A Dark Shadow;

Or, A Coming Vengeance

CHAPTER IV.—(Cont'd.).

He sat on his Committee—a dreary business, which any man with the intelligence of a lop-eared rabbit could have settled by himself in ten minutes—then, with a sigh of relief, made his way out of the stifling room into the fresh air. As he did so Big Ben chimed the half-hour after twelve: it was too soon for lunch, and he turned towards St. Jame's Park for a stroll during which he could think over some points on the subject of the Blue Book he had been studying last night; then suddenly he thought of the little street singer, and resolved to face the probability of another rebuff, and inquire after her.

He made his way to Benson's Rents, and found the door, which had been shut so unceremoniously in his face last night, now open. He knocked two or three times without getting any response; but suddenly he heard a voice inquire impatiently:

"Well, wot is it?"

Looking down in the direction of the voice, he saw a young woman's smutty face peering at him indignantly from between the banisters of the basement stairs.

"I am inquiring for a person—a fiddler——" he began.

"Second floor back," said the slavey, and the face instantly disappeared, though Clive could hear murmurs of reproach and complaint until they were drowned by the slamming of a door in the basement. After a moment or two of hesitation, he went up the rickety stairs, and knocked at a door on the second floor. It was a moment or two before he received any answer; then a low voice said, "Come in," and he entered.

In a low chair beside a handful of fire sat the girl he had rescued from the hooligans. She was leaning back with her shawl wrapped round her as if she were cold; her face was very pale, and her large, dark eyes met his with a startled questioning; she rose, gripping the arm of the chair, and continued to gaze at him with surprise and an expression that would have been one of fear but for a touch of something that looked like a shy pleasure. The color rose to the clear olive of her face, and accentuated its girlish beauty; her lips opened, as if she would speak; but she said nothing, and only continued to gaze at him.

"I hope I have not startled you?" said Clive. "I came to ask after you, and was told to walk up. I hope you are not ill from last night's adventure, that you were not seriously hurt by that young ruffian."

The tone, the manner in which he addressed her, were just those in which he would have spoken to a girl of his own class; they had none of that fatal and foolish condescension which some persons consider it proper to assume when they are speaking to their inferiors. And the girl seemed to respond to his inborn courtesy, to rise to the occasion, as it were; the color still struggled in her cheeks, and her bosom still fluttered; but she said quite calmly, and with a self-possession and grace that were not lost upon Clive:

"Thank you, it is very kind of you, sir. Won't you sit down?"

Clive drew forward a chair and waited for her to resume her seat; again just as he would have done if she had been a girl of his own class.

"You haven't answered my question," he said with a smile.

She smiled in response. "Oh, no, I am not ill; it was rather a nasty cut, but Tibby saw to it—it was not bad enough for a doctor." She paused, then went on. "I am quite ashamed when I think of—of last night. It was foolish of me to be so frightened and to faint; but I am always nervous when I am singing in the streets." Her eyes were cast down, and her clasped hands closed over each other tightly; then she looked up at him with a quick glance. "I am not obliged to go; don't think that; it is my own free will. Elisha would rather I didn't; indeed, he has been all against it from the first; but——" she looked at him again, almost appealingly, as if she were eager that he should understand—"but I felt that I ought to do something, that I ought to help to earn some money. Elisha is not—not strong. You saw. And sometimes he is not able to play. And I do help them, him and Tibby. People give me money; more money than they give him, Elisha says, when he's alone. But not often as much as you gave me last night. It was—too much. I wanted to thank you for it, and all your kindness to us; but"—again she looked at him appealingly, with a faint apologetic smile—"there was not time."

"No," said Clive, with an answering smile. "But it wasn't necessary to thank me. Your song was worth more than that trifling sum. Is Elisha your father—brother?"

"No," she replied; "he's no relation."

Clive was not surprised at the information. Accustomed as he was to the apparent inconsistencies which were always presenting themselves to him in the lives of the poor people with whom he came in contact, he was struck by the girl's manner, her mode of speech, and her voice; they were distinctly superior to those of the class to which she belonged; they were as free from vulgarity and as strangely inconsistent with her surroundings as her graceful figure and the refined beauty of her face.

"And Tibby?" he asked.

