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To Katy's repeated question: "Is he dead?" he answered: "Worse than that, I fear. He has left the city, and no one knows for what, unless my do. From something he wrote, my wife is led to suppose there was trouble between you two. Was there?" and father Cameron's gray eyes rested earnestly on the white, frightened face which looked up so quickly as Katy gasped:

"There has been trouble—that is, he has not appeared quite the same since—"

She was interrupted by the carriage stopping before her door; but when they were in the parlor, father Cameron said:

"Go on now. Wilford has not been the same since when?"

Thus importuned, Katy continued:

"Since baby died. I think he blamed me as the cause of its death."

"Don't babies die every day?" father Cameron growled, while Katy, without considering that he had never heard of Geneva, continued:

"And then it was worse after I found out about Geneva's first wife."

"Geneva! Geneva, Wilford's first wife? Thunder and lightning! what are you talking about?" and father Cameron bent down to look into Katy's face, thinking she was going mad.

But Katy was not mad, and knowing it was now too late to retract, she told the story of Geneva Lambert to the old man, who, utterly confounded, stalked up and down the room, kicking away chairs and foot-stools, and whatever came in his way, and swearing promiscuously at his wife and Wilford, whom he pronounced a precious pair of fools, with a dreadful adjective appended to the fools, and an emphasis in his voice which showed he meant what he said.

"It's all accounted for now," he said; "the piles of money that boy had abroad, his privacy with his mother, and all the other tomfoolery I could not understand. Katy," and pausing in his walk, Mr. Cameron came close to his daughter-in-law, who was lying with her face upon the sofa. "Katy, be glad your baby died. Had it lived it might have proved a curse, just as mine have done—not all, for Bell, though fiery as a pepper-pod has some heart, some sense—and there was Jack, my oldest boy, a little fast, it's true, but when he died over the sea, I forgave all that, and forgot the chair he broke over a tutor's head, and the scrapes for which I paid as high as a thousand at one time. He sowed his wild oats, and died before he could reap them—died a good man, I believe, and went to Heaven. Juno you know, and you can judge whether she is such as would delight a parent's heart; while Wilford, my only boy, to deceive me so; I knew he was a fool in some things, but I did trust Wilford."

The old man's voice shook now, and Katy felt his tears dropping on her hair as he stooped over her. Checking them, however, he said:

"And he was cross because you found him out. Was there no other reason?"

Katy thought of Dr. Morris, but she could not tell of that, and so she answered:

"There was—but please don't ask me now. I can't tell, only I was not to blame. Believe me, father, I was not to blame."

"I'll swear to that," was the reply, and father Cameron commenced his walking again, just as Esther came to the door with the morning letters.

There was one from Wilford for Katy, who nervously tore off the envelope and read as follows:

"Will you be sorry when you read this and find that I am gone, that you are free from the husband you do not love, whom, perhaps, you never loved, though I thought you did. I trusted you once, and now I do not blame you as much as I ought, for you are young and easily influenced. You are very susceptible to flattery, as was proven by your career at Saratoga and Newport. I had no suspicion of you then, but now that I know you better, I see that it was not all childish simplicity which made you smile so graciously upon those who sought your favor. You are a coquette, Katy, and the greater one because of that semblance of artlessness which is the perfection of art. This, however, I might forgive, if I had not learned that another man loved you first and wished to make you his wife, while you, in your secret heart, wish you had known it sooner. Don't deny it, Katy; I saw it in your face when I first told you of Dr. Grant's confession, and I heard it in your voice as well as in your word, when you said 'A life at Linwood would be perfect rest compared with this.' That hurt me cruelly, Katy. I did not deserve it from one for whom I have done and borne so much, and it was the final cause of my leaving you, for I am going to Washington to enroll myself in the service of my country. You will be happier without me for a while, and perhaps when I return, Linwood will not look quite the little paradise it does now.

"I might reproach you with having telegraphed to Dr. Grant about that miserable Geneva affair which you had not discretion enough to keep to yourself. Few men would care to have their wives send for a former lover in their absence and ask that lover to take them away. Your saintly cousin, good as he is, cannot wonder at my vexation, or blame me greatly for going away. Perhaps he

will offer you comfort, both religious and otherwise; but if you ever wish me to return, avoid him as you would shun a deadly poison. Until I countermand the order, I wish you to remain in the house which I bought for you, Helen and your mother both may live with you, while father will have a general oversight of your affairs; I shall send him a line to that effect.

"Your Disappointed Husband."

