No Other Way

By Sir Walter Besant

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CHAPTER XXII.

The Conclusion of the Business.

It was Oliver's design to deal with the man of revenge, so that he might enjoy four and twenty hours, at least, of the king's bench prison, with the full delights of the poor side—those delights with which he was himself familiar. The time of year was still summer, but late summer, when the nights are cold. Mr. Fulton would therefore be able to anticipate some of the joys of winter, with no bed to lie upon, except the hard, bare, unwashed boards; no blanket to cover him, no change of clothes, a crowded room with close and confined air; no food, unless he was so lucky as to share in some of the miserable doles of the prison; and no drink. Four and twenty hours, Oliver thought, of the poor side would be quite enough to quench that burning desire for revenge.

He left his man, therefore, alone for the moment. There was, however, one more source of danger, hitherto unsuspected; that, namely, from the parson who had conducted the ceremony in Newgate. Like all his brethren, he kept a register, in which he entered the names of the couples whom he married. Now, Oliver considered, if the man had any suspicion of the wealth to which the lady had attained he would most certainly have endeavored to make money by his knowledge. As he had not done so, it was probable that he had quite forgotten the name of the bride and even the circumstances of the function. He resolved, however, to find out the man and to ascertain the truth. The mere name in the register without any qualifying description would be of no importance, because in such cases a name may be easily assumed. A maid servant, an apprentice, a milliner's girl, may assume for the occasion the name and style of her mistress. In itself, therefore, the register would be of no use to its possessor; and, as for other evidence, he was disposing of that by the banishment of one of the two persons chiefly concerned and the imprisonment of the other.

However, it is not a long journey from the temple to the Fleet and he made his way to the place.

The haunt of the marrying parsons is not a delectable place for the stranger to visit. Nowhere is it mentioned as one of the shows of London; the market, seldom cleaned, is strewn and covered with broken fruit and vegetables trodden into the ground and putrefying; it is encumbered with barrows; it is not only noisome with its unswept rubbish, but it is dreadful to ears polite by reason of the people who are continually fighting, quarreling and cursing. Every other house is a tavern and in most of the taverns may be found a parson in cassock-bands and wig ready to marry couples in a back room at a fee proportioned to the appearance of the pair, namely from five shillings, or even half a crown, to a guinea.

On Fleet Bridge and Ludgate Hill are the men who tent all day long for their masters, dragging in, so to speak, any couples who may happen to be walking along the street or on the hill.

To one of these men Oliver addressed himself. He learned from him first that the clergyman who had tied the futile knot was dead; he had been dead for nearly three years; his calling, it would seem, is not conducive to long life; perhaps because it is too intimately connected with punch and strong drink of various kinds, he was dead, however. Next Oliver was invited to bring the lady when he might be comfortably and safely married by the defunct divine's successor. Thirdly, as he showed no signs of producing a lady, he was earnestly invited to offer the means of procuring a drink for a thirsty throat. Lastly, he was referred to the landlord of the tavern where the pious soul had set up his quarters; lived, drank, eaten, slept and died.

Oliver found the place a little way up the market. The landlord was standing at the open door, a man of middle age and forbidding aspect, bearing upon his brow the unmistakable stamp which sooner or later brands the man who leads a life of internal iniquity. No one can deny, I believe, that the landlords of the Fleet taverns do lead lives of iniquity, if half the reports are true.

"I have come," said Oliver, "to make inquiries concerning the registers of marriage kept some years ago by your marrying parson."

"Oh!" the man replied. "You would like to see those registers, would you? Pray, sir, why do you want to see them?"

"I hear that the parson is dead. You have probably kept his books."

"Maybe—maybe. You are a lawyer, I perceive, sir. When a lawyer wants to see the register it is for some purpose of his own, I take it."

"Naturally. You are quite right."

"Well, sir, the register is, perhaps, in my possession. I do not say. Perhaps it is not. May a body ask why you want to see it?"