"Tibby is Elisha's daughter," she said, her dark grey eyes growing soft with sympathy and affection. "She calls me her sister, but I am not. I wish I was, for we love each other like sisters; and she is good, oh, very good to me! So is 'Lisha," she dropped the "E" in her earnestness, and Clive liked her all the better for doing so. "I am an orphan. 'Lisha found me under the archway one night when I was a baby; and he has taken care of me ever since; adopted me, don't you call it? He taught me to sing. He is a great musician; you heard him play? But he doesn't play so well in the streets as he does at home here. Ah, then it is beautiful—when we are alone, and it is quite quiet. He is nervous in the streets, too; though you wouldn't think it."

"Yes, he is a very fine player," said Clive. "I knew that while I was listening to him last night." Her eyes glowed with pleasure, and she leaned forward slightly, and nodded eagerly. "Are you fond of singing?"

"Oh, yes," she replied, with a long breath. "It is"—she looked round as if for a word—"beautiful, especially when I am by myself, and there is no one listening, looking on. I forget everything then, and nothing—nothing seems to matter."

"I can see that you, too, are a musician," said Clive.

"Oh, no," she hastened to say simply. "I can't play anything. Elisha tried to save money enough to buy a piano—he said that it would be so much better for me, that presently I might get some engagements, if I could play my own accompaniments; but he got ill. He is very delicate—and we had to have a doctor, and so the money went; the savings, I mean; and we didn't have the piano. Elisha fretted about it; and he's trying to save again. I wish he wouldn't."

Clive was touched but not surprised by her naive recital. He had long since discovered that self-denial is more apt to flourish in the slums than in Mayfair.

"And what does Tibby do?" he asked. "Is she also a musician?"

The girl laughed; and Clive thought it a good laugh to hear—it was so soft, so innocent, so girlish.

"Oh no; Tibby does not know one note from another, and always mixes up 'Killarney' with 'The Minstrel Boy' if she doesn't hear the words. But she is very clever," she added, as if she were afraid he should think she was disparaging Tibby. "She makes flowers. She works at a factory where they make the artificial ones—for hats and bonnets, you know. She is so quick with her fingers, oh, wonderfully; and has such taste. You should see some of the beautiful things she makes, wreaths and sprays; they look so natural that you feel inclined to smell them—to see if there is any scent," she explained. "But they do not pay her much," she sighed, "not nearly so much as they ought to do. Sometimes we see the flowers that Tibby has made in the shops, and they are marked up ever so much; and poor Tibby only gets eighteenpence a day. Don't you think it is wicked to pay people such a little and get so much for their work?"

"It is very wicked," said Clive, wishing that some of his political friends who called him a visionary, an agitator, and a Don Quixote could see, and listen to, this girl. "It is one of the things some of us are trying to reform."

"Oh, I am glad some one is trying," she said simply. "Tibby will be glad to hear that too. She will be home presently; it is past one, isn't it?"

As Clive was looking at his watch, a voice—he recognized Tibby's—was heard on the staircase, shrilly exclaiming:

"You jest take your hoop off the staire, Jimmy Ryan. You left it there last night, and I fell over it, and landed on my 'ead on the mat. You be orf home with it; these stairs ain't the proper place for you to ply hoop on. And while you're about it, you might ask your mother if she could spare a few minutes from the 'Goat and Compasses' to wash yer face. You'd better tell her from me that soap's cheap, almost as cheap as dirt; it'll be a bit of information for her. I s'pose she doesn't wash yer because she might lose yer, and she wouldn't know yer again with a clean face."

There was a boy's shrill retort, a sound of scuffling on the stairs, the patter of flying bare feet, and a moment afterwards the door was flung open, and Tibby bounced in, flushed but triumphant.

"I don't know wot boys are coming to——" she began as she opened the door; then she stopped suddenly at the sight of Clive, and, with her arms akimbo and her whole attitude and expression an epitome of resentment and indignation, she demanded:

"Well, who are you, and wot do you want?"

Mina went to her, and laid a soothing hand on her arm.

"It is the gentleman who—who was so kind to us last night, Tibby," she said in a low voice.

"Oh, is it?" retorted Tibby. "And wot does he want? Wotever he wants, we don't want no gentlemen here; and so I tell him—strite."

Mina's face flushed; and she looked from one to the other appealingly.

