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# The DAUGHTER OF DAVID KERR

by Harry King Tootle

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### CHAPTER XXII.

The morning after the election, Gloria called for the Banner as soon as she awakened. The headlines told her

at once that her father had been defeated. She searched carefully through the paper for some reference to Joe Wright, but no mention was made of him. Naturally enough, the Banner was not in a jubilant mood. It predicted dire things in store for Belmont, but Gloria, remembering what she had learned at so bitter a cost, felt that any change must be for the better.

The girl had now recovered from the first severity of the shock, and was anxious to know for a certainty what had become of Wright. She knew that he lived and was not seriously injured, else there would have been some mention of him in the paper. The day previous she had thought much of him, but there had been much else for her to think of. Now with a return to what was to be for her the normal, she wanted to know how he fared.

All the morning Gloria spent in revolving in her mind just what she ought to do. She knew that her father meant Wright harm. Pride and maidenly reserve wrestled with what she considered her duty. Her conscience told her that before she left Belmont forever she should warn this man who once had loved her. He must be placed on his guard against her own father. It cut her like a knife to think that the attack on the editor had really been made at her command. Now she could do no less than tell him how affairs stood.

Dr. Hayes could scarcely conceal his surprise when Gloria followed him into the hall after luncheon and asked about Mr. Wright's condition. He told her that he still kept to his room, but was reported as improving. Before he could frame a question, Gloria thanked him and fled up the stairs. About three o'clock she emerged from her room, dressed for the street, and announced to Mrs. Hayes that she was going for a short walk alone.

What the daughter of David Kerr told her hostess was the truth. She did go for a short walk, a walk that took her in the most direct way to the house where Joe Wright resided. The door was opened for her by a little girl who invited her to enter.

"I wish to see Mr. Wright," Gloria explained to the child.

"I'll take you to his sitting-room. He told me to bring anybody in that came to see him, and to tell 'em he'd be back in a minute."

All was silence in the room when the little girl threw wide the door and bade her enter.

"Then he's not in the house, you say?"

"No, he's gone to get a baggageman, but he said to wait," Patty insisted.

"Whom did he wish to wait?"

"Oh, anybody. He said somebody's coming to pack his books. He hurt himself and can't bend over the box."

"Oh!" cried Gloria, with a little gasp of pain. She remembered all too well the hurt of which he complained. Then at the same time came a new thought, why was he packing his books? A more critical look showed her many evidences that he was giving up his apartment. She could not understand.

"Is Mr. Wright moving everything?" she ventured.

"Yes, he's going away."

Gloria gazed at the child in surprise, not quite grasping what she said. A smothered exclamation caused her to look up quickly. There, staring at her from the doorway in honest amazement, stood Joe Wright. She felt her cheeks crimson.

"Miss Kerr! You here!" he gasped, before he could master his surprise. Then in an instant he went on in an even, conventional tone, "I beg your pardon, I scarcely expected to find you here."

"No, I—I—I scarcely expected to find myself here, but here I am." As she said this she extended her hands, then dropped them, a gesture which seemed to typify the simplicity with which the visit had been accomplished.

Wright readily recognized that there was some motive in the call, and dismissed Patty with instructions to let him know if anyone asked for him.

"Won't you sit down?" he begged, remembering his duty as host.

"Thank you, I haven't a moment to stay."

Wright looked about for a chair, to find them filled with odds and ends of things intended to be packed. The girl insisted that she preferred to stand, and listened to his apology for the appearance of the room and the explanation that he was moving.

"I learned at luncheon that you were going away," she acknowledged.

"Since you would not come to see me, I had to come to see you."

Again his amazement equaled that the sight of her in his living room had occasioned. He permitted it to betray itself by exclaiming:

"Since I wouldn't come to see you! Surely, Miss Kerr, you didn't expect that? There was nothing whatever equivocal about my dismissal."

This was something she had not planned, a reference to the past. She wished merely to warn him and then take leave of him forever.

"I didn't come with a desire to refer to that," she answered. "You must realize that what I have to say seems to me of the utmost importance, else I—oh, you can't know the effort it has cost me to come here."

"I'm sorry if your dislike is so intense."

She shook her head, with a smile that was only a sad lighting up of her countenance, like the last flare of an expiring flame.

"Let us not speak of like or dislike. All that is past. It is true I promised myself never to see you again, but since that day in Judge Gilbert's office events have shed such a new light on Belmont and on me that I feel some explanations are due you before you go away."

Quick as a flash he saw that she had turned the truth, or at least some part of it. With his characteristic generosity he wished to relieve her of the necessity of making explanations.

"I appreciate your coming, Miss Kerr, from the bottom of my heart I do, but if—if anything you think you have to tell causes you pain, I'd rather far that what you wish to say should remain unspoken."

"That's generous of you, but I should find it harder to maintain silence—because I want to be just."

"Miss Kerr! There is no occasion for you to—"

"Please, please, don't interrupt me. It's hard enough as it is." A chair he had brought for Gloria she had refused, and now he sank into it himself, his head resting in his hands as he listened. "I have lived away from Belmont," she went on in an even, repressed monotone that cut him to the heart, "since I was a little girl, too young to understand, and I was brought up to believe that my father was—well, just the opposite of what he is. It was all a mistake, of course. It was no fault of mine, but I must suffer for it just the same. I had everything money could buy; and then you came—and I had love."

Her voice trembled for the instant. Wright could not stand it.

"Gloria!" he cried, seeking to stop her, but she went on again in the same impersonal manner, apparently unheeding his gesture for her to desist as much as she did the cry of pain that burst from his lips.