Oliver assumed his most lawyer-like air. "Sir," he said, "I need not inform you; it must be plain to a person of your understanding that such a register may be of infinite importance in proving, or substantiating, or the reverse, as the case may be, claims to an estate, to inheritance or to succession. Take, for example, the case of one born in wedlock who cannot prove his mother's marriage except by reference to these registers."

"Aye, sir, I understand. Or there may be equally the case of a woman who would bide, if she could, the proofs of her marriage. You take me, sir? These marriages must be beneficial to the community, because they are cheap and easy and may be hastily entered upon. You take me, sir?"

"Perfectly. Perfectly. You are quite right. Such a case might immediately arise."

"Well, sir, we come to this. The registers are worth money, especially to lawyers. You must, therefore, pay for looking at them."

"By all means. I will give you a present for looking at the registers kept by this divine—this devoted servant of Hymen. I want especially the register of three years ago."

"High men or low men turn all the same to my old friend. But, alas, good sir—only three years ago? I can show you now the registers of ten years ago—or even of five years ago—but of three years ago—you must know, sir, that the cause of the death of my unfortunate and pious friend—he was a member of the University of Oxford, sir, and as full of learning as an egg is full of meat—I say that the cause of his death was that he happened, being in liquor, to set his candle beside the bed and too near the sheets—in consequence of which the latter caught fire, and in extinguishing the flames we not only saved the unfortunate gentleman, who was lying dressed in his silk cassock, but caused him a fever, which, together with the burns, carried him off three days after."

"And the registers?"

"They were under his pillow while drunk or sober; he always kept them. And what with the fire and the water they were mostly reduced to pulp and ashes."

"So—they are no longer legible, then?"

"Just as they were—brown ashes and pulp, as I said, we threw them away. There was nothing left of them that could be read."

"Oh! They were destroyed. Perhaps as well. My friend, you have lost a guinea by this misfortune. Pray, if I may ask, have you found a successor?"

"Truly, sir, there is another divine who hath taken his place. A scholar, they tell me, but he lacks the persuasiveness of his predecessor. He certainly drinks as hard, but he is wanting in the pleasantness which used to make my home a place of resort for gentlemen and wits. I shall have to send him about his business, I fear. When he is in his cups he weeps over his sins, weeps, sir. How can young people be encouraged to marry by a man who sheds tears if you give him a glass of punch?"

From the Fleet market Oliver took oars across the river. As he had expected, twenty-four hours of privation had already reduced his friend to a condition of great humility. He had already sold his wig, his coat and his stockings, and was horribly and miserably thirsty.

"Sir," he cried eagerly, "I have been looking for you. I have been expecting you."

"Where are your clothes?"

"It is an extortionate place. They give next to nothing for them. The wig gave me a pint of Lisbon; the coat gave me three glasses of punch; the stockings this morning gave me a pint of small ale. And I am already consumed with thirst again. Oh, sir, have pity on a poor, thirsty unfortunate bankrupt! My throat is like an oven for dryness. For the love of the Lord, sir, give me a drink—give me a drink."

Oliver sent for a bottle of wine. "There!" he said. "It will make you happy for an hour."

The man sat with his head in his hands, moaning, for the consuming fire of thirst in his throat. When the bottle came he seized it and drank off half the contents without the form of pouring it into a glass. "Ha!" he sighed, setting down the bottle with a deep sigh, "it is heaven! I want no better heaven!"

"How do you like the prison?"

"Sir—it is—it is"—He drank again. "It is not heaven. All night long I was pursued, sir, by rats. The rats of this prison are as large as cats; all night they ran after me, thousands of rats, there were; and they chased me and no one else. Do you think, sir, I ask you as a Christian and a Briton—do you think that his majesty's gracious prisoners should be hunted * * * hunted, sir"—(he looked about him with terror in his eyes)—"hunted by rats as big as cats and twice as fierce?"