"I am sorry you regard my visit as an intrusion, Miss Tibby," said Clive; "but don't you think you would have considered me rather impolite, not to say hard-hearted and unfeeling, if I had not come to inquire after your—sister, who was very cruelly hurt last night?"

The word sister somewhat mollified Tibby.

"Oh, that's why you've come, is it?" she said, still irately and resentfully. "An' now, as I suppose she's told you, you'd better go. We're very much obliged to you; but we don't want no swells here. Swells is all very well in their way, I dare say, though I never could see wot God made 'em for—any rate, we've got no use for 'em. We're 'ard-working people, and wot you'd call poor; but we're 'onest, an' we've got our proper pride—some of us. 'Ow would you like Mina or me or 'Lisha to bounce into your swagger room jest because we'd been mixed up in a row with you the night before?"

As she spoke she dashed at the cupboard, and produced a cloth, which she proceeded to lay on the table with an emphasis which was significant of her desire for his departure.

"I assure you that I should be very grateful, Miss Tibby," said Clive, "and I should think it very bad manners of you if you did not call."

"Ah, we don't sell manners at this shop," remarked Tibby; "they're too expensive, and take up too much time. And, speaking of time, we're goin' to hev our dinner; cold 'addock and bread and cheese I s'pose you 'aven't had yours?"

"No," said Clive, wondering whether it would be well for him to accept the coming invitation.

"Then I should advise you to go and get it," said Tibby emphatically.

Clive could not refrain from laughing at this unexpected rebuff.

"I thought you were going to ask me to stay," he said good-temperedly.

"Ah, that's about the most foolish thought you've ever had," she retorted. "I'm not naturally a ill-mannered girl, but you'll excuse me saying that there's some people whose room is more welkim than their company."

"I certainly must not stay any longer after that broad hint," said Clive. "Good-bye, Miss Mina; good-bye, Miss Tibby."

Mina took his hand, and held it in her warm little one for a second or two, but Tibby, scorning to affect ignorance of his extended hand, nodded abruptly to him over her shoulder as she went to the cupboard for the cheese.

With a smile and a nod to Mina, as if to assure her that he was not wounded by Tibby's cavalier treatment, Clive left them. On his way down the stairs he met the little hunchback, who was just entering the house, with his violin in its cover under his arm. He started and peered up at Clive, and greeted him with nervous shyness.

"I have just been to inquire after your daughter," said Clive. "I am glad to find that she is not so badly hurt as I feared."

"Thank you; sir; it is very kind of you," said Elisha. "It was a cruel blow. Mina's not like some girls; she's delicate-like and timid; not delicate in the way of health, I don't mean; she hasn't had a day's illness since she was born—I mean," he corrected himself hastily, "since she was a baby."

Clive nodded. "She has been telling me how good you have been to her," he said gravely.

The dwarf reddened. "Not more than she deserves, sir," he said. "Mina's the best and lovingest girl that ever breathed. Not more than she deserves. No; she ain't my child, more's the pity; but I'm as fond of her as if she was; and I'm grateful from my 'eart for the kindness you showed us last night, sir. It isn't every gentleman that would have stopped to mix himself up in a street row, and stand up for poor common people like us, in the way you did; and I'm sure it's very kind of you to call to ask after her."

"That's a mistaken idea of yours, I assure you," said Clive. "Every gentleman," he laid a slight stress on the word, "would have acted last night as I did, and would have done so much less clumsily, I hope. I was very glad I happened to be on the spot to be of some use. Miss Mina tells me you are training her for the musical profession. She has a beautiful voice, a sweet and natural one, and I'm sure she is an apt pupil."

"You're right, sir, you're right," assented the dwarf with tremulous eagerness and enthusiasm. "It's a wonderful voice, or rather it will be when it's properly trained. I do my best; but I—well, I'm only what you see, sir; and she ought to have a good master, one of the big men I've heard of."

"I don't agree with you," said Clive. "I've known many a sweet and promising voice ruined by some of the big men you speak of."

"That's true enough, sir," said Elisha, "at least, it's often the case; but whether it is or not, any other master is out of the question; we must go on as we are. I'm 'oping some day to give her a show, as we call it, at some concert or other. I'm sure she would be a success, because she can sing; yes, she can sing even now; and in a hall, one as was not too large for her young voice, she'd make her mark."