This was the letter, and there was perfect silence while Katy read it through. Mr. Cameron never taking his eyes from her face, which turned first white, then red, then spotted, and finally took a leaden hue as Katy ran over the lines, comprehending the truth as she read, and when the letter was finished, lifting her dry, tearless eyes to Father Cameron, and whispering to herself:

"Deserted!"

She let him read the letter, and when he had finished, explained the parts he did not understand, telling him now what Morris had confessed—telling him too that in her first sorrow, when life and sense seemed reeling, she had sent for Dr. Grant, knowing she could trust him and be right in doing whatever he advised.

"Why did you say you sent for him—that is, what was the special reason?" Mr. Cameron asked, and Katy told him her belief that Geneva was living—that it was she who made the bridal trousseau for Wilford's second wife, she who nursed his child until it died, giving to it her own name, arraying it for the grave, and then leaving before the father came.

"I never told Wilford," Katy said. "I felt as if I would rather he should not know it yet. Perhaps I was wrong, but if so, I have been terribly punished."

Mr. Cameron could not look upon the woman who stood before him, so helpless and stricken in her desolation, and believe her wrong in anything. The guilt lay in another direction, and when, as the terrible reality that she was indeed a deserted wife came rushing over Katy, she tottered toward him for help; he stretched his arms out for her, and taking the sinking figure in them, laid it upon the sofa as gently, as kindly, as Wilford had ever touched it in his most loving days.

Katy did not faint nor weep. She was past all that; but her face was like a piece of marble, and her eyes were like those of the hunted fawn when the chase is at its height, and escape impossible.

"Wilford will come back, of course," the father said, "but that does not help us now. What the plague—who is ringing that bell enough to break the wire?" he added, as a sharp, rattling echo echoed through the house, and was answered by Esther. "It's my wife," he continued, as he caught the sound of her voice in the hall.

"You stay here while I meet her first alone. I'll give it to her for cheating me so long, and raising thunder generally!"

Katy tried to protest, but he was half way down the stairs, and in a moment more was with his wife, who, impatient at his long delay, had come herself, armed and equipped, to ensure Katy as the cause of Wilford's disappearance, and to demand of her what she had done. But the lady who came in so haughty and indignant was a very different personage from the lady who, after listening for fifteen minutes to a fearful storm of oaths and reproaches, mingling with startling truths and bitter denunciations against herself and her boy, sank into a chair, pale and trembling, and overwhelmed with the harvest she was reaping.

But her husband was not through with her yet. He had reserved the bitterest drop for the last, and coming close to her he said:

"And who think you the woman is—this Geneva, Wilford's and your divorced wife? You were too proud to acknowledge an apothecary's daughter! See if you like better a dressmaker, a nurse to Katy's baby, Marian Hazelton!"

He whispered the last name, and with a shriek the lady fainted. Mr. Cameron would not summon a servant; and as there was no water in the room, he walked to the window, and lifting the sash scraped from the sill a handful of the light spring snow which had been falling since morning. With this he brought his wife back to consciousness, and then marked out her future course.

"I know what is in your mind," he said; "people will talk about Wilford's going off suddenly, and you would like to have all the blame rest on Katy; but, madam, hear me: Just so sure as through your means one breath of suspicion falls on her, I'll bla-out the whole story of Geneva. Then see who is censured. On the other hand, if you hold your tongue, and make Juno hold hers, and stick to Katy through thick and thin, acting as if you would like to swallow her whole, I'll say nothing of this Geneva. Is it a bargain?"

"Yes," came faintly from the sofa cushions, where Mrs. Cameron had buried her face, sobbing in a confused, frightened way, and after a few moments asking to see Katy, whom she kissed and caressed with unwonted tenderness, telling her Wilford would come back, and adding, that in any event no one could or should blame her.

"Wilford was wrong to deceive you about Geneva. I was wrong to let him; but we will have no more concealments. You think she is living still—that she is Marian Hazelton?" and Mrs. Cameron smoothed Katy's

hair as she talked, trying to be motherly and kind, while her heart beat more painfully at thoughts of a Geneva living, than it ever had at thoughts of a Geneva dead.

