

that! You used to be a pretty girl, but you've cried so much lately that your tears have washed away your good looks and my love with it. So, now that you understand that, perhaps you'll think different about the baby. What do you say? My friend, she was just struck dumb, she was so stunned at what he said. But after a minute she made out to say: 'What do you mean? What about baby?' 'Well, to make it short, he says, 'this baby is as much mine as yours, worse luck, and I don't mean to have it bother me in the future. So I'm going to take it away.' Then she cried, and she begged, and she got out of bed and went down on her knees and prayed to him. But he was stone deaf and stony hearted. He just wrapped the baby up, and push her away from him, he went out with it in his arms. She fell back in a faint on the floor, and when they found her of course she was worse. And, what's more, she never got better again. She died two days later."

"But she had seen her baby again, thanks to you, Mrs. Cooper."

"Thanks to the Almighty Father, you mean. Thanks, indeed! I never comes to a Thanksgiving now but I offer up my praise, remember what happened that day, for who but the Lord led that beast of a man to my door to lay his bundle where it was best for it to lie?"

"No doubt you are right," said Mr. Mitchell. "You know what the Bible says. 'Not a sparrow shall fall.'"

"Indeed I do, and many's the time I've thought of the selfsame words. But that's the way the child got the name of Lily, or Lillian, which is the proper way of putting it. Her own mother gave it to her."

"Strange! Her mother gave her her first name, and her father gave her her last," said Mr. Mitchell.

"Yes. But that wasn't his fault. And he didn't give her his own name neither, which would have been more to his credit."

"You mean that his name was not Vale?"

"Indeed it wasn't, though I didn't know that myself for years afterward. You see, in the excitement of finding my friend so low and hearing that the baby was hers I never thought to mention about the bit of paper with Vale on it nor to ask her the name of the father, though I doubt if she would have told me. Women are strange that way. They let men deceive them and trample them in the dust, and then they goes down to their graves keeping their secrets. It ain't just. The men should suffer, too, I say."

"Did she tell you nothing about the father?"

"Oh, yes, almost everything 'cept his name. That she never breathed by no chance. But she told me he was rich and of good family and all that, and she said he must have been crazy that night, 'cause he never treated her bad before, and she made all sorts of excuses for him till you would have thought he was an angel. But, you see, with her baby back to comfort her and knowin she was going to die, I suppose she found it easy like to forgive him. And near the last she give me a package of letters and her ring—not a band ring, but a lovely diamond that he'd given her—and she told me to keep the letters and the ring for her child when she was old enough to understand."

"Ah! This is fortunate. Have you kept the letters?"

"Sacred! I've kept both the letters and the ring. That was a trust from a dyin woman, and I couldn't break that. Why, I've seen the day many a time when I've wanted bread and could have had it by puttin up the ring for a little money, but I never did. I was that fearful I mightn't find the money to get it out again. Why, sir, not even the love of the drink has made me part with that diamond."

"You are an honest, good woman, Mrs. Cooper. Have you ever read the letters? Do they reveal the man's name?"

"As I told you before, I didn't find out about the right name for several years, and by then the girl was known as Vale, so I never changed it. But the letters was from him, and while some was only signed with one name and some only with initials there was one or two had the full name."

"And what was that?"

"I can't rightly tell you, because it's so long since I read the letters, and my memory ain't what it used to be. But I'll give you the letters and the ring, and you can do what you think is best for my Lily."

She went to a trunk, using a key on a ring that must have contained the keys of every article of furniture that she had ever possessed, and handed to Mr. Mitchell a packet containing a few letters in faded envelopes, and also a small ring box, within which glittered a diamond of first water, as Mr. Mitchell saw at a glance.

"Before I open these," said Mr. Mitchell, "there are one or two more questions that I would like to ask. In the first place, tell me, does Lily resemble her mother?"

"She's her mother's livin image. I was only thinkin of this this mornin when she was here. She's just as old now as her mother was when I first met her, and I could almost see my old friend standin before me."

"Is she like her in other respects?"