"Why, sir, if you invite them, so to speak—"

"They ran after me all night—only after me. The other men in the room sat up and cursed me. I did not bring the rats into the prison. They have no pity upon me; they cursed me."

The livid looks betrayed the horror of his mind. "I see them again," he cried, jumping about. Oliver gave him the bottle. He drank again. "Ha!" he said, "they are gone. Where did they go to? How did they get into the room?"

"You told me," said Oliver, "that you would have revenge. You said that revenge was dearer than life. As you cannot have revenge, I suppose you would like to keep your life."

"Sir, I was wrong. I would rather have drink. Give me drink, and I ask for no revenge. Sir, I was wrong. The lady did not owe me £1,200, but less than £100. I thought to cheat the creditors. I did, indeed. I have been deceiving you."

"Not me, sir. You have not deceived me, I assure you. What do you propose, then?"

"Nothing, nothing. O, if those rats—" He trembled and shook.

"Now, sir, give me your attention. You are in great misery; you will be in greater misery before long. If, however, you are disposed to sign a statement giving the truth of the whole matter so far as you are concerned, I shall not take you out of this place, where you may be quite as comfortable as outside, but I will remove you to the master's side; I will give you a lodging and 15 shillings a week. Will that do for you?"

"Sir, I accept; I accept with joy. Anything—anything—I want protection—O!—against the rats. I want drink."

If Oliver had been in the tavern one hour later he would have been edified by the spectacle of the prisoner restored to self-respect and even happiness. He was in the first stage; that of a boastful imagination. "Gentlemen," he said, "I hope we shall be good company. For my own part, I am the great Mr. Fulton of Ludgate hill, whose bankruptcy made so great a stir in the city some years ago. I drink to the health of the company. It was for many thousands—a great many thousands. There was a woman who—" he checked himself and looked about the room. "I drink," he repeated, "to the company. This is a pleasant place and the drink is good; the drink is good."

I do not think that Oliver had occasion to pay that allowance very long; the graveyard of St. George's church opened, I am sure, before many weeks or months, for the final reception of the poor wretch who had made of life so terrible a mess and bungle. The tears shed by wife and children were, I believe, few and quickly dried. There is, indeed, one reading of the fifth commandment too much neglected. When a man has fallen so low as to be hopeless; when there can be no reform, but only a deeper sinking in the slough, with no chance of reformation, the children who would most anxiously obey that commandment do well to pray for the best thing that can happen—the speedy dissolution of their parent—with gratitude, praise and thank offering when their prayers are granted.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Showing How the Best-Laid Plan May Go Wrong.

"We have now," said Oliver, "settled the whole business. The two principals, if we may so call them, are safe; one of them is locked up for life in a debtor's prison. The other will tomorrow be dropping down the river on his way to the gold coast, where, let us hope, he will remain for the rest of his natural term."

"Is there no other way with the man Fulton than making him a prisoner?"

"My dear madam, I did not propose to leave him on the poor side. I have, believe me, a lively recollection of that side of the prison. The man blusters about revenge. I have placed him where revenge is impossible. Revenge, he says, is dearer than life. Very good; we shall see what starvation, with no drink, will do for our friend. He has now, as I was sure he would do, submitted himself. I have, therefore, with your permission, given him the means of living—and drinking. 'We do not drink to live,' he would say; 'we live to drink.' So long as he can drink he is as happy in the prison as out of it."

"As for the other man, I will go this evening in order to make quite sure of his readiness for departure. He is now reduced to terror unspeakable, and will, I think, give us no trouble."

