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A Terrible Temptation

OR, THE FAMILY RING

CHAPTER X.

On rare occasions when Mrs. Anderson felt, to use her own favorite expression, "up to it," she gave a large At Home, to which all her numerous friends and acquaintances were bidden; and for which she found herself able to rise from her couch, and take a wonderfully active part, for so sad an invalid, in the entertainment of the evening.

It was at one of his mother's parties that Miles had met Sister Grace for the first time, except in the routine of duty, since Hope left him; and seeing her tall form and sweet face across the long drawing-room, he made his way towards her, soothed by a sudden sense that here was a woman who would rest instead of rasping him as his mother was apt to do.

The weeks of suspense and anxiety since Hope's flight had left traces upon him which even time would scarcely wipe out. His face had grown lined and careworn, and he had the appearance of being much older than he really was; many threads of grey showed in his dark hair, and his eyes had lost some of their old alertness, and had a hard, strained expression which it hurt Grace's tender heart to see. That during all these past weeks he had practically ignored her, excepting as sister of his ward, to whom "Good afternoon" must be said, and possibly a professional question or two asked, had hurt her more than she cared to own; and only a sympathetic understanding of the misery, which like an open sore cannot be touched, made her realize that he could not bear to speak of his wife at all.

The tide of gossip which had ebbed and flowed round Miles and his wife when the news of her flight became public, was naturally known to Grace, and the knowledge of how bitter such publicity, such gossip, must be to Miles, at first roused in Grace a feeling of strong resentment against the doctor's wife, followed by a juster estimate of the difficulties of that dual life which Miles had attempted.

When she received Mrs. Anderson's invitation for this evening, Grace's first instinct had been to refuse; but next came an overpowering desire to see Miles, in some other way than as the grave and formal visiting physician; perhaps to have an opportunity of getting into touch with him again, and returning to their old friendly footing; and the invitation was accepted.

She had known the elder Mrs. Anderson for many years, and had been greeted by her to-night with the words:

"Oh, my dear Grace, if you have the slightest influence over Miles, do persuade him to go away for a time. This shameful, shocking business about his wretched wife has upset him terribly."

Grace looked into the pretty foolish face of Miles' mother, and a faint irritation stole over her, listening to that thin querulous voice.

"I think Doctor Anderson is the sort of man who would rather stick to his work when he is in trouble," she answered gently, "and I can't help agreeing with him. I know if I were in any trouble, the last remedy I should adopt would be going away into idleness. I should want to work doubly hard."

"You are as bad as Miles," the elder woman said plaintively. "I have done my best to persuade him to accept a most kind invitation he has had from Prettowe, from Lady Dimsdale. Mr. Dimsdale is here to-night and tells me his aunt is most anxious to have Miles down there. But my son is the most obstinate of men, he won't go!"

"I understand his feelings," Grace spoke slowly, her eyes roving over the pretty softly lighted drawing-room and its throngs of guests: "he prefers to go with the daily routine, and not blazon out his grief to the world."

"Grief!" Mrs. Anderson's tone was tart, "my own opinion, and I have told Miles so several times, is that he ought to be thankful that miserable wife of his has left him. The marriage was a mistake from beginning to end; she made my poor boy utterly wretched, and now, of course, she has made him the talk of the town by her wretched, ungrateful behaviour."

Grace was profoundly thankful that a fresh batch of arrivals here put a stop to the garrulous flow of Mrs. Anderson's conversation, and she hurried away impatiently to the upper end of the room, where she could watch the people from a quiet corner, and it was here that Miles caught sight of her later in the evening.

His brow lightened, his eyes grew brighter; the restful element in Sister Grace's character had always appealed to him. It appealed to him doubly now that every nerve semed on edge, now that he was convinced with such certainty that everybody was discussing him and his unfortunate essay in matrimony. Disinclined as he had been to come to the party, a spirit of bravado had forced him to do so; he would not let the world suppose that he owned either to a broken heart or a remorseful conscience. Yet though he was not suffering from the pangs of the one, he was surely enduring the tortures of the other, and Grace instinctively realized this. When at last he had elbowed his way to her side, he said abruptly:

"You have heard of my wife's leaving me?"