"She's got the same talent for singin and dancin, and she seemed to take to the stage as natural as can be. Then she's got the same easy, calm, simple, affectionate nature. That's been the ruin of her as well as her mother, I'm afraid. It don't do for women to give their love too easy in this world."

"Did you ever meet this man Morton, to whom she was supposed to be married?"

"Oh! So it's Morton she's fell in love with, is it? Oh, yes, I've met him, and I owe him a grudge. It was him as persuaded my Lily to leave me and go to live by herself. I see now why that was. He wanted her more to himself,

some place where I couldn't keep my eye on him, the schemin villain that he is! But I never trusted him, and I often warned Lily that he was no good."

"Ah! Then you and he were not fond of each other?"

"Fond of each other? Well, I should say not. Why, I despised him; that's what I did. I never took to him from the first. He never seemed to be what he pretended. So he's the man? Well, then, I'll tell you one thing, and you'll find I'm right."

"What is that?"

"I've done my girl a wrong. I said just now that she's inherited the bad in her from her parents. Maybe she has inherited her mother's weakness, but I've never seen nothin in her that made me think she had any of her father's wickedness. So, if her baby was abandoned, be sure it's no doin of hers. It's the man as done it, and you'll find I'm right."

"Lily denies that she knew anything, but she also declares that the father had no hand in the crime."

"Ain't that like her mother? What did I tell you? She makes excuses for the man, but you'll find he's the villain, after all."

"Did you ever meet a man known as Slippery Sam?"

"No; I only know he had a room off and on in the house in Essex street where Lily lived. He was a crook, I think."

"Yes; you are right. Then perhaps you know Preacher Jim?"

"Why, everybody knows him. He's a crank—touched in his head, you know—but he's a good man for all that."

"A good man? Why, is he not a criminal?"

"Oh, he says he is, but nobody knows any wrong he ever done. He's done lots of good. That I know for certain. He's helped the sick and poor around about, and he is awful fond of children. He's been good to Lily, givin her apples and candy and sick like, since she was a little girl. Oh, there's no wrong in Preacher Jim, 'cept in his mind, and that's the crookedest part of him, I guess. But see if you can find the name in the letters."

Mr. Mitchell looked them over and very soon came to one, at the bottom of which was a full signature. He started upon reading it and uttered an exclamation.

"Do you know who it is?" asked Mrs. Cooper.

"Yes! I do know the man. What is more, I know where to find him, and I will find him within the hour!"

CHAPTER XVII.
AFTER MANY DAYS.

Leaving Mrs. Cooper's, Mr. Mitchell hurried back to the rooms of the Metropolitan Foundling society and was glad to learn that Colonel Payton had not gone. He sent in his card, and within a few minutes the two men were alone in the colonel's private office.

"Well, Mr. Mitchell," began the colonel, "back again so soon? Changed your mind about that girl up stairs?"

"In what way should I have changed my mind?" asked Mr. Mitchell.

"Oh, well, you were rather impulsive this morning and espoused her case pretty warmly, I thought. You said you would take the responsibility of keeping the matter from the knowledge of the authorities, and that's a serious business. I did not know but that after maturer consideration you had altered your views—come to your senses, I should call it."

"You mean that, in your opinion, it would be the proper course to give this girl into custody, to abandon her to her fate?"

"There you go again with your stupid sentimentality. Abandon her to her fate, indeed! And why not, pray? What fate awaits her but what she richly deserves?"

"Colonel, your society is in existence for the protection of children. Would it not be cruel to have this young girl arrested?"

"That is not our affair. Women cease to be children when they become mothers. In this case it is the cruelty to the infant that we must consider."

"Ah! The abandonment of the baby is the paramount thought in your mind?"

"It is, most decidedly. We are the guardians of those who are defenseless because of their immature years."

"Then you believe that a person who abandons a baby should be punished?"

"I do. It is the law, and I am a stickler for the letter of the law. Without laws and their strict enforcement society must suffer. Therefore the guilty must be punished."

"Regardless of sex?"

"Assuredly. Men and women must fare alike. In the eyes of justice the evildoer is sexless."