"Yes; I think she would," said Clive; "but, if I may venture to offer any advice to so good a musician——"

"Meaning me, sir?" said the dwarf, with a meek surprise that touched Clive.

"Yes," he said. "I meant you. I should say, don't hurry her; wait until she has grown stronger, less timid——"

"Mina's stronger than she looks, sir; and she's not nervous; that is, she's not when she's singing; she forgets everything then but the music. She's a born musician. But your advice is good and kindly meant, sir; and I'll think on it."

"Do," said Clive.

He held out his hand, and the dwarf took it, shyly and gratefully.

"Oh, by the way," said Clive, over his shoulder, and as he was leaving the house, "I should like to send you a little souvenir, a little remainder of our unpleasant experience last night, or, shall I say, a little thanksgiving for our escape from more serious consequences? You won't be offended?"

The hunchback, with his hand griping the stair-rail, colored and shuffled his feet nervously.

"We're poor enough, sir," he said, "but we've never—I mean to say, we've never took money from any one, excepting what we've earned."

Clive went back and laid his hand on the dwarf's shoulder, his own face as red as Elisha's.

"My dear fellow, I should no more think of offering you money than I should think of—offering you a blow. My little tribute will be laid at the shrine of Music—you understand?—which both you and I reverence and love; and I shall expect you to accept it in that sense. Good-bye, and good luck to you!"

On his way to his rooms he called at the warehouse of a famous pianoforte maker, and spent nearly an hour selecting an instrument. The man who waited on him found Mr. Clive Harvey rather hard to please; for it appeared that he wanted a first-class piano in a cheap and simple case; in fact, he wanted a sixty-guinea instrument that should look like one costing five-and-twenty. He tried a great many—Clive had a good touch and a keen ear—and at last he selected one, gave his cheque for it, and ordered it to be sent to "Miss Mina, No. 19, Benson's Rents."

"Oh, and by the way," he said, "I want it delivered quietly, you know. If you can deliver it without my friends knowing the firm from whence it comes, I should be glad."

The man began to smile knowingly, but his smile dried up under Clive's direct and rather stern gaze, and he promised that Clive's instructions should be carried out. "Wait," said Clive, "address it to 'Mr. Elisha,' please."

Clive lunched at his rooms on a chop, boiled potatoes, and a bottle of bitters; then he lit a pipe, and turned to his table. But he found that he could not work. Having paid his call, and sent the piano, probably a rather foolish thing to do, he had certainly done all, and more than the circumstances demanded; and he ought to have been able to have dismissed the girl, Tibby, and Elisha from his mind; but he could not do so. He must go out, and forget them.

Suddenly he remembered—it was strange that he should have forgotten—his promise to call at the Chesterleighs'. With a curious reluctance he changed his lounge suit for the regulation one, which included a long frock coat and silk hat, and set out for Grosvenor Square. He found a line of carriages drawn up outside the great house, which is one of the landmarks of the fashionable world, and, ushered by a footman in rich livery, ascended the stairs to the famous drawing-room, in which for generations grand ladies and famous statesmen had been wont to meet for social and party functions as famous as the persons who moved in them. The magnificent room was crowded, and Lady Edith was surrounded by a group of men and women whose names were as familiar as household words, as Clive made his way slowly towards her. Young as she was—a girl in her position matures early—she was holding her own with the best of them, her proud lips drooping, her beautiful face looking just a trifle weary; but suddenly she saw him, and, as suddenly, the expression of her face changed; a smile flashed to her eyes, and curved and softened the haughty line of her lips.

"You are late, Mr. Harvey," she said. "I thought you had forgotten."

As Clive took her hand and bent over it, the contrast presented by the magnificent room, this proud, dainty aristocrat's daughter, to the shabby "second floor back," and the pale face and slight form of the poor little street singer, smote him with the sharpness of a sudden blow.

CHAPTER V.

Of course, Clive's entrance had attracted attention; nearly every one's eyes were levelled at him, and there was a momentary lull in the buzz of chatter; for nothing is so quick as a London fashionable crowd to scent the "coming man," or so eager to recognize the individual who promises to be famous; before the interesting indication of his approaching greatness he is, very naturally, an unconsidered quantity.

The man who happened to be seated near Lady Edith rose promptly, and, with a little nod of acknowledgment, Clive took the chair. A week ago no one would have given place to him.

