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A Woman's Sacrifice.

CONTINUED.

"**P**ERCIE—Mr. Lennox—I have made a fearful mistake—" the words died on her lips, as he lifted his glorious eyes, full of love, to hers. "I—you—I release you from the promise you made me last night, and ask you to give me back mine."

"Cecil, in heaven's name, what are you talking about?" Then, sinking back with an amused smile, "How you frightened me! For half a moment I thought you were in earnest."

Another effort to quiet the unsteady lips and voice; this time he saw the struggle.

"I do mean it, alas! I can be nothing to you in future."

He sprang to his feet.

"Are you mad, or am I? Were you only acting a lie last night when you put your head on my breast and swore to be mine? Cecil, if the whole world proclaimed you false, I would cling to you and believe you true. Take back my promise!—give you yours! No, by heavens! not till your own lips assure me that you do not love me, will I believe that I could be so wholly, so utterly deceived and betrayed by the woman I adore!"

"Then you may believe it now." The tone was cold and hollow; she dared not raise her eyes to his face. For the first time, the proud noble nature had stooped to falsehood, and the degradation smote her to the soul. But she knew, Heaven, help her! that only by making him think her unworthy could she accomplish her end, and upon herself she had no mercy. What did it matter? All gladness was over for her now; she could sink no further into darkness.

"What did you say?" His face was stern and pale as marble. She forced herself to look at him for a brief second.

"It has been an awful mistake. I do not love you, except as a brother or a friend." And then the storm burst.

Cecil had often heard that Percie Lennox was swift to anger, but she had never dreamed of arousing such a violence of temper. He showered fiery reproaches upon her, he stung her with his scorn, and lashed her with his satire. She heard him out with dumb agony; she did not try to arrest one cruel word, one bitter sneer.

"Enough!" she cried, hoarsely, at last, feeling that her strength was failing her; and she rose, groping like one suddenly blind for the staircase.

The pitiful gesture smote Percie to the heart. For the first time, he had been guilty of harsh language to a woman, and his remorse was keen.

"Cecil, my darling, take care; you will fall. Trust yourself once more to my guidance." And before she could prevent it, he lifted her slight form in his arms and began the descent.

A shiver shook Cecil from head to foot, as she closed her eyes and lay half-fainting in his embrace. She was powerless to battle against this returning tenderness, and a cry broke from her very soul:

"O Percie, Percie, kiss me once before we part!"

Not once, but many times, and the hot tears fell on her upturned face. But they were at the end of the stairs now, and he drew her shawl carefully around her and left her in the shadow, as he spoke to the keeper and thanked him for showing them the lamps.

He put her arm within his as they walked slowly down to the hotel, and neither broke the silence until they reached it.

"You are an enigma, Cecil," he said; and all the anger had gone from his voice. "At one moment you tell me that you do not love me, and at the next you force me

to believe that you are suffering as bitterly as I am. Well, I do not pretend to understand a woman. But remember this: I have given you my heart, and I do not lightly take back the gift. Scorn it, trample it under your feet, if you will, I will yet have you for my own some day."

She sighed, "It cannot be!"
"Cecil, you cannot deceive me so; I know that you have some hidden motive for this, and, though I think it hardly what I deserve at your hands, I will not now ask you what it is; but I will find it out for myself, if it takes me twenty years."

He seated her in a dark corner of the piazza, and went to get a glass of wine. She terrified him by her strange impassiveness; she did not shed a tear, but shook from head to foot as if with an ague.—Percie passed through the hall, and met Mrs. Maxwell and Flora in the parlor.

"Where is Cecil?" Mrs. Maxwell was very pale, and Flora sobbing over a letter.

"Outside. What has happened?"

"My brother—Commodore Dare—O, how shall I ever tell her?"

Percie snatched the paper from Flora's trembling hand.

"Good, God, dead!" with shocked emphasis.

"It was an accident; they removed the steamer's plank too quickly, and he was precipitated into the water. They saw the wheel struck him, for he was a fine swimmer. Where is my poor child?"

The words almost died on her lips, for, looking like a ghost of her former self, Cecil came toward them.

"What is it aunt?"

Percie tried to stop her, but she drew the paper impetuously out of his hand.—One moment of awful pause, as her face grew stony in its pallor; she gave a single cry, and Percie caught her as she fell.

They thought she would never come out of that deathlike swoon. The nerves that had been so strung and lacerated during the painful day had received their final shock, and when she did uncloset her eyes, she seemed stupefied. Finally Mrs. Maxwell put her arm around her.