He assumed his disguise once more—it turned out to be for the last time—and he repaired to Great Hermitage street in order to take his sable friend on board ship and to leave him there, in comparative safety, until the sailing of the vessel. It was at nightfall, just after sunset, that he arrived. He encountered the very thing which he had held up before Mr. Truxo, as a danger, without believing in it himself. How it was done, or by whom, he never discovered. The sailors and the lightermen would, one is sure, considering their own lives, scorn the work of an informer and would refuse with indignation to take the wages of infamy. But there were occasional craftsmen who also used the house and among craftsmen may sometimes be found here and there one with an eye to the reward, rather than honor; to personal gain, rather than the general welfare. It must have been one of those who betrayed the heroic negro—hero of so many burglaries. As to the discovery of the fact, namely, that Mr. Adolphus Truxo was one who had escaped from the house of bondage and the plantations in Virginia, that had certainly been revealed, confessed with pride and proclaimed aloud, by the hero of the adventure himself, when in his cups. The rest is easy of surmise; given a man with a feeble sense of honor; given a man, also, who, while in drink, declares the truth boastfully; what more certain than an information laid at Bow street; a claim of the reward offered for such information; and, very possibly, the things which Oliver was enabled to witness that evening when he arrived on the spot.

First he found a great crowd of men and women, both gathered together in the street before the tavern. They were violently agitated; the women were all talking together and all as loudly as they could, so as to be heard above the rest. Oliver heard broken parts of the exclamations. "They say he has settled two, at least; two are dead; more than two, six, at least, are knocked o' the head, besides two desperately wounded. He is fighting them all together. He's a lion, not a man. Where is Doll? They say that Doll brought in the constables. She is with him; she is looking on; she has sold him; she is fighting with him; hanging is not too good for her; she is standing up for her man. He is upstairs in his bedroom. Doll keeps the stairs with a poker. They are going to starve him out. He will set fire to the house; the landlord has run away. The man will be hanged if they take him alive. Shame to hang so proper a man, though black of color!" And so on with contradictory statements, but all tending to show that a fight was going on and that Mr. Adolphus Truxo was defending himself valiantly.

As for the men, they formed in groups; they whispered to each other; they looked dangerous. It was evident that they were thinking of a rescue.

Oliver pushed through the crowd to the front.

"REMEMBER NOT PAST YEARS."

At this moment the man of whom they were speaking appeared at his window, that of a first floor front. He threw open the casement and stood before them all, roaring like a bull at bay he was a man proper. His rough waistcoat was thrown open, he had no coat, his broad, square shoulders and his deep chest were exposed; it was surely impossible for a man to look stronger or more terrible; he had a wound of some kind in the face and the blood was trickling down; his fierce eyes flamed like those of a wild beast in wrath; he bellowed, with rage inarticulate. There was no longer any touch of terror in the man; face to face with the danger, all the brute surged upward with the lust of fight. Such he must have looked when, to procure his freedom, he fought and slew the overseers in the plantation of Virginia. Oliver regarded him with admiration as he made one more and the last fight for escape.

He also perceived at once that unless the men in the crowd attempted a rescue there was no hope for the man. The posse that had been brought out against him consisted of twenty men; they were armed with clubs and they were a determined company. Some of them stood guarding the door of the tavern; the rest were gathered under the window at which the negro stood defying them. He had no weapon; he shook his huge fist at them; he defied them, he cursed them; within could be heard the shrill voice of Doll, who guarded the staircase. Some of the constables showed on their heads and faces the marks of recent encounter in bruises, wounds and bleeding places; these were due to the defensive efforts of Doll and they increased the determination of the men to effect the arrest. The head constable stood out in front, exhorting the man to surrender; but his words were neither heard nor regarded.

"Come down," cried the women. "Jump on their heads. It's your only chance. Jump, ye devil, jump!"

"Steady, men, steady!" said the leader. "We are 12 to 1. Let him jump. He'll have to before long. When he does, strike at his shins—it's no use to strike at his thick skull. Batter his shins. Surround him and batter his shins."

The prisoner in the bedroom looked out; most of the constables were stationed at the door; beneath the window there were only three or four.

"Jump; Lord love ye!" cried the women. "Drop down. It's nothing. You can't hurt yourself. Jump! jump, you fool. Jump! and run for it!"