"It is very good of you to come," said Lady Edith; "I know how very busy you must be. There is a full account of your life and works in several of the morning papers, The Beacon especially."

"I didn't know The Beacon went in for fiction," said Clive, with a smile. "I hope you don't believe all the things they may have said of me, Lady Edith?"

"Oh, they have nothing but good to say; it is 'roses, roses, all the way.' How happy you must be——"

"Count no man happy till——" he murmured.

She made a charming little grimace. "I know; but I don't believe it. One can be happy without being dead. And is there anything so delightful as success?"

"Failure is sometimes satisfactory," he suggested.

"I hate failure," she retorted. "But I can't associate it with Clive Harvey, the 'friend of the people.' Father says—— But I think I have said quite enough nice things, and here is some fresh tea. Do you take sugar? You will find I shall only ask you this once; it is the one thing I remember. Are you going to speak to-night?"

"It's Wednesday," he reminded her.

"Ah, yes. I wish you'd let me know when you are speaking next; I—father and I—want to go down to the House and hear you; but you must promise to be as eloquent and as scathing as you were last night."

All this was very pleasant, and Clive enjoyed it, though he modestly put it aside with a few words of self-depreciation.

"But it isn't all work and no play with you, is it?" she asked.

Clive laughed. "By no means. I have my amusements, such as they are."

"You don't go out much?" she inquired.

"No," he admitted. "I'm afraid I spend most of my leisure prowling about the streets."

"Ah, yes; I see; studying the people——"

"And smoking a pipe," he put in.

"Oh, but you ought not to confine yourself to studying one class only," she went on. "It seems to me—I dare say I'm wrong—that what is called 'the people' absorb all the attention nowadays. The other classes—the one to which you belong, for instance, is worthy of notice."

"I'm afraid I don't belong to any class now," said Clive musingly. "I am rather an outcast from Society; a kind of black sheep."

"Black sheep are more picturesque, and sometimes more interesting, than the white," she rejoined with a nod. "But I think you will find that you are not regarded as an outcast."

"Seeing that you are so kind as to permit me to be here——" he began.

She gave a little shrug of her shoulders. "I didn't mean that. I meant that everybody—excepting the Conservatives, the old blue Tories—will be anxious to welcome you. And that reminds me that I am monopolizing your attention, and that all these people want to talk to you. I can see it in their faces, and in the way they are watching us; some of their faces express their indignation and impatience pretty plainly."

"Is that a dismissal?" he asked.

"No," she said, with a touch of color and a swift glance. "No; you may stay, say, five minutes longer; and I'll use them up in telling you how much I envy you. You smile, of course. But think! To have all the world before you, to feel sure that your ambition will be gratified, that Success is waiting with the laurel wreath in her hand, ready, when your highness pleases to beckon her, to place it on your brow. Oh, it is good to be a clever man! You are free to step into the arena, to fight for all you are worth, to pluck Victory from the grip of Difficulty, to—— But you are laughing. How would you like to change places with me?"

Clive looked at her as she bent forward, her expression certainly not one of pride and hauteur at that moment; and was rather surprised and startled by the sudden revelation. It seemed as if the pride which he had noticed were but a mask, and that for a moment it had slipped aside. She caught the grave regard of his keen eyes, the color left her face, and she dropped back with a little gesture, as if she was almost ashamed of her vehemence.

"Other persons have their ambitions as well as Mr. Clive Harvey," she said in an explanatory and apologetic tone. "Why do you remain so silent?" she added with a touch of impatience.

"I was wondering what ambition you could have which could not be easily gratified, Lady Edith," he said.

"You mean that I am Lord Chesterfield's daughter, daughter of an ex-Cabinet Minister——"

"With youth and"—he paused before the word "beauty"—"with all the means of obtaining your heart's desire——"

"Who, knowing his heart's desire and having it, is satisfied?" she put in quickly; then she laughed. "How serious we have become, and—how personal! It is my fault. You did not want to talk about yourself; and I—well, I'm not usually given to talking of mine." She had drawn herself up with a return to her usual hauteur. "I think you must go now—to the other people. Oh, wait," she added quickly, as he rose at once, "my aunt, Lady Dalrymple, has a dance on Monday. I will ask her to send you a card, if you care to come?"