Wilford's leaving home so suddenly to join the army, could not fail, even in New York, to cause some excitement, especially in his own immediate circle of acquaintance, and for several days the matter was discussed in all its phases, and every possible opinion and conjecture offered, as to the cause of his strange freak. They could not believe in domestic troubles when they saw how his family clung to and defended Katy from the least approach of censure. Juno taking up her abode with her afflicted sister, Mrs. Cameron driving round each day to see her; Bell always speaking of her with genuine affection, while the father clung to her like a hero, the quartette forming a barrier across which the shafts of scandal could not reach.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

When Wilford left Katy so abruptly, he had no definite purpose in his mind. Like most angry people, he forgot wherein he had been in fault, but charged it all to Katy as he went down Broadway that spring morning, finding on his table a letter from an old classmate, who was then in Washington getting up a company, and who wrote urging his friend to join him at once, and offering him the rank of First Lieutenant. Here was a temptation—here an opportunity to revenge himself on Katy, against whom he wrote a sad list of errors, making it sadder by brooding over and magnifying it until he reached a point from which he would not swerve.

"I shall do it," he said, and his lips were pressed firmly together, as in his private office he sat revolving the past, and then turning to the future, opening so darkly before him, and making him shudder as he thought of what it might bring. "I will spare Katy as much as possible," he said, "for hers is a different nature from Geneva's. She cannot bear as well," and a bitter

groan broke the silence of the room as Katy came up before him just as she had looked that very morning standing by the window, with tears in her eyes, and a wistful, sorry look on her white face.

But Wilford was not one to retract when a decision was reached, and so he arranged his business matters as well as his limited time would allow; then, after the brief note to his father, wrote the letter to his mother, and then followed to the Jersey ferry a regiment of soldiers that night. Four days more and Lieutenant Wilford Cameron, with no regret as yet for the past, marched away to swell the ranks of men, who, led by General McClellan, were pressing on, as they believed, to Richmond and victory. A week of terrible suspense went by, and then there came a letter to Mr. Cameron from his son, requesting him to care for Katy, but asking no forgiveness for himself. There were no apologies, no explanations, no kind words for Katy, whose eyes moved slowly over the short letter, and then were lifted sadly to her father's face as she said:

"I will write to him myself, and on his answer will depend my future course."

Meanwhile at Silverton there was much anxiety for Katy, and many doubts expressed lest something was wrong. That Wilford should go away so suddenly, when he had never been noted for any very great amount of patriotism, seemed strange and Uncle Ephraim at last made up his mind to the herculean task of going to New York to see what was the matter.

Presuming upon her experience as a traveler, Aunt Betsy had proffered sundry pieces of advice with reference to what it was best for him to do on the road, telling him which side of the car to sit, where to get out, and above all things not to shake hands with the conductor when asked for his ticket.

Uncle Ephraim heard her good-humoredly, and stuffing into his pocket the paper of ginger-snaps, fried cakes and cheese, which Aunt Hannah had prepared for his lunch, he started for the cars, and was soon on his way to New York.

In his case there was no Bob Reynolds to offer aid and comfort, and the old man was nearly torn in pieces by the hackmen, who, the moment he appeared to view, pounced upon him as lawful prey, each claiming the honor of taking him wherever he wished to go, and raising such a din he turned away thoroughly disgusted, telling them—

"He had feet and legs, and common sense, and he guessed he could find his way without 'em. Blegged to you, gentlemen, but I don't need you," and with a profound bow the honest looking old deacon walked away, asking the first man he met the way to Madison Square, and succeeding in finding the number without difficulty.

With a scream of joy Katy threw herself into Uncle Ephraim's arms, and then led him to her own room, while the first tears she had shed since she knew she was deserted rained in torrents over her face.

"What is it, Katy—did I mistrust something was wrong. What has happened?" Uncle Ephraim asked; and with his arm around her, Katy told him what had happened, and asked what she should do.

"Do?" the old man repeated. "Go home with me to your own folks until he comes from the wars. He is your husband, and I shall say nothing again him; but if it was to go over I would forbid the banns. That chap has misused you the worst way. You need not deny it, for it's writ all over your face."

Mr. Cameron knew that Katy would be happier at Silverton, and he finally consented to her going, and placed at her disposal a sum which seemed to the deacon a little fortune in itself.

To Mrs. Cameron and Juno it was a relief to have Katy taken from their hands, and though they made a show of opposition, they were easily quieted, and helped her off with alac-

rity, the mother promising to see that the house was properly cared for, and Juno offering to send the latest fashions which might be suitable, as soon as they appeared. Bell was heartily sorry to part with the young sister, who seemed going from her forever.

