

HER PRIDE SUBDUED.

When Helen Vinton was twenty-one, the mills where her father had made the bulk of his fortune became her property. It had been understood that before long time she would be the wife of her cousin Victor, to whom she had been betrothed almost from her cradle.

Between her and all care regarding the mills stood her foreman, Stephen Walker, a man whom the mill both loved and feared, and whose father had been a man there before him.

Though the marriage had been delayed from time to time, and Victor had spent most of the two years since she reached her majority wandering over Europe, she had never known the responsibility of her position until this autumn day, when she sat amid the rich surroundings of her library, bending wearily over the long columns of figures that represented to her the state of her business.

There was a quick step in the hall, and Stephen Walker entered.

"You are examining the accounts, Miss Vinton. I trust you find no difficulty in understanding them."

"Oh, I dare say they are plain enough," she replied with a forced laugh, "but I was always stupid about figures. This is a heavy burden you have thrown on my shoulders, Mr. Walker—how heavy I scarcely realized until I attempted to go over those books."

Stephen Walker grew very pale.

"I hope there will be no trouble, Miss Vinton. I suppose Victor will be home

in the spring, and I think Brown will be capable of taking charge until then."

"I dare say you shall do very well, and I cannot blame you for wishing to go. I know you have talents that are quite thrown away here. But Stephen—" with a little break in her sweet, proud voice, and extending her hands to him—"I shall miss you sadly."

He took her hands in his, and bent over them, with a sob in his voice.

"Oh, Helen—don't you know? Can't you understand? It is not because I want to better myself that I must go, but because to stay here, seeing you every day, and knowing, as I do, that you can never be mine, is madness, for, oh, Nell, my queen, I love you!"

"Stop!" she said passionately.

"No; you must hear me. I never meant to tell you this, but now you must know why I desert the charge your father left to me. I remember the first day I saw you, when your father brought you down to the dusty old mills—a tiny golden-haired fairy, who seemed of finer clay than I, a rough boy—and left you for a whole bright day in my care. Helen, from that day I have worshipped you, madly, hopelessly, I know, but as never man loved before; and now to stay here and see you Victor's wife, is worse than death."

"Have you quite finished?" she said.

"Then go. It is well you have chosen to leave here at once."

He went wearily out into the autumn evening, where the wet wind, sobbing through the leafless branches of the trees, seemed an echo to his thoughts.

And inside, prone on the floor, her golden hair trailed over the rich carpet, Helen Vinton lay struggling with the great sense of loss and pain, for she loved him, knowing, too, that between her and the foreman of her mills was a gulf that love could not bridge.

The winter that followed was a trying one to Miss Vinton. Brown, the man whom Mr. Walker had left to fill his place, fell ill soon after his departure, and the heavy responsibility fell upon her.

Murmuring and discontent on one side, and scornful impecuniosity on the other, culminated in a strike, involving a heavy loss to Miss Vinton, and much suffering among her people.

In the spring Victor returned, with his happy heart and sunny smile.

He was eager for a speedy marriage, but on one pretext and another it was

delayed until the summer faded and autumn was upon them.

Once or twice during the summer, Victor brought her a newspaper containing favorable accounts of an invention by Stephen Walker, an improvement that had been in operation in her mills long before it was patented.

The paragraph stated that he had accepted an offer to superintend the creation of some mills in South America, and was going far away.

And then the restraint she had put upon herself suddenly gave way, and she fell down unconscious at Victor's

feet.

He did not dream of the true cause. A few days after this, she was engaged in some household duties, when Victor's bright face appeared at the window.

"I want you to come down to the mills by-and-by, Nell," he said. "The addition is almost finished, and I want your approval before we remove the scaffolding."

"Very well, Victor, I shall be down presently," she said.

"And Nell," he continued, "the men have been working like beavers to get it finished, and I have promised them a half-holiday to-morrow and a picnic up at the quarries. Could you lend your dignity, and honor us with your presence for awhile? It would be so much better for all concerned, if there was a better feeling between you and your people."