The men of the crowd made a movement; they drew together; they looked dangerous. The casement window was narrow for a man of the negro's bulk, but he was able to put his legs through, and his body followed after; then, for a moment, he hung clinging by one hand to the window sill, his feet no more than three feet from the ground and his back to the wall. Had he dropped immediately he might have escaped; at least a rescue might have been attempted. But he hesitated; he hung by the wondow sill for half a minute in apparent uncertainty; and the men of the crowd who might have made a rush waited, looking on. Had there been a leader among them to give the word the end might have been different. But they waited, and too long.

At that moment one of the constables, mindful of instructions, swung round his club and brought it down upon the negro's shins, which are, as is well known, like the heel of Achilles, being the most vulnerable part of his frame. They might have battered on his skull in vain, but the shin—the shin—is a negro's most tender part. The man dropped on the ground with a yell of agony; he fell headlong in a heap; he strove to rise, but his enemies were upon him. He received without an attempt for the moment, to defend himself, all the clubs upon his head; he was recovering from the blow upon his shins, he was about to make one more effort, when one among them—was it one of the constables?—but a constable is not armed with a sword—ran upon him with that weapon and drove it through him from behind. The negro raised his arms; he sprang to his feet with a hoarse roar, and he fell down dead. The man had come to the end of his tether; for such a one, he had enjoyed a long rope and had been allowed to commit many crimes. But the fates do not allow more than a certain period of lawlessness; it is sometimes short and sometimes long—it comes to an end, soon or late. This man was a murderer, a housebreaker, a shoplifter, a highway robber, a footpad, there was no kind of crime that he had not committed joyfully and eagerly; he had set before himself an imaginary hero who broke all the laws. Then the fates at last interfered, the thread was cut.

"Who done it?" asked the constable, looking around. "Well, the man's dead; if we hadn't killed him, he would have killed us."

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The constables gathered together; the fight was over; at their feet, prone, lay the body of the man they had come out to take. The honor of a constable is concerned with a successful capture. At the same time, the men of the posse were, perhaps, pleased that a man of so much courage and such vast strength should have been forbidden to make that last struggle and should have escaped the gallows.

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Then came running out of the door none other than Doll, his poor, faithful wife, battered and beaten by her husband's brutality, yet, woman-like, fighting for him and loving him to the end. With a shriek she threw herself upon the dead body.

"'Tis his wife," said the women among themselves. They were whispering, now awe-struck in the presence of death. "Look at her. They call her Doll. She married him five or six years ago. You remember? We laughed at her because she had gotten a black man. He was a good husband to her when he was at home except for a black eye and a kick and a turn of the strap. What odds for a black eye, with such a husband as that?"

They carried the body into the house and upstairs to the room where he had slept. Doll followed with despair in her face. Then the constables marched away in silence. The landlord prepared for the coroner's inquest, which would be a thirsty job, and the crowd dispersed—the women still chattering and the men downcast and reproachful. They ought, it was felt, to have rescued so brave and strong a victim of the law.

Oliver attended the inquest, standing modestly at the door. The coroner and the jury viewed the body. They took the landlord's evidence. The man and his wife had come to his house some days before. They had money and they took a room—the room which the jury had seen. They paid for the room and for the food and drink which they ordered. They were free with their money. The man never told the landlord what was his trade or anything about himself. For his own part, so long as his customers paid their way and behaved quiet and reasonable he asked no questions; the company that used his house was the most respectable; they found the man friendly and pleasant. That was enough for him. When the constables came to arrest him he was down below, by himself, except for his wife. He fought the whole posse, having for weapon nothing but a chair, which he soon reduced to a leg; being overpowered by numbers he escaped up the stairs and barricaded the door; he got out of window and was set upon by the constables. Some one among them who had a sword drew it and ran him through a vital part.