"I know you will never come back. Something tells me so," she said; as she stood with her arms around Katy's waist, and her lips occasionally touching Katy's forehead. "But I shall see you," she continued; "I am coming to the farm-house in the summer, and you may say to Aunt Betsy that I like her ever so much, and —" Bell glanced behind her to see that no one was listening, and then continued: "Tell her a certain officer was sick a few days in a hospital last winter, and one of his men brought to him a dish of the most delicious dried peaches he ever ate. That man was from Silverton, and the fruit was sent to him, he said, in a salt bag, by a nice old lady, for whose brother he used to work. Just to think that the peaches I helped to pare, coloring my hands so that the stain did not come off in a month, should have gone so straight to Bob!" and Bell's fine features shone with a light which would have told Bob Reynolds to confess it, if the lips did refuse to confess it.

"I'll tell her," Katy said, and then bidding them all good-bye, and putting her hand on Uncle Ephraim's arm, she went with him from the home where she had lived but two years, and those the saddest, most eventful ones of her short life.

CHAPTER XL.

There was much talk in Silverton when it was known that Katy had come to stay until her husband returned from the war, and at first the people watched her curiously as she came among them again, so quiet so subdued, so unlike the Katy of old that they would have hardly recognized her but for the beauty of her face and the sunny smile she gave to all, and which rested oftentimes on the poor and suffering, who blessed her

as the angel of their humble homes, praying that God would remember her for all she was to them. Wilford had censured her at first for going to Silverton, when he preferred she should stay in New York, hinting darkly at the reason of her choice, and saying to her once, when she told him how the Sunday before her twenty-first birthday she had knelt before the altar and taken up on herself the vows of confirmation, "Your saintly cousin is, of course, delighted, and that I suppose is sufficient, without my congratulations."

Perhaps he did not mean it, but he seemed to take delight in teasing her and Katy sometimes felt she should be happier without his letters than with them. He never said he was sorry he had left her so suddenly; indeed he seldom referred to the past in any way; or if he did, it was in a manner which showed that he thought himself the injured party, if either.

Katy did not often go to Linwood, and seldom saw Morris alone. After what had passed, she thought it better to avoid him as much as possible, and was glad when early in June he accepted a situation offered him as surgeon in a Georgetown hospital, and left Silverton for his new field of labor.

True to her promise, Bell came the last of July to Silverton, proving herself a dreadful romp, as she climbed over the rocks in Aunt Betsy's famous sheep-pasture, or raked the hay in the meadow, and proving herself, too, a genuine woman, as with blanched cheek and anxious heart she waited for tidings from the battles before Richmond, where the tide of success seemed to turn, and the North, hitherto so jubilant and hopeful, were weeds of mourning from Maine to Oregon. Lieut. Bob was there, and Wilford, too; and so was Captain Ray, digging in the marshy swamps, where death floated up in poisonous exhalations—plodding on the weary march, and fighting all through the seven days, where the sun poured down its burning heat and the night brought little rest. No wonder then, that three pairs of eyes grew dim with watching the daily papers. But the names of neither Wilford, Mark, nor Bob were ever found among the wounded, dead, or missing, and with the fall of the first autumn leaf Bell returned to the city more puzzled, more perplexed than ever with regard to Helen Lennox's real feelings toward Captain Ray.

The week before Christmas, Mark came home for a few days, loo ing bronzed from exposure and hardship, but wearing a disappointed, listless look which Bell was quick to detect, connecting it in some way with Helen Lennox. Only once did he call at Mrs. Cameron's, and then as Juno was out Bell had him to herself, talking of Silverton, of Helen and Katy, in the latter of whom he seemed far more interested than her sister. Many questions he asked concerning Katy, expressing his regret that Wilford had left her, and saying he believed Wilford was sorry, too. He was in the hospital now, with a severe cold and a touch of the rheumatism, he said; but as Bell knew this already she did not dwell long upon that subject, choosing rather to talk of Helen, who she said, was "as much interested in the soldiers, as if she had a brother or a lover in the army," and her bright eyes glanced meaningly at Mark, who answered carelessly:

"Dr. Grant is there, that may account for interest."

Mark knew he must say something to ward off Bell's attacks, and he continued talking of Dr. Grant and how much he was liked by the poor wretches who needed some one like him to keep them from dying of homesickness if nothing else; then, after a few bantering words concerning Lieutenant Bob and the picture he carried into every battle, buttoned closely over his heart, Mark Ray took his leave, while Bell ran up to her mother's room as a seamstress was occupying her own. Mrs. Cameron was out that afternoon, and that she had dressed in a hurry was indicated by the unusual confusion of her room. Drawers were left open

and various articles scattered about, while on the floor, just as it had fallen from a glove-box, by a letter which Bell picked up, intending to replace it.