"Yes—I heard. I am terribly sorry."

"For her or for me?" he exclaimed harshly.

"For you both," was her gentle answer; "your suspense must be dreadfully hard to bear."

The sympathy in her eyes met the misery in his, and some of their hardness softened, his voice grew less harsh.

"It is the suspense that is almost intolerable," he said, motioning her to a seat in a big couch and sitting down beside her. "If I only knew she was safe and well—somewhere; if I could only be sure she had not fallen into any of the traps laid for ignorance and innocence—I could bear it better. The suspense is almost intolerable."

"You have never heard of her?"

—"Never! I have no more notion where she went to when she left my house, or what has become of her since than you have. I have left no stone unturned to try and discover her whereabouts; I communicated with the police at once, the most searching investigation has been made, but it has all been a failure. She has vanished as utterly as though the earth had opened and swallowed her up."

"She had no friends anywhere?" Grace's voice was grave and thoughtful.

"None—anywhere, as far as I am aware; I may say I am sure she had not; she has often told me so, and Hope is eminently truthful. I could think of absolutely no place in which to find her excepting the lodgings in which she lived with her mother, but the landlady there had seen and heard nothing of her."

"If she wished to elude you she would not have gone there," was Grace's shrewd answer, and Miles stirred restlessly on his seat.

"Why did she wish to elude me?" he said impatiently; "I tried to make her happy. I gave her a home, and everything else I could think of for her gratification—but it did not satisfy her. I seem to have made mistakes throughout." His voice dropped to such a tone of despondency that the heart of the woman by his side ached almost unbearably.

"I cannot but believe that it will all come right for you in the end," she said; "surely, surely some day you will find your poor little wife, and be able to begin again."

"Begin again?" he exclaimed hoarsely and vehemently; "do you suppose that after all this we can begin again as if nothing had happened? It has been a mistake throughout—I wish to God I had been less of a machine, let foot in my certainty of knowing what was best!"

"It seemed best at the time," said the gentle soothing voice.

"You rest me when you talk to me," he said suddenly, his eyes fastening on her face with a curious intent gaze that sent the color flashing over her face. "I might have found the best—and—I have missed it by my own incomprehensible folly."

The words, and the tone in which those words were spoken, set Grace's pulses beating wildly, as did the look of scarcely veiled admiration in his eyes. But she was not the sort of woman who would ever try to carve her own happiness out of another's misery; she looked straight into Miles' face with eyes in which was no expression, but that of quiet interest.

"Don't you think," she said, "that it is an added foolishness to look back and regret past follies, which are unalterable. I feel it is very impertinent of me to say such a thing to you, because I look on you as a strong man—but—to me there is always something of weakness in remorse. It is not the strongest people who are perpetually remorseful and regretful over past mistakes."

He looked silently at her for an instant, a little smile creeping about the firm lines of his mouth.

"So you call me a strong man?" he said after an instant.

"A very strong man," was the answer; "but you will show weakness if you spend your time now in futile regrets."

"Do you think, as I fancy the rest of the world thinks, that I ill-treated my wife until she was forced to leave me?" Intense bitterness was audible in his accents, and his listener turned her head aside that he might not see the pity in her eyes.

"You attempted a very difficult experiment," she answered slowly; "it is scarcely surprising that it has not succeeded. It was not an easy position either for your wife or yourself, perhaps——"

"Perhaps what?"

"You sometimes forget how young she was, scarcely more than a child, and a child accustomed to a great deal of petting and spoiling. Perhaps she missed it all."

"You hit hard, sister," he exclaimed, the familiar hospital palliation dropping naturally from his lips, "but you hit true—and—whether it is strong or weak of me, I shall carry remorse with me to my dying day, because I failed to make the child happy."

His voice had dropped almost to a whisper, over the last words it shook terribly, and Grace saw that his hands were working nervously.

"Your mother is very anxious that you should go away for a change," she said, after a little pause; "she thinks you need a rest."

"Pshaw!" he answered with a touch of his former impatience, "my mother has change and rest on the brain. Surely you can understand"—he turned towards her impatiently—"that work is my only salvation."

"Yes—I understand."

