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MY MOTHER-IN-LAW.

A Wife's Confession.

I did not marry for love. Very few people do, so in this respect I am neither better nor worse than my neighbors. No, I certainly did not marry for love; I believe I married Mr. Cartwright simply because he asked me.

This was how it happened. He was Rector of Doveton, and we lived at the Manor House, which was about ten minutes' walk from the church and the rectory. We had daily service at Doveton, and I nearly always attended it, and it came to pass that Mr. Cartwright invariably walked home with me. It was a matter of custom now, and I thought nothing of it; it pleased him, and on the whole it was rather pleasant to me also.

I must confess, however, I was rather surprised when, one morning as we got to the avenue which led up to the Manor House, Mr. Cartwright asked me to be his wife.

I have never been able to find out why I said yes, but I did; perhaps I thought it a pity to throw away so much love; perhaps it was because he was so terribly in earnest that I dared not refuse him; perhaps I feared his pale face, and his low pleading voice, would ever haunt me if I rejected his love; or perhaps it was because he only asked me to marry him—he did not ask me if I loved him, for I think he guessed I did not; perhaps it was all the reasons put together, but anyhow I said yes, and in due time we were married.

I ought to have been very happy, for he was a most devoted husband, but I was not, and though I did not notice it then, I know now that for the first six months after our marriage he was not happy either.

It was all my fault, I either would not or could not love him; I accepted all his devotion to me as a matter of course, but I made no effort to return it; and I am sure he had found out that he had made a mistake in marrying a woman who did not love him.

One morning, about six months after our marriage, he told me at breakfast that he intended leaving me alone for a few weeks, to stay with his mother, who was not very well. He watched the effect of this announcement on me, but though I was really displeased, I concealed my annoyance, and asked, carelessly, when he would start.

He replied, the next day, if I had no objection, and so it was settled.

He was more affectionate than usual that day, and I was colder than ever; I only once alluded to his journey, and that was to ask if I might have my sister Maud to stay while he was gone.

The next morning I was anxious to avoid a formal parting, so I drove to the station with him; as the train moved off, I remembered this was our first parting since our marriage, and I wished I had not been so cold.

When I got home the house looked so dreary and empty, and there was no one to meet me; presently one of the servants came for the shawls, and with her Nero, Mr. Cartwright's retriever, which, when he saw I was alone, set up a howl for his master. I patted him, and tried to comfort him, feeling rebuked by his grief, as he followed me, whining, into the house. Every room seemed empty, and each spoke of the absent master; at last I wandered into his study, where he spent his mornings, and liked me to sit and work; and now I remembered how often I had excused myself, saying I preferred the drawing-room, and this reflection did not add to my happiness.

There was a photograph of me standing on his writing table, and another on the chimney-piece; on the walls hung two or three of my drawings, which he had begged of me when we were engaged; indeed the room was full of remembrances of me: I opened a book I had given him and in it was his name in my handwriting, and underneath in his own, "From my darling wife." I laid it down with a sigh, as I thought how carefully he treasured every thing I had ever given him, and how little care I took of all his gifts to me.

Every thing I attempted, every thing I looked at reminded me of his goodness to me, and of my coldness and ingratitude to him. At last I went to bed, where after working myself into a fever of anxiety lest he should not have reached the end of his journey in safety, I at length cried myself to sleep.

The next morning I went down to breakfast with a heavy heart, for I knew I could not hear from him till the next day; it seemed so strange to breakfast alone, and Nero seemed to think so, too, for he was most unhappy, sniffing round his master's chair in the most melancholy manner.

My plate, for the first time since my marriage, was empty, as I sat down to breakfast, for my husband, who was an early riser, always had a little bouquet to greet me with every morning; frequently I forgot all about it, and left it to be put into water by the servant; this morning I would have treasured it most carefully, if he had gathered it.

After breakfast I determined to rouse myself, and go and visit some of the poor people in the village, so I filled my basket with some little delicacies for the sick, and set out.