"Miss Helen Lennox," she read in astonishment. "How came Helen Lennox's letter here, and from Mark Ray, too," she continued, still more amazed as she took the neatly folded note from the envelope and glanced at the name. "Foul play somewhere. Can it be mother?" she asked, as she read enough to know that she held in her hand Mark's offer of marriage, which had in some mysterious manner found its way to her mother's room. "I don't understand it," she said, racking her brain for a solution of the mystery. "But I'll send it to Helen this very day, and to-morrow I'll tell Mark Ray."

Procrastination was not one of Bell Cameron's faults, and for full half an hour before her mother and Juno came home, the stolen letter had been lying in the mail box where Bell herself deposited it, together with a few hurriedly written lines, telling how it came into her hands, but offering no explanation of any kind.

"Mark is home now on a leave of absence which expires day after to-morrow," she wrote, "I am going round to see him, and if you do not hear from him in person I am greatly mistaken."

The next day a series of hindrances kept Bell from making her call as early as she had intended, so that Mrs. Banker and Mark were just rising from dinner, when told she was in the parlor.

"I meant to have come before," she said, seating herself by Mark, "but I could not get away. I have brought you some good news. I think—that is—yes, I know there has been some mistake, something wrong somewhere. Mark Ray, yesterday afternoon I found—no matter where or how—a letter intended for Helen Lennox, which I am positive she never saw or heard of, at least her denial to me that a certain Mark Ray had ever offered himself is a proof that she never saw what was an offer made just before you went away. I read enough to know that, and then I took the letter and—"

She hesitated, while Mark's eyes turned dark with excitement, and even Mrs. Banker, scarcely less interested, leaned eagerly forward, saying:

"And what? Go on, Miss Cameron. What did you do with that letter?"

"I sent it to the rightful owner, Helen Lennox. I posted it myself. But why don't you thank me, Captain Ray?" she asked, as Mark's face was overshadowed with anxiety.

"I was wondering whether it were well to send it—wondering how it might be received," he said, and Bell replied:

"She will not answer no. As one woman knows another, I know Helen Lennox. I have sounded her on that point. I told her of the rumor there was afloat, and she denied it, seeming greatly distressed, but showing plainly that had such offer been received she would not have refused it. You should have seen her last summer, Captain Ray, when we waited so anxiously for news from Potomac. Her face was a study as her eyes ran over the list of casualties, searching not for her amiable brother-in-law, nor yet for Willard Braxton, their hired man. It was plain to me as daylight, and all you have to do is to follow up the letter with another, or go yourself, if you have time," Bell said, as she rose to go, leaving Mark in a state of bewilderment as to what he had heard.

Who withheld that letter? and why? were questions which troubled him greatly, nor did his mother's assurance that it did not matter so long as it all came right at last, tend wholly to reassure him. One thing, however, was certain. He would see Helen before he returned to his regiment. He would telegraph to him the morning to Washington, and then run the risk of being a day behind the time appointed for his return to duty.

"Suppose you have three children when I return, instead of two, is there room in your heart for the third?" he asked his mother when next morning he was about starting for Silverton.

"Yes, always room for Helen" was the reply, as with a kiss of benediction Mrs. Banker sent her boy away.

CHAPTER XLI.

There was to be a Christmas tree at St. John's, and all the week the church had been the scene of much confusion. But the work was over now; the church was swept and dusted, the tree with its gay adornings was in its place, the little ones, who had hindered so much, were gone, as were their mothers, and Helen only tarried with the organ boy to play the Christmas Carol, which Katy was to sing alone, the children joining in the chorus, as they had been trained to do. It was very quiet there, and pleasant, with the fading sunlight streaming through the chancel window, lighting up the cross above it, and falling softly on the wall where the evergreens were hung with the sacred words, "Peace on earth and good will towards men." And Helen felt the peace stealing over her as she sat down by the register for a moment ere going to the organ loft where the boy was waiting for her. Not even the remembrance of the dark war-cloud hanging over the land disturbed her then, as her thoughts went backward eighteen hundred years to Bethlehem's manger and the little Child whose birth the angels sang. And as she thought, the Child seemed to be with her, a living presence to which she prayed, leaning her head upon the railing of the pew in front, and asking Him to keep her in the perfect peace she felt around her now. For Mark Ray, too, she prayed, asking God to keep him in safety wherever he might be, whether in the lowly watch, or in some house of prayer where the Christmas carols were sung, and the Christmas story was told. As she lifted up her hand struck against