The head constable also gave evidence. Information had been received that a certain man, the man upstairs, had escaped from the plantations of Virginia, whither he had been transported for life; the man's name was Truxo; he was a negro who had been sentenced to death, but his sentence was commuted. He was ordered to summon a posse and to arrest the man; he brought a dozen constables with him; there was a fight; the man threatened to murder everybody. The fight was terminated by a sword thrust which killed the man and prevented further mischief and probable loss of life. Had he been arrested he would have been hanged most certainly. Runaway cases were never pardoned; a man may have one chance, but not more."

The coroner summed up. The jury found that the man had met with his death in the course of resistance to the law, and that it was justifiable homicide. So all was over. The jury went away. Oliver felt somewhat sorry for the fate of the man, who was, after all, in spite of his daring and his strength, a mere criminal, unworthy of pity. He, too, came away. There was nothing more to be done. The man was dead. He had certainly left no papers behind. His widow knew nothing, or remembered nothing of the event. There was no cause to fear her. She would make a living somehow or other. How do such women make a living?

He did not think it necessary to communicate the intelligence to the captain of the ship. That officer had lost his passenger, but was the richer by his passenger's pay.

Oliver went back to Drury lane and put off his disguise. "I shall not want it any more," he said. "My business is ended."

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Remember Not Past Years."

Oliver's task was done. Isabel was safe; no charge could now be brought against her; the bridegroom in that terrible marriage was silenced by death; the man of revenge was silenced by drink and seclusion; the Fleet parson was dead, his registers were destroyed; the dressmaker was a woman of many secrets, all of which were safe with her provided she had her ladies' custom. Lord Stratherrick could do nothing but repeat what he had heard and his words would no longer be heard. The landlord of the Grapes had no purpose to gain by repeating a rumor of which he had no proof. The lady's reputation, in a word, was saved. It only remained to communicate to her the news that the business was now buried and could never be revived. He sighed as he thought of the reward that might be offered him, and of Alice and of her warning that Isabel was in love with him. For now, in the first flow of gratitude, words might be said, a reward might be offered which in common gratitude for all Isabel had done for him he could not refuse.

He owed everything to her—his freedom, his good name, his present prospects, his hopes, his ambitions; he repeated to himself that she had found him in the deepest distress and had taken him out of his misery; he had no right to entertain the thought of any other woman if this woman should haply claim more than gratitude, more than friendship.

Isabel was in her parlor, the room at the back on the ground floor; her own room, where she sat when she was alone, surrounded by her books and her pictures. She looked up when Oliver appeared with an inquiring glance.

"Madam," he said, "I bring you what I hope you will consider good news."

"You always bring me good news, Oliver. Tell me quickly what your news is. I am more anxious than I can tell you."

"Providence, madam, has been on your side—may I say—on our side?"

"Surely you may say so. But how?"

"Your enemies are finally scattered. You will hear no more of them."

"How? What have you done?"

"Madam, it is not what I have done. It is surely the hand of the Lord. You were in the hands of wicked men. They are silenced and powerless. As for the escaped convict—" he paused, thinking how best to present the story of the last scene.

"Has he gone on board?"

"Not on the ship provided for him. Das alike visum; by the gods the end was otherwise appointed. He has embarked on the ship whose pilot is Charon. Someone—believe you, madam—not myself—betrayed him. The constables were sent out to arrest him. He fought them, being a fellow of infinite courage, and well-nigh escaped them—for the moment—but in the fight someone—I know not who—drew a sword—and so he fell. Murderer, robber, companion of murderers and robbers—he has met with the death that he deserved, but not at my hands."

Isabel sighed, but not with grief. "He is dead. Alas! Oliver, I cannot choose but feel relieved. You think that he has left nothing—no papers—behind him?"

"What papers could such a man possess, or leave, who knew not how to read or write? He has left nothing—neither papers, nor record, nor history. He has descended in the grave; his place knoweth him no more. Well for him that he has perished in this way instead of the way he feared—and deserved."