"No, thank you, Victor," she said haughtily. "If there is anything in this house that will serve them, they are welcome to it. But to go up there is too dreadful for contemplation."

"What a little aristocrat you are, Nell! You were born a hundred years too late. But I think I love you the better as you are," raising her fingers to his lips.

Yielding to a sudden impulse, she bent forward and touched her lips to the bright boyish brow.

And Victor went down the road to the mills with a lighter heart than he has known for months, for he loved his cousin, and her coldness and indifference troubled him sorely.

Just then the morning train thundered up to the little station, half a mile distant, and left a single passenger, who nodded familiarly to the few bystanders and took the path across the fields to the mills.

Victor was standing surrounded by the men. He was telling them of his arrangements for the picnic.

On the outskirts of the little group, unnoticed in the excitement of the moment, stood the man who had just arrived.

Suddenly he raised his eyes to the scaffolding above Victor's head, and then strong men were thrown right and left, as by a giant's strength.

There was a crash, and Victor was thrown far out of harm's way.

But where he had stood a moment before, lay a man they all knew, pinned down by a beam across him.

And while they stood horror-stricken, a woman was in their midst.

"Men," she said in a voice so unlike her own that those who heard it never forgot, "can you do nothing but stand and stare like idiots? Victor has given his life for you, can you do nothing to relieve him?"

"Go to the house and see that a room is made ready to receive him. John Stiles, saddle the fleetest horse in the stable, and ride for Dr. Jackson, as you never rode before; and the rest of you, put forth strength and lift this beam."

And they succeeded in rescuing the man, and bore him into the house. Before them walked a woman with wild eyes and white drawn lips.

When the doctor came out of the room, she met him at the door.

"Is there any hope, doctor?"

"I cannot tell yet. He has a strong constitution, and I hope for the best."

"Doctor," she said, grasping his arm with passionate force, "you must save him; you must, you must!"

"You forget, my child, that the issues of life and death are not in my hands. Forgive me, doctor! I scarcely know what I was saying. I know you will do all you can, and I am a good nurse—papa always said so."

"Helen, you must not think of nursing him. You are ill already."

She laid a slim cool hand on his.

"Put your finger on my pulse, doctor. It beats evenly. I must be brave and

strong for his sake. If I gave my life for him, it would but poorly requite what he has done for me."

The doctor looked into her face and read her secret.

"It shall be as you wish," he said briefly; "but you must let a nurse help you."

She went into the darkened room, where he lay in a heavy stupor, and knelt beside the couch.

Presently he opened his eyes and saw her there. A smile lighted his face.

"Nell, Queen Nell!" he said softly, and then, "Victor, is he safe?"

"Safe and unharmed, Stephen; but at what a cost!"

"It is better so—better and easier to die thus for your happiness than to live through the weary years of exile I looked forward to."

"Do not talk of dying," she moaned. "You must live for my sake; for, oh, darling, I cannot live without you."

"Do you know what you are saying, Helen? Did you care for me a little after all?"

"So much, Stephen, that if you are taken, there will be no good thing left in life for me but to lie down and die, too—so much that I could never have married Victor, though like a coward I shrink from telling him so."

"I must live, dear," he said; "I cannot die now."

And then he drifted away into unconsciousness.

It was long days before he knew her again. Through it all she never left him.

When the crisis was past, and he was pronounced out of danger, there seemed to be no room in her heart for her great joy and thankfulness.

They were married at Christmas. Stephen Walker won wealth and honor, and never did wife glory more in her husband's success than she in his.

Victor took his sore heart away as soon as Stephen was out of danger. His trouble was not incurable, for he has brought home a fair young girl, to be mistress of the fine house he is building.

He did not dream of the true cause. A few days after this, she was engaged in some household duties, when Victor's bright face appeared at the window.

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