Of course Clive expressed his sense of her graciousness; and she jotted down a memorandum on an ivory tablet, and dismissed him with a slight inclination of her head. Clive would have passed out; but Lady Edith's assertion proved to be correct, and he was stopped by the first group he came to, and was quickly surrounded by persons, some of them even distinguished enough to be called personages, who appeared desirous of exchanging a word or two with Mr. Clive Harvey. Many a young man's head would have been turned by so much flattering attention; but Clive's was not given to swelling, and all with whom he spoke were impressed by his modesty.

Lady Edith's eye followed him—though she did not appear to be looking in his direction—and when he had left her, her manner to those who remained became cold and unresponsive. When the visitors had all gone she rose, and went to the window, and looked out at the Square with her delicate brows drawn straight, and her lips shut tightly. For the first time in her life she had gone out of her way to be pleasant to a man; she had been more than "pleasant," indeed; and her face flushed as she recalled some of the things she had said to him. She had stooped to flatter him, and had reached a climax in offering to get him a card for her aunt's dance. "Offered"? Had she not virtually asked him to come?

And he—she bit her lip as she recalled his manner—had not only not met her half-way, but in his self-possessed fashion had seemed to hold her at arm's length. "At arm's length"; her mental phrase made her color deepen; her eyes flashed with sudden scorn of herself, and resentment of his reserve. She, Lady Edith Chesterleigh, had deigned to stoop to this man who called himself a social outcast; and he——!

She caught up a flower from a vase, and crushed it in her hand. She would not see him again; would deny herself next time he called. Already he was spoiled, she told herself, by his sudden success; but even as the thought passed through her mind, she knew it was an unjust one. Knew, too, that his very reserve, the refusal to fall at her feet and worship her, as most men would have done, had rendered him more interesting to her.

For the first time in her life Lady Edith had met a man who possessed the power of impressing her. She had felt drawn to him on the preceding night, when he had entered the room just now something within her had grown warm—was it her heart?—and at his approach a thrill of pleasure, surely the first of its kind, had shaken off the coldness, the pride, in which hitherto she had encased herself.

"No; I will not see him again," she said; but even as she made the assertion her mind darted towards Monday with a wistful longing, and she knew that she would go to the ball in the hope of meeting him.

The door opened, and her father came in.

"All alone, Edith? All gone?" he said, putting his arm round her shoulder. "Has Mr. Clive Harvey been here?"

"Mr. Clive Harvey? Yes; I think so: oh, yes, he has," she replied indifferently.

"Tut! I'm sorry I missed him," said Lord Chesterleigh. "Mr. Graham wants him to speak at a big meeting in the East End. He's just the man. I told Graham I should probably find him here, and would ask him."

"Since when have you been Mr. Graham's messenger?" she asked.

Lord Chesterleigh looked at her with surprise.

"What's the matter, Edith?" he asked. "Anything wrong?"

"Nothing," she replied coldly; "but it seems to me that Mr. Clive Harvey is—rather too much in evidence. You will spoil him between you, father."

"Oh, he'll take a lot of spoiling," he said. "He's that rara avis, a modest young man. But I mustn't praise him, I see, Edith; for you don't like him, eh?"

"I neither like nor dislike him," she said as coldly as before. "You forget that I have seen him only twice, and that I know very little about him——"

"And care less?" he finished, pressing her shoulder and laughing. He was, though he did not know it, rather proud of his beautiful daughter's exclusiveness and insusceptibility.

"And care less," she echoed, turning away with a little gesture of profound indifference. "We are dining out to-night, you know. I must go and dress."

She went to her own rooms, a suite so luxurious that Clive, if he had seen them, would have been still more struck by the contrast between the dens of Lazarus and the palaces of Dives. Decorated, furnished with the minutest regard for taste, and none at all for cost, they were remarkable even in this age of artistic luxury. Rare books, choice pictures, priceless bric-a-brac, they were all here to minister to the girl's roving fancy. As she opened the door of the sitting-room a woman, who was at needlework by the window, rose quickly, and noiselessly approached her mistress, her eyes scanning her face with a strange eagerness.

She was a Hindoo of little more than middle age, but looked older than her years by reason of the sallow face covered with a mesh of fine wrinkles, and the snow-white hair, which showed up vividly against her dusky skin; her dark eyes, almost black, had a peculiar expression as they rested on Lady Edith, one at once proprietorial and appealing.