"I have heard that justice is blind, but I have never been told before that she is also heartless. I think, too, that you are wrong, for justice is typified by a female figure. Assuredly, then, even in the name of justice, I may plead for one of her sisters."

"Look here, Mitchell. I hope you have not come here to repeat all that rubbish which you talked this morning. I thought that perhaps you had been making further investigations."

"You are right. That is what I have done."

"Then what have you discovered? Nothing to the girl's credit, I'll wager."

"Nothing to her discredit, I assure you. But, colonel, before I tell you the story which I have heard I would like to ask you why you seem to be so particularly bitter against this girl."

"I am not. I treat her just as I would any other delinquent. What an extraordinary question for you to ask! You practically charge me with showing prejudice against a woman who is entirely unknown to me. You use odd language, Mr. Mitchell. What do you mean?"

"Pardon me, colonel, I meant no offense. But you tell me that the girl is a stranger to you. Somehow I had entertained the idea that perhaps you had seen her before."

"Never, sir; never! That is another preposterous suggestion on your part. I would have you remember that I do not select my associates from that class."

"Well, then, perhaps the girl's face seemed familiar to you; perhaps she reminded you of some one?"

At these words the colonel started and then grew quite angry. Rising from his chair, he towered over Mr. Mitchell, who remained seated and looked up at him calmly.

"What do you mean, sir?" cried the colonel, "by your insinuations? How dare you come to my own office and presume to catechise me in this way? If you hope to help your pretty little friend by your impertinence, you calculate wrongly, sir. I am not the man who puts up with that sort of thing. I have half a mind to kick you out, sir."

"I am glad you have only half a mind, for that makes it possible for the other half of your mind to dissuade you from such a foolish project. It would be very unwise for you to dismiss me unheard."

"Unheard, sir? Then why the devil don't you speak? Why are you beating around the bush in this way? Come to the point, sir; come to the point!"

"I will do so," said Mr. Mitchell, rising and facing his companion. "It will, after all, be the best way perhaps. Well, then, colonel, to make it short, I will ask you to recall the day when I first came here and saw the infant."

"I do, quite distinctly."

"Two things I will mention. You may remember that we had a little discussion regarding the proper treatment of those who abandon their children. I advocated the plan of compelling the parents to care for their offspring."

"And I told you you were a fool. I have not changed my mind."

"I afterward told you that I would knowlege rather than from mere presumption. Therefore the colonel asked in a low tone:

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, Colonel Payton, that Lillian Vale, 'The Lily of the Valley,' as she is called; this girl for whom you think a prison is a fitting home; this girl whose heritage and environment are in your mind no palliation to her offense; this girl whose infant was cast away among the tombs of the dead, is—"

"Is what?" cried Colonel Payton.

"Is your own daughter!" declared Mr. Mitchell.

"It is false!" cried the old man in a voice tremulous with excitement.

"Denial is useless, colonel. You damned your own child with a curse which has come at your bidding. You professed that this babe, whose mother called it Lily, would lose her purity as soon as she should learn to understand the meaning of love. Well, colonel, your daughter was a mother at 16. What say you?"

"Nothing, nothing! I do not know where you have heard this story nor why you bring it to me."

"One more fact will convince you. You took the child from its mother, and, wrapping it in a shawl, you carried it to a convenient doorstep, where you left it. But you pinned on its little dress a scrap of paper, on which you wrote the letters V-A-L-E. The ignorant woman who found the child interpreted this to mean Vale, the family name, though she marveled that a parent would abandon a babe, yet disclose its name. But she was ignorant of Latin. When you wrote those letters, you meant them to stand for the Latin word vale, farewell, did you not, colonel? You thought to bid farewell to your sin, to your past, to blot out all and begin anew? Am I not right?"