"That good kind soul, Lady Dimsdale, has begged me to go to Prettowe; I see her nephew is here to-night and will probably renew the invitation. They are the kindest and pleasantest of hosts—but—I couldn't stand the loafing life of a country house, and long idle summer days. The more work I have just now, the better I am pleased."

"I quite understand," Grace repeated gently, and Miles gave her a grateful glance, but there was no opportunity for further speech, Grace's attention being claimed by other people.

Miles moved away and was crossing the room again, intent on making his escape as soon as he could do so with decency, when a hand was laid lightly on his shoulder.

"Doctor Anderson, I am glad to have run across you at last," said a pleasant voice, and Miles, facing round sharply, found himself vis-a-vis with Mr. Dimsdale.

"I thought you were sure to be here," that gentleman continued; "I have come with the Fortescues, old friends of mine who turn out to be also old friends of your mother. Now, look here, Doctor Anderson, you look fagged out. Work is no sinecure in this weather; can't I persuade you to change your mind, and come down to Prettowe, at least for a week end?

Miles smiled and shook his head.

"It is most awfully good of you and of Lady Dimsdale," he answered, "but my hands are full at this moment, I cannot spare myself a day."

"Not even a Sunday?"

"Sunday is not exactly my day of rest," and Miles laughed. "I do occasionally manage to get to church, but you would hardly believe how often I am sent for on Sunday, nor what a ghastly accumulation of letters and papers have to be sorted then, simply because I have not a second of time to attend to them on any other day."

"My uncle and aunt will be disappointed, and so am I," the younger man said courteously; "but we shan't let you off altogether. Some day you must come. Some day you will probably be sent for professionally and in a violent hurry, for I tell my aunt she will kill herself if she allows our new local quack to doctor her."

"You have a new local man?" Miles spoke carelessly; it was a matter of complete indifference to him whether Prettowe had an old or young doctor, or none at all.

"Yes—a fellow called Radford, a terrible little outsider with a stout wife and an appalling family. They live just outside the park gates, and the family is allowed to disport itself inside the park at the cost, I never came across a more rabbit lot of young ruffians."

"Spoilt children," The doctor's voice was still indifferent.

"Spoilt, I should think they are! Young monkeys!" Dimsdale spoke with some vehemence. "They have been dragging about an unfortunate tired looking nursery governess lately. I fancy they make a change in that department every month."

"I pity governesses," Miles said more warmly; "poor souls, they live such grinding monotonous lives with no future before them; which reminds me, you were asking me some weeks ago about companions, I know a lady now who might suit your aunt."

As he spoke, Anderson laid a hand on the other man's arm, and drew him aside into an alcove, and the light from the electric lamp fell full upon a ring he wore on the little finger of his left hand. The ring was an unusual one for a man, a stone of peculiar color, surmounted by a tiny coronet of diamonds, and with the word "Amor" carved across its surface.

The flash of light upon it drew Dimsdale's attention to it, and he stopped short in the sentence he was beginning, and stared silently at the jewel.

"Excuse me," he said suddenly, "but your ring attracted my attention; it—it is so very unusual—and so extraordinarily like——"

"It is an unusual ring," Miles answered hurriedly, "it belonged to my—to my wife." He brought out the words with difficulty, and the other, mindful of the tragedy in the doctor's household, said quickly:—

"Oh! I beg your pardon, it was extremely rude of me to comment on it at all, but it is so remarkable in itself—and—the extraordinary thing is that it is the exact counterpart of one that has been in our family for years."

"Indeed?" Miles felt but a faint interest in the Dimsdale family jewels, and it merely struck him as a coincidence hardly worth noticing that Hope's ring and one of the Dimsdale rings should be alike.

"It is very curious," Dimsdale went on speaking in a puzzled voice as though he could not tear himself away from the subject; "you know—or probably you do not know, that a ring like the one you wear has for centuries been our betrothal ring. I had no notion that another existed in the world."

"Very strange," Miles murmured, "but this ring, as I say, belonged to my wife, who inherited it from her mother."

"Quite so—quite so. Obviously ours was at some time copied without the knowledge of the family. There is a curious custom attached to our betrothal ring. It is always given by the heir of the house to his bride, and at her death it is bound to pass on again to the heir. It is family property and may not be willed away."