"But no one was really kind to me. I lived in a fool's Paradise. I did not know the truth." Then vehemently, losing control of herself: "Oh, why did you ever speak to me of love! You, of all men, to make my humiliation doubly great."

"Don't speak so, I beg of you," Wright commanded. "Can you believe that I have not suffered?"

She chose to ignore his question.

"Oh, if I had never come home! If I had even not gone to Judge Gilbert's office that day! It was fate, Joe, it was fate. I can see it all now. We boast that we dominate circumstances, the gods laugh and are our masters still. Looking back the way we've come from that first night I met you here I can see that every step, relentless as death, was leading to that day when I learned the truth about my father."

"And you know?"

"Everything. That's why I'm here. It was really such a little time ago that I came back to Belmont, yet it seems ages. Oh, why didn't you go away! You must have seen how it had to end. Since I came home and first met you, I've lived and suffered and grown old. And I had dreamed such dreams!" Here she paused, as if to fight back the painful memories of those rainbow dreams. Then she admitted them. "And they became rosier and rosier—because of you. Even the disappointments my father's lack of polish caused me were nothing—because of you. Then you ceased to see me, and I didn't understand."

"I wanted you so very much—then—and you did not come. I know now what it was; the election was coming on, you had begun to fight my father. You knew I didn't realize his position in Belmont. I'm sincere. I want you to know I understand how hard it was for you, my friend—because I believe you loved me—sincerely."

"Sincerely, Gloria." His reply was almost a sob. "You know I begged you to go away. I would have followed you, and you would never have known."

His last sentence was full of bitterness, an acknowledgment of the Never-Never Land whither all happiness had flown.

"That's true, but the gods laugh and are our masters still. I felt that I owed it to my father to remain with

him in Belmont. Then came the day in Judge Gilbert's office. Did ever a girl have a courtship crowded into half an hour? So short a time there was between those few words of love and the rude awakening which followed that there remains to me now not even a sweet memory of that avowal which all girls cherish so. And then—well, that's why I've come today. I couldn't let you go away without asking you to forgive me for what I said in Judge Gilbert's office."

"There's no need of speaking of forgiveness. Please do not say any more."

She was not to be deterred from her



"The Gods Laugh and Are Our Masters Still."

set purpose, and therefore affected not to hear, going straight on with her narrative.

"You see, I was proud of my father. All my life he'd been an ideal, not a reality, and I thought him incapable of anything else. It turned out I was wrong—what I said about you."

"No, Gloria, you just didn't understand."

"But just the same, I was wrong, and wanted to tell you so before I went away. I knew I should not be here when you return, and so I came today."

"You're not going to leave Belmont!"

"Yes, I am. Do you think I could stay!" Her tone made Wright's heart sink. "No, I lack the courage, Joe, the moral courage. There's that much of the butterfly left in me. I'm not strong and brave like you are."

Gloria could not know how his strength and bravery were slipping from him little by little as they talked. Her very presence was weaving its subtle spell about him, snaring him with her wan beauty, maddening him with the thought that he was losing her. So she was going away. He wondered why, speculating on how she had come to learn the truth. This led him to ask:

"But your father?"

Had Wright known what a piteous outburst this would evoke, he never would have spoken.

"My father! What am I to him? I haven't seen him from that day. Since then I've been with Mrs. Hayes. When I learned at luncheon that you were going away, I had to come because I can't forgive myself for what I said in Judge Gilbert's office that came near ending so—disastrously—for you."

"Please don't think of it," he begged. "I don't connect you in any manner with the attack on me."

"But I do," she insisted, "because I know the truth." Here was the whole reason for her coming, she told herself—even though you're fighting my own father—I want you to have all the protection that knowledge of the truth will afford. I've come to warn you."

Wright saw that he had not made her understand that he was giving up the fight.

"But I'm going away."

"Yes, you've told me; but you're coming back again because you know your place is here. There's work to do."

He recognized instantly that it was her wish for him to remain. Her belief in him, such as it was, centered about his efforts to make Belmont a better place. Not wishing to explain what pain it would constantly give him were he to do so, he avoided the matter by referring to her own future.

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going abroad in a few days."

"What does your father say to that?"

Gloria's lip curled with scorn at the question. Her answer came with the coldness of a woman of the world.

"He can't say anything. What is he to me? I haven't even sent him word yet. He gave me everything in the world, but then at the supreme moment of my life he robbed me of it all. Would a father do that?" she asked fiercely. "What allegiance do I owe him. The claim of blood! Bah! He's always wished I'd been a boy. He didn't lie to me because he loved me. He didn't even know me. Do you think it wrenches my heart to leave him now? No; a thousand times no. We've lived too many years apart. What have we in sympathy? We'd be strangers though we lived under the same roof for years."

"But when you go abroad what are you going to do?" He could see no future for her.

"Just drift. There is so much that I want to forget."

"Much, Gloria?" he asked gently.

"Yes, much." She would not let him trap her into a damaging admission.

"Everything?"

"Everything painful."

Her attitude, he felt it was antagonistic, impatient even of his kindly questioning, stirred him to a vigorous reply. After all, she was but a child, and like a child wanted to shirk the lesson life was teaching her.

"Surely I've not been mistaken in you," he began. "It's by suffering that we learn to live. You've only come to see life as it is, that's all. Would you throw away the precious knowledge that is power for an Arcadian ignorance akin to weakness? You've just said that you've come to warn me of something. Were you true to your theory of life, you would leave me in ignorance, because the truth would give me pain. But you don't believe that."

From the depth of his world-scarred

Continued on page 1.

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