"Cecil," as the wandering eyes rested on her aunt's face, "I have a letter here from your father; try to read it."

She looked down at the page. It began, "My darling Sissy," his pet name for his only daughter. Over her heart came the sound of his voice lingering on the words—her own brave sailor father, whose caress she would never feel more; a single low sob broke the silence of the room, and the tears they had so anxiously looked for rolled down Cecil's cheeks as she sank back on her pillows.

The Maxwells were anxious to get away before morning, and there was a possibility of their catching the night train if they ran across the bay in a sailboat to the mainland. Percie Lennox offered his yacht instead of their own, on account of its greater speed, and in about an hour the travellers came down on the pier, Cecil, still half-stunned with her grief, a thick veil drawn over her face. Strong arms lifted her into the boat and carried her to a sofa on deck, and she said, gratefully, "You are so good to me, Uncle John; I have no father but you now," as she laid wearily down. But Mr. John Maxwell was some steps behind her, and she did not know then, nor for long years after, that it was Percie Lennox who had held her so lovingly.

It was a dark gloomy afternoon of a November day, and the schoolbell at Miss Hatherton's "English and French Boarding and Day School for Young Ladies," rang twice, rather waspishly, as if it said, "Do go home! do go home!" to the weary and dispirited students. With brightening faces the girls rose from their seats, and proceeded to pile up their books, the unloosened tongues flying at a pace calculated to make up for their enforced silence.—Suddenly, in the midst of the hubbub, a single sharp stroke sounded from the principal's desk.

"Young ladies," said Miss Hatherton, "as soon as the day scholars have withdrawn, I wish to say a few words to the boarders."

Six of the older girls and four or five children (for the boarding-school was limited) reentered themselves, and one, a pretty aly-looking girl, with masses of chestnut hair and big blue eyes, muttered to her neighbor:

"What upon earth's up? The griffin looks wonderfully amiable."

After a few minutes, the schoolroom being emptied of all but the girls just mentioned and a few teachers, Miss Hatherton, drawing herself up into an attitude

that she firmly believed combined the grace of Madame Roland with the dignity of Queen Elizabeth, addressed them:

"Children, I asked you to wait because I wished to inform you of a new arrival. I have been applied to by my friend, Mrs. Sidney, to receive as parlor boarder the daughter of Senator Evelyn, who desires to have the advantage of musical and Italian instructors in New York. Miss Evelyn belongs to a very distinguished Boston family, and I have no doubt that her society will be an acquisition to all of us! But I wish you all to understand that there must be no running freely into her chamber, or intruding upon her privacy, as she will have nothing to do with the school or rules. And now, children, prepare for your walk with Madame Fanchon; *donnez moi la carte.*" The last remark was intended for the servant, and, glancing down at the card which bore Miss Evelyn's name, Miss Hatherton prepared to descend, regardless of morning-wrapper and soiled linen.—"Please have the weekly reports ready for me on my return, Miss Dare," she said, as she left the room.

With a weary tired hand Cecil Dare opened the book of marks, and sat down to fill up the reports. She was used to the treadmill now; but to-day her head ached shockingly, the children in her department had been especially trying, and she had indulged in a faint hope that Miss Hatherton would assign her the duty of walking with the girls instead of madame.

Cecil was a different looking being from the one who had laughed and danced, the gayest of her set, that summer at Wachasasset. The face was older, paler, and more set in its severe outline; even in her happy days she had been devoid of color, but now the cheek was at times waxen in its transparency, and the full lips a shade less rosy. But the noble brow and deep eyes were lovely as ever, and the purple stuff dress fitted as trimly as the silks had done, while the linen collar rolled back from the beautiful slender throat, white as of old.

It was two years since she had accepted a position as teacher in Miss Hatherton's school, three, since she had broken her engagement with Percie Lennox. Teaching was her own choice, for both the Maxwells and Dares were strongly opposed to it, and had each offered her a home. Perhaps she might have accepted it but that it gave her too much time to think, for years had by no means deadened that parting. Twice since then a letter had come for Cecil bearing the Lennox crest, and with trembling hands she had locked them in her desk, where they now lay with unbroken seals. She did not dare to send them back, but she was equally resolved not to let her heart influence her now, when in trial and adversity, or bring Harold's vengeance upon him by yielding to his pleading. And stern and haughty as she had been in her defiance of Harold, she was yet woman enough not to wish to exasperate him further; therefore, when they met (as they sometimes did at the Maxwells), she was polite, but coldly indifferent. This behavior seemed unaccountable to her uncle, for after Commodore Dare's death, when Cecil's dependent condition became known, Harold had written an apparently generous and ardent letter to Mr. Maxwell, beseeching his influence with Cecil. She received the proposal with something very like scorn, and the Maxwells were much annoyed at the refusal of so excellent a match. About eighteen months before, upon the occasion of his mother's second marriage, Percie Lennox had accepted a diplomatic appointment, and it was previous to his sailing for Vienna that his second letter went to Cecil.