Miles murmured something vague and polite about the interest of old family customs, and then resumed the interrupted conversation to expatiate on the merits of the lady he wished to recommend as companion to Lady Dimsdale, after which he contrived to make his way from the crowded rooms, and to walk rapidly home.

His thoughts were in a strange jumble. The mention of his wife's name had aroused in him afresh all the agony of remorse he had been undergoing for weeks, whilst the remembrance of Grace's face, of her gentleness and sympathy, awoke in him a passion of regret, regret which he honestly did his best to stifle, as being disloyal to the wife he had lost.

"But it might have been," his heart cried out, "it might have been if I had not thrown away my freedom and the happiness of my life for a girl who cares nothing for me. And I didn't even succeed in making her happy," was the end of his bitter reflections.

He let himself into his own house, and entered his study with the heavy tread of one who carries a heavy heart. A pile of letters lay on his table, the top one he opened hastily. It was written from Scotland Yard, stated baldly that every effort to discover the whereabouts of Mrs. Miles Anderson had proved a complete failure, and more than hinted that if the lady left home in a fit of either temper or misery, it was more than possible she had made away with herself altogether.

Miles flung down the note, and sank into his armchair, burying his face in his hands on the table before him; vision after vision of Hope rising before him to awaken fresh remorse, a new agony of regret. He saw her first the small untidy girl in the grimy lodging-house, her hair curling and wild, her short frock fastened in some incongruous fashion of her own, her big eyes wide with fear and wonder. He saw her next sobbing her heart out in childish unrestrained grief over her mother's death, and he recalled with a pang the irritation produced in him by those ungovernable sobs; the vexed sense of helplessness that had leapt over him when she stood before him in her weird mourning, looking at him with her pathetic tear-stained face. And then came a vision of her as his wife; the unruly curls brushed back into a straightness that maddened him almost as much as their old untidiness had done; the sallowness of the small face rendered more marked by the colors of the gowns she chose; the wistful eyes that had seemed to ask something of him which he either could not or would not give.

(To be Continued.)

MURDER FOLLOWED FUN.

Italian Quarrel in a Back Yard Ended by Stilleto.

A despatch from Montreal says: An Italian named Antonio de Rieca was fatally murdered on Friday evening by another Italian named Micela Viti. The two men, who had been friends, were out of work for some time, and had considerable drinking and loafing together. They were wrestling in the backyard of their boarding-house on Cadieux street, when their fun changed to anger. Friends rushed out to part the two, and an Italian named Pietro Sello had his thumb bitten off by Viti, who then drew his stiletto and stabbed possibly Lucca. His stiletto pierced his victim's heart, who expired at once. Viti coolly came, wiped his stiletto and disappeared.

IMMIGRATION RETURNS.

Nearly a Quarter of a Million People in Last Ten Months.

A despatch from Ottawa says: For the first ten months of the current fiscal year, ending with January, the total immigration for Canada was 240,837, an increase of [illegible] as compared with the corresponding period of 1906-07. The total immigration via ocean ports was 191,208, an increase of 56,793, or 42 per cent. The total immigration from the United States was 49,647, a decrease of 1,063, or 3 per cent. During January the total immigration via ocean ports was 2,386, and from the United States 2,418. Of those who arrived at ocean ports during the ten months 114,166 were men, 40,781 were women and 36,261 were children under twelve years of age.

TOWN SITES FOR SALE.

Grand Trunk Pacific Will Offer Some Bargains.

A despatch from Montreal says: The Grand Trunk Pacific will put sixty-two town sites west of Winnipeg on sale simultaneously in the spring. Already three of these town sites are ready for sale, namely, Rivers, a divisional point, 142 miles west of Winnipeg; Nokomi, 382 miles west of Winnipeg, and Tofield, on Beaver Lake, fifty miles east of Edmonton. At the divisional points the prices of town lots will range from $100 to $500, while in smaller places they will run much lower, although the rates for the latter places have not yet been fixed. Lots will not be auctioned off at the ordinary town sales, but will be sold at fixed prices, and will be allotted in the order of precedence of the application. Already a great number of purchasers have sent in requisitions to the office in charge of the sale. This, of course, will not apply to Prince Rupert, the Pacific terminal, where there will be a historic sale of building lots for the future city when the road is ready to open the auction sale.