Isabel bowed her head. "Can I pretend to be sorry?" she asked. "If we may not desire the death of a sinner we may at least acknowledge the hand of Providence when a sinner is cut down. It might have been myself. Oliver, can I forget that I once held that man's hand while the parson declared that those whom God had joined together man must not part?"

"Dear lady, there was no marriage. He was already married."

"The marriage was in my mind; it was in my intention. I can never forget the shame and the humiliation of it."

"Let the memory of the day and the hour perish. Dear madam, forget the man and all. As for the other, the poor drunkard, who in his sober moments talked of revenge; who pretended that you made him bankrupt."

"What of him?"

"You know that he is in the King's Bench prison. He is now submissive and repentant—that is, afraid he will get no more drink. I have ventured to pledge your word for a small allowance, which will give him a sufficiency. It is the best place for him, believe me. At the tavern where he lived he drank all day long. He would have been killed in a few days or weeks. Already he had begun to see rats and creeping things, which is the worst sign in the world. He will live longer in the prison, if it is worth while to prolong a useless life in the hope of repentance. But he has had a fright. He will never again talk of revenge. If he does he will have to go back to the poor side, where there is no drink to be obtained except for money. And he will have none."

"I must tell his wife and Alice where he is. Oliver, it was my sin that found me out when this man was taken to my brother-in-law with his story. He goes into a prison, where he will die—a pauper. I am free and rich."

"Madam, you have done kind and good actions. These are your guardian angels for you. They stand between you and evil. That man's life has been a long course of drink, with the evils that drink brings with it. Do not waste your pity upon him."

"I will not. Poor wretch!" Yet she was wasting pity upon him. "Perhaps his wife will go to see him."

"There remained the Fleet parson. Madam, you will not be surprised to hear, perhaps, that shortly after you saw him this worthy divine went to bed drunk; it was not, I believe, an uncommon ending of the day with him; the candle set fire to the sheets and in the extinguishing that followed not only his life was lost, but his latest book of registers was also burned irrecoverably. Madam, said I not that Providence was on your side. Afflavit Deus; the Lord hath once breathed and your enemies are scattered."

"The Lord hath sent me also a faithful and most loyal friend." She gave him her hand. He stooped and kissed it. She took his hand in her own and held it. He changed color, thinking of what might be in her mind. "There," she said, softly, "henceforth you are my brother. Do you understand? My brother." Alas, Oliver would never understand what it cost her to confer this title upon him. He only thought that Alice had been mistaken. "My brother," she repeated. They were, he thought, tears of relief—nay, of gratitude—for her release. But they were not. They were the tears with which she could not choose, but offer when she made surrender, once for all, of the dream that had filled her soul until it became a part and parcel of her life, insomuch that, without it, there seemed no joy or hope or joy left at all. "All that I have is yours. Promise me that if you want anything that I can give you, you will tell me. It will be my happiness—my chief happiness, my brother—to watch your happiness." To promote him she was giving up to this loyal and true gentleman the bond which would have made him her own for life. "But I cannot help you. Wealth, honor, rank, office—all will be won by yourself, for yourself. We women can only look on. There is a great future before you. And I shall sit and watch and thank God; yes, Oliver, thank God all my life for you and for your success."

She released his hand; he saw the tears rise to her eyes and roll down her cheek. He stood before her too deeply moved for speech, too deeply moved even to kiss her hand. At length he found words.

"Madam, remember what I owe you. Think what you have done for me. Could I do anything, think of anything, while there was a service left undone for you?"

"Nay, but you make too much of a simple act." She dried her tears. "Oliver," she said, "there is one thing that I must do for you. "Oh! one thing I must do—and that tonight—immediately."

"What is that madam?"