Wherever I went it was the same story, all held forth on my husband's goodness and kindness, for all had been helped by him in some way or other, and all loved and respected him. As I listened with burning cheeks, I felt as if I was the only person on earth who had treated him with cruel ingratitude, and I was the very person whom he most loved and cherished.

At last I went home, tired and sick at heart; but there was no one to notice I was pale and worn out, no one to get me wine or soup to revive me, no one to make me lie down and rest, as he would have done had he been there. O how I missed him! What a fool I had been! Was there ever woman so loved and cared for as I had been? Was there ever friend so ungrateful? O! why had I ever let him leave me? I was sure he would never come back. Why had he gone away?

And conscience answered, "You drove him; he gave you all he had to give, and in return you gave him nothing but cold looks and unkind words; and so he left you to seek love and sympathy from his mother."

This thought almost maddened me; in fancy I saw her sitting in my place by his side, loving and caressing him, as I had the best right to love and caress him I pictured her receiving tenderly the little loving acts I had received so coldly, and now I seized with a jealous anger against her. I mentally accused her of estranging my husband from me, and of trying to win his love from me, as though his heart was not large enough for both of us.

When Maud arrived in the afternoon, I treated her to a long tirade of abuse against mothers-in-law in general, and my own in particular, and I vented all the anger I really felt against myself, on the innocent Mrs. Cartwright.

"Why, Nelly," said Maud, "I thought you liked Mrs. Cartwright so much, and thought her so nice, that you even wanted her to live with you, only your husband very properly, as mamma says, objected."

"So I did," I answered; "but I did not know then she would ever entice my husband away from me in this way, or, of course, I should never have liked her."

"Really, Neil, you are very hard on the poor woman; for, as I understand, Mr. Cartwright went to her of his own free will, because she was not well, and he thought his company would do her good," said Maud.

"Nonsense; I am sure he would never have left me alone, unless she had put him up to it," I replied, rather crossly.

"The truth is, Nelly, you are so much in love with your husband that you are jealous even of his mother; and you are making yourself miserable about nothing. Why, Mr. Cartwright will be back in a fortnight, and I dare say you will get a letter from him every day; so cheer up, and let us go for a drive," said Maud.

I agreed to this plan, and giving Maud the reins, I lay back and thought of her words. Was she right, after all? Was I jealous? Was I really, as Maud said, in love with my husband? Had I only found it out now I was deprived of his company? Was this the reason that I could do nothing but inwardly reproach myself for my conduct to him? And the longer I thought, the more convinced I became that Maud was right, that I was jealous, and that I was in love, as she called it.

This knowledge did not make me happier, for I no sooner knew I loved him than I longed to tell him so, and make up, as far as I could, for all my former cruelty; for I could call my conduct by no milder word. I passed a sleepless night, and as I lay awake I composed various letters of confession, which I resolved to send the following day; but when morning came my pride stepped in, and I began to feel it would be impossible to write, and I settled I must wait till my husband came home, and then tell him how his absence had altered me.

I got up early and walked out to meet the post-man, so anxious was I to get a letter from him; it was the first I had ever received from him since our marriage and no girl was ever so anxious for, or so pleased with, her first love-letter as I was over this.

It was a long letter full of loving messages and terms of endearment, all of which cut me to the heart, for they sounded like so many reproaches; in reality I think there was a tone of gentle reproach throughout the letter. He gave me an account of his journey and of his mother's health, begged me to write to him a few lines every day; but he said not a word about returning.

I spent the morning in answering it, much to Maud's amusement, who, of course, thought I was pouring out volumes of love and complaints of my temporary widowhood; after tearing about a dozen sheets of paper, I at last sent a short note, cool and with no allusion to my misery. The more I tried, the more impossible I found it to write any expression of love or penitence, though I was hungering to do so.

For a whole week I went on in this way, suffering more acutely every day, and every day receiving long loving letters from Mr. Cartwright, and writing short cold answers.