Cecil set at her desk, working with mechanical precision and rapidity, until the fading light rendered it impossible to continue the task, and then she sat still in the darkness thinking. Her head ached too much to allow her ideas to go beyond the mere physical pain, but even this was not to be long indulged, for presently a grand disturbance rose suddenly in the hall. First one shrill voice, and then another, until she began to think that all the French servants in the house must be scolding together; and she rose and opened the door. It was not totally dark in the vestibule, but as the only light came from a burner on the second flight above, it only served to "make darkness visible." As far as Cecil could discern, three of the servants were announcing their intention not to carry up another trunk, while the fourth stood on the staircase, explaining matters to a little figure, holding a travelling-bag and shawl.

"What is all this noise about?" said

Cecil's calm voice, proceeding from the schoolroom door.

Four tongues responded simultaneously, in French and English, that the trunk was too heavy; would mam'selle tell the young lady to send for a porter?

"I beg your pardon," said the little figure, addressing Cecil; "I have just arrived, and Miss Hatherton ordered these trunks carried to my room—a more difficult matter than I had imagined."

The voice was both ladylike and refined, and struck Cecil pleasantly. It was impossible to tell what the stranger looked like, but Cecil fancied her from that instant.

"Miss Evelyn, is it not?" asked she. "The flights are so long that we are obliged to take out one of the trays. Can you unlock your trunk there?"

"Certainly," said the stranger, running down stairs again. "It is only necessary to take out this; I can find a dress in it, I think."

"Very well," said Cecil. "Fanchon will take it to your room. The south room on the fourth story, Miss Evelyn. We take tea at half-past seven."

George Evelyn gave a glance of undisguised perturbation around the room assigned her as soon as she entered it. Her experience of boarding-schools was limited, for she had never been even to a day school in her life, and coming fresh from a luxurious home, with a *bijou* chamber of her own, the low single bed, chest of drawers, and small round table, did look rather unpromising it must be confessed. As she made her toilet a feeling of homesickness began to creep over her, and she reflected, with devout thankfulness, that she was only to be here for a short time, and, finally, with a little bit of a sigh, she heard the tea-bell ring, and walked down stairs, meeting Miss Hatherton at the foot.

"Just in time, dear," said that lady, honeyedly, drawing George's arm within her own. "Young ladies, I present you to Miss Evelyn. Madame Davoust, Mrs. Vaughn, Miss Harrison, Miss Dare; these are all my resident teachers. I have kept a seat for you at my right hand. I never make a stranger of any one, and I hope Miss Evelyn that I can make you enjoy your visit sufficiently to have you desire to repeat it."

As George's blue eyes opened with a quick amused glance, she raised them to the speaker's face, and, for the first time, took a scrutinizing glance at her. Miss Hatherton was, at first gaze, a handsome woman of about thirty, large and fair, with a fine figure, and plenty of yellow hair, which was usually in eminent danger of coming down about the shoulders. Miss Hatherton's eyes were blue, her nose straight and rather large, and she possessed very beautiful teeth, but the eyes had a trick of wandering all about, instead of looking clearly into yours while talking, and the lips were thin and depressed at the corners. Swift and keen was George's glance, as she unfolded her napkin, saying, to herself, "Deceitful, clever and hypocritical! What a combination!" And then Miss Evelyn ran her eye down the table, where the schoolgirls were honoring her with the unblinking stare which none but that genus acquire.

Meanwhile, from the opposite side of the table, Cecil was eyeing the new-comer as closely as was consistent with good-breeding. From Miss Hatherton's remarks she had received the impression that the parlor boarder was a girl of perhaps fifteen, and had groaned inwardly over the advent of another of the species, who was just uncontrolled enough to be an annoyance. But George was a surprise to her. This was no unformed girl, but a quiet self-possessed lady, with the unmistakable stamp of aristocrat upon her, from the lovely chestnut curls and refined face to the hand, white and fairy-like as Cecil's own, while a certain determination around the mouth, and a laughing stare in the deep violet eyes made Cecil smile involuntarily, as she thought, "A match for Miss Hatherton herself, unless my reading of faces is false." Glancing up she caught George's eyes, and blushed at their very evident admiration.