The woman, who was called Sara—a convenient contraction of her native name, Surya—and was not known by any other name, had been Lady Edith's nurse; and was the most important person in the domestic side of the household. She had almost taken the place of a mother to the girl, and had an affection for her which combined maternal love with the devotion of the faithful slave. To say that she worshipped her young mistress would not be an extravagant assertion; she would have willingly laid down her life to give the girl a moment's transient pleasure, and would have cheerfully committed any crime for the like trifling result. She seemed to live with only one object: to watch over Lady Edith, and minister to her ease and comfort; and in the pursuit of her object she was quite ready to sacrifice not only herself, but all the world.

No doubt the woman's tireless ministrations had done not a little to foster the spirit of pride and—it must be written—selfishness, which characterized Lord Chesterleigh's daughter; but, even if she had been aware of the fact, Sara would have gloried in it. In her eyes the girl was perfect in body and mind. She was as vain of Lady Edith's beauty and grace as if they had belonged to a daughter of her own; and she spent most of her time planning and devising dresses and other adjuncts with which to set off that beauty.

Sara had come from India as ayah, or nurse, to Lady Chesterleigh. That she exercised a great though covert influence over her young mistress was evident, but not surprising; for it was only natural that the girl should repay the woman who, next to Lord Chesterleigh, had been her closest companion since babyhood, with a feeling somewhat warmer and more confidential than that with which a mistress generally rewards her maid, and permitted her familiarities of speech and service with a complaisance which astonished her friends.

In the servants' hall Sara was by no means popular, for she was reserved and high-handed, and kept herself aloof from her fellow-servants, whom she appeared to regard as her inferiors; but they had come to bear her manner of superiority in silence—in her hearing, at any rate—for on one or two occasions the woman had displayed a temper so passionate, so volcanic, that they all went in absolute fear of her.

The dark eyes rested only for a moment on Lady Edith's face, and were then swiftly covered; but Sara, in that brief, flashing glance, saw that something had disturbed her young mistress's usual proud serenity. She said nothing, but in silence began to help Lady Edith to remove her dress.

"I'm late, I think, Sara," said Lady Edith, rather listlessly.

"Yes, yes; I will be quick, missie," said the woman in a subdued voice. "You will wear——?"

"Anything you like," replied Lady Edith, as she sank into her chair before the glass. "I don't care which it is."

Sara wrapped her in a peignoir of white silk, and, unfastening the golden hair, let it fall, a cascade of flossy silk, over her hands, stroking it admiringly, dotingly, as a mother might have stroked the hair of her first-born.

"Your head aches, missie? Sara make it well. Yes, yes!"

Gently, as if she were touching thistledown, she poured some liquid from an Oriental flask into the palms of her hands, and drew them caressingly over the white brow.

"That better, missie? How did it come? The heat, the talk—you were late at tea, and the sahibs pressed round you? Yes?" he said proudly. "They always do and will."

"Not when I'm old and ugly, Sara," remarked Lady Edith.

"Never old and ugly!" responded the woman proudly and defiantly. "There are some women who will never be old, and my child is one of them. She is a daughter of the gods——"

"That's Tennyson; though you don't know it," said Lady Edith, with a smile and a suppressed sigh. "No wonder I am vain, Sara; and I am."

Sara laughed softly as she bound up the hair, still caressingly, as if she were handling something more precious than the virgin gold it resembled.

"It is not Sara alone, missie," she said with a vanity which even surpassed Lady Edith's; "does not every one who comes near my girlie tell her that she is beautiful, if not with their lips, with the eyes that cannot lie?"

A faint flush rose to Lady Edith's face, and she frowned slightly.

"No; not every one," she said, rather to herself than the woman.

Sara cast a keen glance at the mirror, and her hands paused for a moment in their rapid but smooth movements.

"Not every one? Then, if it is a woman, she is envious; and if it is a man, he is a pig," she responded with a flash of anger and contempt darting across her dark face.

Lady Edith laughed a trifle wearily. "I should like Mr. Clive Harvey to hear you call him a pig," she said.

Sara held the brush suspended, and looked at the mirror again, and kept her eyes there while she repeated the name.