I lost my appetite, I could not sleep at night, and the torture I was enduring made me look so ill that Maud became frightened, and declared she would write and summon my husband home, and tell him I was pining away for him. I forbade her doing this so sternly that she dared not disobey me, for I was determined she should never hear from any lips but mine that at last his heart's desire was attained, for I loved him.

At last, when he had been away ten days, I could bear it no longer, for I felt I should have brain-fever if I went on in this way, so I determined to go to Melton, where Mrs Cartwright lived, and see my husband. I came to this decision one night, and went into Maud's room early in the morning to tell her my intention I expected she would laugh at me, but think she guessed something was wrong for she seemed glad to hear it, and helped me to pack a few things and set off in time to catch the morning train.

It was three hours' journey, they seemed three years to me, for the nearer I got to my husband the more impatient I was to see him. At last we got to Melton, a largish town. Of course as I was not expected, there was no one to meet me, so I took a fly to Mrs. Cartwright's house, where I arrived about three o'clock.

I learnt afterwards that Andrew was with his mother in the little drawing-room when I drove up, but, thinking I was only a visitor, he escaped into another room; so I found my mother-in-law alone.

By her side were some of my husband's socks which she was darning, socks which I had handed over to the servants to mend, and which I now longed to snatch away from his mother His desk stood open, a letter to me, which he was writing, lying on it.

The servant announced me as Mrs. Andrews, my voice failing as I gave my name, so that Mrs. Cartwright held up her hands in astonishment when she saw who it was.

"My dear! Nelly! Has any thing happened? How ill you look! What is it?" she exclaimed.

"I want my husband," I gasped, sinking on to a chair, for I thought I should have fallen. Without another word Mrs. Cartwright left the room; I feel sure now she guessed all about it, and I can never thank her enough for forbearing to worry me with questions as to what I had come for.

She came back in a few moment with a glass of wine, which she made me drink off, saying she would send him to me at once if I took it. I complied, and she went to fetch him; in another minute I heard his step outside the door, and then he come in.

"Nelly, my love - my darling! what it it?" he cried, as I rushed into his outstretched arms, and hid my face on his breast, sobbing bitterly. For some moments I could not speak; at last I recovered myself enough to sob out:

"O, Andrew, my love! my dear love! can you ever forgive me? I came to ask you, and to tell you I can't live without you." I would have said more, but his kisses stopped my mouth; and when at length he let me go, there were other tears upon my cheeks besides my own.

That was the happiest hour or my life, in spite of my tears; and before my mother-in-law again joined us, which she directly avoided doing till dinner time, I had poured out all I had to tell into my husband's ears; and I had learned from him that he left me to try what effect his absence would have on me, for he had felt for some time that my pride was the great barrier he had to overcome to win my love.

He had judged right. He was too generous to tell me how much he had suffered from my indifference, but I now it must have grieved him terribly. He is a different man now, he looks so happy, and I know he would not change places with any one on earth. We went back to the rectory the next day, but we could not persuade Mrs. Cartwright to come with us; she said we were best alone, and I think she was right.

"Hellen," said the deep-chested Hector as he sat, one evening, on the front doorstep and wiped the perspiration from his mighty brow; "Why is this weather a godsend to the beleagured and starving sons of Troy?" "Fhat's that yer givin us?" said the ox-eyed Hellen, with a piquant French accent; "Shure, and because it'll melt the hosts of Greece," and sweet was the ripple of her silvery laugh. "Not much," answered the son of Priam, as he ordered up a fresh gallon of ice water, "try again." But Helen said she must go home and sew a button on Paris' white vest and could'nt waste her time fooling with conumdrums. "Because," said the swiftfooted Trojan, "because," they can get all the bacon they need by just going out in the sun." And then when Helen asked him to explain he boxed Astyanax's ears for laughing and went into the house muttering about the stupidity of "these blasted foreigners."—*Norwich Bulletin.*

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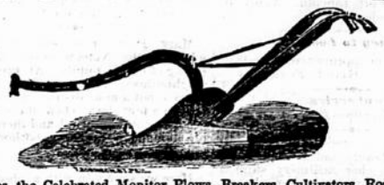
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