FEWER LOANS AND DEPOSITS.

January Bank Returns Indicate a General Curtailment.

A despatch from Ottawa says: The January statement of Canadian chartered banks was issued by the Department of Finance on Thursday. It indicates that the process of shortening sail was persisted in during the month. Thus, as compared with December, the banks decreased their note circulation from $77,504,398 to $66,871,376; current loans from $556,588,451 to $546,957,658; saving deposits decreased from $402,626,076 to $399,407,294, and deposits on demand fell from $157,185,414 to $146,757,963. Thus the liabilities of the banks were reduced in all by about nine millions.

BROKE BABY'S ARM.

Man Named Babcock of Murvale Charged With Cruelty.

A despatch from Kingston says: A man named Babcock of Murvale was arrested on Thursday, charged with inhuman treatment of his babe, four months old. Because it cried, it is alleged, he twisted one of its arms till it broke. The mother and infant were taken to the Kingston General Hospital.

LEADING MARKETS

BREADSTUFFS.

Toronto, Feb. 25.—Manitoba Wheat—No. 1 northern $1.16½; No. 2 northern, $1.13; feed wheat, 66c; No. 2 feed, 61c, lake ports.

Ontario Wheat—No. 2 white, 95c to 95½c outside; No. 2 red, 95c to 95½c; No. 2 mixed, 94c; goose, 91c to 92c.

Barley—No. 2, 71c to 73c, according to quality.

Corn—Firm; No. 3 yellow American, 63c to 63½c, Toronto freights. Old corn, about 72c, none offering; inferior, 62½c to 63c.

Peas—86c to 87c.

Rye—No. 2, 84c to 85c.

Buckwheat—No. 2, 65½c to 66c.

Oats—No. 2 white, 52c to 53c outside, 54c on track Toronto; No. 2 mixed, 49c to 50c outside.

Flour — Manitoba patents, special brands, $6; seconds, $5.40; strong bakers' $5.30. Winter wheat patents, very dull around $5.50.

Bran—Full cars, $24 per ton. When part of a car the price ranges from $22.50 up.

Shorts—$24, buyers' bags.

COUNTRY PRODUCE.

Poultry—	
Young turkeys, extra choice	13c to 15c
Young geese	9c to 11c
Young ducks	9c to 11c
Chickens, choice	9c to 11c
Old fowl	6c to 8c
Inferior chicks and fowls	5c to 7c
Butter—	
Creamery, prints	30c to 31c
do solids	29c to 30c
Dairy prints	25c to 27c
do large rolls	23c to 24c
do solids	22c to 23c
Inferior	20c to 21c

Eggs—Storage, 21c to 22c per dozen, in case lots; selects, 25c to 26c; new-laid, 28c to 29c.

Cheese—Steady at 13½c for large and 13¾c for twins, in job lots here.

Beans—Firm; $1.70 to $1.75 for primes and $1.80 to $1.85 for hand-picked.

Potatoes—70c to 75c per bag in car lots on track here.

Honey—Strained steady at 11c to 12c per pound for 60-pound pails, and 12c to 13c for 5 to 10-pound pails. Combs at $1.75 to $2.50 per dozen.

Baled Straw—Slow at about $10 per ton on track here.

Baled Hay—Timothy is quoted at $16 to $17 in car lots on track here.

PROVISIONS.

Pork—Short cut, $22 to $22.50 per barrel; mess, $18 to $18.50.

Lard—Tierces, 11½c to 12c; tubs, [illegible] 12½c.

Smoked and Dry Salted Meats—Long clear bacon, [illegible] tons and [illegible]; hams, [illegible]; backs, [illegible]; rolls, [illegible]; breakfast bacon, [illegible]; hams, large [illegible]; medium [illegible]; [illegible] to [illegible]; backs, [illegible]; shoulders, [illegible]; [illegible] to [illegible]; Windsor [illegible]; [illegible] to [illegible]; [illegible] hams, [illegible]; shoulders, [illegible]; [illegible] to [illegible]; [illegible] to [illegible]; [illegible] to