"It is the thing that is dearest in your thoughts and lies nearest to your heart. Oh! Oliver, you have preserved my reputation. Indeed, I think you cannot know how great a thing you have done for me. My sin—my grievous sin—found me out and followed me even to this place when I thought myself secure. I was threatened, you know. Those who threatened me were ruthless. They wanted to rob me of all and to tear from me my good name. Alas! Heaven knows that I had deserved all—all—all. But you, best of friends—you saved me! Oliver! once more—what is the thought that is nearest to your heart?"

"Madam," he stammered, "what should it be by my ambition and my hopes."

"I do not mean your ambition; I said your heart, Oliver, not your head."

"Can it be other than the continuance of your friendship and my service?"

"That is still your head. I said your heart, Oliver, your heart. Answer me faithfully, my brother."

"Madam, what am I to say? You know not what you ask."

"You think so? You shall see. Tell Alice that I would speak to her. Will you ring the bell? He pulled the bell rope.

"Child," said Isabel, when Alice appeared, "we want your help. No one can put it right except yourself. Perhaps you know. I have asked Oliver to tell me what is nearest to his heart. He seems unable to reply. Will you help him?"

The girl crimsoned and then turned pale. "Madam," she said, "how can I know Mr. Macnamara's heart?"

"Little hypocrite—how badly you play that part. Why, child, you were never made for an actress. Look at this man; he has no words of reply to a simple question. Well, there is no one who knows Oliver's heart better than you yourself. For you have betrayed yourself. It was on the night of the thunderstorm. I was sitting here, and voices—your voices—came up to my window from the garden. Alice, my dear, they were the voices of you and Oliver. I heard what you were saying. Shall I recall those words?"

"No—no—no, madam."

"Then, Alice, you must help me. I have asked Oliver to tell me what is nearest to his heart. He seems unable to reply. This eloquent lawyer can move a jury, but he cannot move himself. Will you help him?"

The girl crimsoned, and then turned pale. "Madam," she stammered, and then, like her lover, she remained silent.

"I am a woman, Alice. Therefore, I have eyes to see. I am not like those foolish men who see nothing and understand nothing. Do you believe that I have not observed certain looks—of the kind, called betraying looks—in Oliver's eyes? Do you believe that I have forgotten those words? Ah, Alice, for loyalty and love, where is thy equal if it be not thy lover? Tell me, honestly, what is nearest to his heart?"

Then Oliver took the girl's hand and made answer.

"Madam, let me answer for Alice. I have ventured to love this maiden."

"Why—there! There! Alice, do you hear? He repeats what he told you in the garden. But I forbid you to repeat what you said!"

"Madam!"

"He dares to say that he loves you. Why, Alice, your lover has consigned your father to a debtor's prison. Can you forgive him? He will be a prisoner for life. We shall not, to be sure, starve him—but—can you forgive him?"

"Madam, my father is—what you know. Oliver could not commit an act that was cruel or unjust or anything but right and honorable."

"But consider, wilful girl, Oliver has his name and fame to make. Would you hamper him at the outset?"

"Madam, he has done me the honor to say that he loves me. I will not hamper him. I will let him go free from any promise. It is enough that I have heard him say once that he loves me."

"After all," said Isabel laughing through her tears, "you are a pair of fools. You think that you can live on words, vows and poetry and promises and hopes. It is like living on air instead of mutton chops. Let me advise, let me provide. Alice, my dear, take his hand. Child, you blush and tremble. See—men have no shame—he takes your hand without a thought of trembling. You will marry him tomorrow morning, or the day after, when you choose. The sooner the better. Alice, my dear, Oliver has become my brother—you are my brother, Oliver, are you not?"

"Madam, you say so."

"Therefore, Alice, you will be my sister. It is a tender relation. Child," for Alice burst into tears and fell at her feet. "It is duty, it is gratitude; it is atonement. For, Oh! my dear, my dear, if my sin has found me out the Lord has granted forgiveness. Ah! dear Lord!" She clasped her hands. "In mercy thou remembereest not past years."

(The End.)

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