"I was very much obliged to you for your assistance," said George, addressing her.

She did not catch Cecil's name, and was wondering where the lovely Madonna face came from.

"What is that?" said Miss Hatherton. Cecil explained in a few words.

"I am sorry that you had any trouble, Miss Evelyn; servants are such a trial. You cannot imagine the care, labor and anxiety it is to have such a charge as mine

—no rest for either mind or body. There are my servants to give orders to and keep watch of, my teachers, who always come to me in the smallest emergency, these children, to whom I have such a sacred duty to perform, and to send forth into this sinful world. Many a time, when my strength gives out, and my brain fairly aches with being overtaxed, I am recalled to that duty by an inward voice, which says, "What will you answer if, in future years, one of these children come back to you and say, "Miss Hatherton, you have failed in strictness, or kindness, or in prudence toward me," and then I start up and work on. Duty is, and always will be, the ruling motive of my life, and I hope I shall fail in no particular of it toward you, my darling."

During this extraordinary harangue, delivered with mingled pomposity and meekness, George was seized with an insane desire to laugh. The utter ludicrousness of a woman with that face riding duty to death, and taking little triumphant flights on her hobby-horse, struck George's quick sense of the ridiculous, but by the time that Miss Hatherton ended her sentence with the very familiar term of "darling," George's response was ready for her with equal politeness and brevity.

"I do not for a moment doubt it, madam."

Miss Hatherton gave one look at the imperturbable face, and subsided behind the tea-urn.

"Children, you are dismissed said the principal, after the mush and milk, crackers and biscuit had been discussed by the boarders. "Miss Evelyn, pray finish your chicken. Miss Dare, don't go. May I give you a cup of tea?"

"Yes, thank you," said Cecil, while George looked up in surprise.

"Dare, did you say? I beg pardon, but are you related to Mrs. Clarence Dayton—she was Flora Maxwell?"

"My own cousin," with a sudden lighting up of every feature, which made George think Cecil's the loveliest face she had ever seen outside of a picture frame. "Now I know who you are, Miss Evelyn; you are Clarence Dayton's cousin."

Up rose George impulsively, and walked over to Cecil's side.

"Yes, and I have so often heard Flora talk of you. We must get acquainted." And down she sat, and plunged into animated conversation, considerably to Miss Hatherton's discomfort.

Cecil felt as if a new life was dawning for her during the next few weeks. Upon every occasion that was possible George sought her society, and she brightened wonderfully under this charm of old ways and old associates. For Miss Hatherton, even when most kind (and she was by freaks, very gracious to Cecil), was yet unmistakably *porcenne*, and never more so than when she aimed at being aristocratic. George Evelyn was a character in her own peculiar fashion. Very refined, thoroughly accustomed to society, with a spice of selfish mischief, that made her enjoy playing off Miss Hatherton's peculiarities in a good-humored way, she was both clever and aimable, and even when most satirical, it was so daintily veiled that Cecil often was the only person who enjoyed it. Brought up among the most cultivated literary clique of Boston, she had all their polish and pedantry, together with a knack of hitting off racy sketches and reviews with her pen, which were a source of great amusement to those who know her well. Within a fortnight after her arrival at Miss Hatherton's, she had a comical estimate in her own mind of the entire household, and she entertained Cecil with it one day.

"First there is Miss Hatherton, politely styled 'the griffin' by the girls," said she. "The opinion I formed of her the first night I retain, with a small addenda. Clever, my dear, very, but her memory is too short; she doesn't remember that those marvellous yarns must have joints, and has a jagged way of stringing them together, which always frets me. A really magnificent liar (like Thackeray's immortal Becky Sharpe) one can perhaps afford to admire for their consistency, but Miss Hatherton contents herself with equivocations and misrepresentations, that are so very aggravating. The only persons who ever holds her own with the principal is Madame Davoust, and her French wit is really charming. In short, that quiet dignified Ruth Graham and yourself are the only genuine ladies in the house!"

CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

A librarian, arranging his books according to their subject matter, put "Irish bulls" under the head of agricultural.