"Mr. Clive Harvey? I don't know him; but he is a pig all the same," she added resentfully, as the flush grew deeper on the face reflected in the glass.

"No; he is not, Sara," said Lady Edith. "He is a very clever man, and beautifully mannered. And perhaps it shows his good taste that he does not admire your child."

"He must be blind, this Mr. Clive Harvey," said the woman, as if she were stating an incontrovertible and self-evident fact; "blind or an imbecile. Who is he? I should like to meet him, to whisper, 'Fool!' Just that: 'Fool!'"

Lady Edith laughed, but not very mirthfully.

"No; he is anything but a fool, Sara; he is going to be a great man, a very great man, I think. All the world will be talking of him—is beginning to talk already."

"Missie know him long?" asked Sara with assumed indifference; but her eyes, though apparently cast down, were watching her mistress's face.

"Not long, Sara. I saw him for the first time last night."

"What's he like, this clever fool-man? Young?" asked Sara, still casually.

"Oh, yes; and very good-looking. You know the kind, Sara: tall and straight and strong—with dark grey eyes——"

The woman made a gesture of depreciation.

"It is just like the young English sahib—they are all alike," she said contemptuously.

"Not quite," said Lady Edith. "This one is different, Sara. He says little, and he does not pay compliments and bow and smile like the others; at least, not to me," she added, with a laugh, the wistful note in which was not lost upon the woman's watchful ears.

"I would like to see him, this young sahib, who is so different, so clever, and yet so imbecile," she said slowly.

(To be continued.)

It Made a Difference.

"The only thing I find to say against you, Jane, is that your washing bill is far too extravagant. Last week you had six blouses in the wash. Why, my own daughter never sends more than two."

"Ah, that may be, mum," replied Jane, "but I 'ave to! Your daughter's sweetheart is a bank clerk, while my young man is a chimney sweep. It makes a difference, mum."

The surest way of losing one's own health is to be always drinking the health of others, says a wise wit.

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FROM MERRY OLD ENGLAND

NEWS BY MAIL ABOUT JOHN BULL AND HIS PEOPLE.

Occurrences in the Land That Reigns Supreme in the Commercial World.

In London there were 2,333 births and 891 deaths last week.

The King has sent a subscription of $50 to the Royal United Kingdom Beneficiary Association.

Lord Tennyson has accepted the presidency of the Isle of Wight Small Holders' Association.

For one night's catch of herrings, the Lowestoft herring boat, Lord Wenlock, has realized $1,685.

The Duke of Connaught presided at the National Rifle Association dinner at Princes' Restaurant.

Messrs. Peare and partners have formulated a pension scheme for their officials retiring at the age of 60.

Wireless telegraphy has been successfully installed at Bishop's Stratford College by one of the scholars.

The King has sent to the Natural Museum of Wales, Cardiff, a fine tiger which he shot in India two years ago.

Mr. Francis Reckitt, brother of Sir J. Reckitt, has given $100,000 to the Newland's Seamen's Orphanage, Hull.

The King, as squire of Sandringham, Norfolk, is presenting to his employes a new club, which is being built at Babingly.

By a fire at the Star Motor Car Works, Wolverhampton, $125,000 damage was done and over 30 motor cars destroyed.

In England and Wales the births registered last year numbered 872,767, the marriages 283,195, and the deaths 486,967.

Stafford has decided to hold a pageant to commemorate the thousandth anniversary of the building of its first fortress.

Mr. Peake, sixty-nine, a master builder of Kingston-on-Thames, was found hanging dead in the workshop at the rear of his house.

Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll, laid the foundation stone of the new South London Hospital for Women at South Side, Clapham Common.

A strike of elder male choristers is in progress at Holy Trinity Church, Rusholme, because a surpliced choir was proposed.

Mr. Geo. Rutherford, stationmaster at Belside, the oldest stationmaster in the employment of the N. E. Railway company, has just retired after 43 years' service.

There is at the present time in the Royal Hospital for Incurables, Putney Heath, a male patient who was born in 1857 at Lucknow during the siege.

An angel fish has been found stranded on the beach at Maryport, Cumberland. It was seven feet long and had a great skate in its mouth.

Princess Henry of Battenburg visited Herne Bay, and opened the King Edward VII. memorial Hall, and also unveiled a medallion of the late King.

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