmot Sarjent, as well as against her mother, who has been a friend to her as long as she can remember. They have been speaking against Dallas Glyne, both of them - Wilmot Sarjent, with his broad fleshy face and white eyelashes and ginger-colored whiskers, as well as his mother. The idea of Wilmot Sarjent daring to sneer at Dallas Glyne!

The girl's wife's heart beats fiercely in angry resolve. They shall see! Within twenty-four hours they shall see Dallas as master here until poor uncle Silas recovers! She will ask him to sit in that very arm chair where his legs stretched out before him most inelegantly, and his big clumsy feet displayed to the utmost extent. She is the heiress of the house, and Dallas Glyne is her lord and master, and they shall see him receive all honor and obedience from her and her servants - they shall see him the head of the house and every one in it.

She smiles scornfully as she thinks how amazed and confounded they will be. How little they dream that her husband is within two miles of her! How well it is she did not send that letter! She will write another - urgent, sensible, business-like - stating the exact position of affairs, and asking her husband for his presence and help. When once he comes she will keep him - oh, she will keep him! If love and wealth and every comfort and luxury can tempt him to forego his pride and every independence, she shall be tempted!

She smiles again to herself with gladness and tenderness to think how she will tempt Dallas; and looking up suddenly she meets again those vexatious pitying eyes - two pairs of them - fastened on her.

Mrs. Sarjent averts hers with a loud sigh, and stares into the fire, and Wilmot averts his with a sudden nervous jerk of his body, and even his big feet go through several spasmodic motions.

"Get your cousin a glass of wine, Wilmot," Mrs. Sarjent says in a compassionate tone. "No, thank you," Yolande declines curtly. "My maid brought me a cup of tea a little while since."

"A glass of wine would have done you ever so much more good," Mrs. Sarjent says patronizingly. "You had better have one now, Yolande - a glass of good port. No? Very well, my dear, if you won't, you won't, then - that's all."

There is a silence for several minutes, and Yolande fancies she sees the mother and son exchanging glances. "I hope I haven't been rude," Yolande thinks; "but I will not bear that tone from aunt Sarjent - pitying me and slandering Dallas, and calling him names behind his back! She is going to say something more unpleasant. I can tell by a glance at her."

For Mrs. Sarjent is coughing little dry coughs, and fidgeting with the jet fringe of her dress, and looking about at the walls and pictures and furniture as if she had never seen them before.

"You needn't look altogether at the black side of things, mother," remonstrates Wilmot. "Uncle Silas will get about again, please goodness; and I hope things are not quite so bad with him as they seem just now. Uncle Silas has had heavy losses in the City, cousin," he explains hurriedly to Yolande, who is looking from one to the other, breathless, wild-eyed, cold with apprehension of some unknown fresh misfortune. "Things have been going wrong with him for some time; some speculation."

"Which no one with an ounce of sense ought ever to have looked at!" interposes Mrs. Sarjent sharply. "Well, we hadn't an ounce of sense - neither uncle Silas nor I - her son says patiently - "for we did look at it, and I dabbled in it - worse luck! - and he'd a great deal more than I - and we both lost."

"Yes; and you may thank your mother you didn't lose ten times what you did!" Mrs. Sarjent says, with stern satisfaction. "Has uncle lost much?" Yolande asks, almost prepared to be angry with them for the terror they have made her feel during these last few moments. It is only a money-loss after all - only a unlucky City speculation - some thousands of pounds perhaps. As if that mattered to a rich man like uncle Silas! Perhaps they may even have to retrench - give up this large house and dispense with the carriage and horses for a year or two. Well, what matter? But Dallas? She had thought of surrounding him with every luxury and comfort; she had thought of seeing him master of this fine establishment. Her womanly fancy and imagination have sketched out a thousand pleasant schemes - which have Dallas for their centre; and loss of money may mean loss of all these.

"Has uncle lost much?" she asks, sighing. "All!" Mrs. Sarjent answers emphatically. "No, Wilmot - smooth no use in trying to gloss and smooth it over!" - as her son looks at her with a reproachful glance. "When a thing has to be faced, let it be faced, I say, and no shilly-shally about it! Your uncle's lost a frightful lot of money, Yolande, and that's the plain truth; and you'd best know it at once, and be sure of it. Nigh forty thousand pounds with another and another - and (To be Continued.)"

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