"Yes, yes! I confess all! My God, my sin has found me out! But I was young. I was tempted. I was—"

He ceased suddenly and stood up erect, transformed in a moment from a coward to a brave soldier. Then he continued in firmer speech:

"No; I have no excuse to make. I was a villain. But since then I have been a soldier, and if I am ready to condemn others I am as willing to confess my own fault. I accept the responsibility of my sin. You said you would find the father of the little one and compel him to support his child. You have also discovered its grandfather, the father of another abandoned child, and you shall also compel him to do his duty. Mr. Mitchell, I will acknowledge my daughter before the world. I will take her and her poor little baby to my heart and home and guard and protect them. Are you satisfied?"

"I am overjoyed, colonel," said Mr. Mitchell, grasping the older man by the hand. "You see, when you are forced to decide what real justice is, you adopt my theory. I am not sure, however, that I would advocate the course which you suggest. We must think it over. Whatever is best for the girl must be our chief consideration."

"You are right; you are right! I place myself entirely in your hands!"

"Then there is not a moment to be lost. The man who has wronged your daughter has also won the heart of another, whom he seeks to wed. He has urged her to elope with him tomorrow. If she should yield, your daughter's fate would be sealed."

"I see, I see! You wish to carry out your theory. You wish him to marry my child. That may not be best for her, but you would argue that the child's interests demand such a course. Perhaps you are right. These ideas are all new to me. You must forgive me if I find it difficult to set aside my own. I cannot help wishing to have the villain behind the bars."

"No, no, colonel! That would ruin your child as well as his. It is not to be thought of. Your daughter loves

the man, and we must hope that she will win him after marriage, for married they must be. But now, colonel, if I am to accomplish this, you must frankly answer a question that I am compelled to put, however painful it may be. Will you do so?"

"I am entirely at your command. I will not flinch."

"Well, then, tell me this—did you not have another child?"

"Yes," said the colonel in low tones and with a bowed head.

"Also a girl?"

"Yes."

"The same mother?"

"Yes."

"By heavens, I knew it! The next thing to be done is to trace that child, and we have but 24 hours. It seems hopeless."

"It may not be. That baby was born in a maternity hospital. We could go there. Perhaps their records might tell us what you wish to know."

"This is fortunate. I feared that she was another foundling. Come. We must visit that institution at once."

They had not far to go and were ushered into the presence of the house physician, a young woman whose face was made lovely by her sweet sympathy for her sorrow laden patients. It was quickly explained to her that a father sought his child, wishing to offer her his love and protection. On this statement access to the records was at once granted, and without difficulty they found the name under which the mother had been received. There also was a record of the birth and sex of the child, while in the last column, written in red ink, appeared the significant word, "Adopted," followed by the date.

"By whom was she adopted?" asked Mr. Mitchell.

"Ah! Of that we keep no record," said the doctor.

"Do you mean that a child intrusted to your care is allowed to pass thus completely from your supervision?"

"No; it is not so bad as that. But we deem it best that the name of a person who adopts a child should be proved the feasibility of my theories by discovering the father of this infant and compelling him to support his child."

"Yes; you did talk some such nonsense. Well, what of it?"

"I have partly kept my word. I know who the father is."

"Yes; I heard her tell you his name. That in itself proved to me that the girl is thoroughly bad. Why, even the worst woman will keep the name of her lover a secret."

"I discovered more than that, colonel. I know who the grandfather is."

"Why, naturally. The father being known to you, you easily go back another generation."

"I am not speaking of the man's father, but of the girl's."

"Oh, hers! But I thought you said she was a foundling?"

"Exactly. Her own father abandoned her, and I have learned his name."

"Well, who is he? Why make a mystery about it?"

"All in good time, colonel. You will see my point in a moment. Now, as a man experienced in these matters, give me your opinion. Suppose that it could be proved that this girl was truly guilty of abandoning her babe. Then suppose that in her behalf I argued that she herself, having been cast adrift by her parents, became a double victim—first, of her heredity, which made her congenitally deficient in parental instincts, and, secondly, of her environment, a bad one, into which she had been thrust by her father. Would not all this lessen her responsibility?"

"No, sir; not in the eyes of the law. Of course I know what you are driving at. You have been reading some of the newfangled notions of the criminologists of today, men who would like us to open the prisons and release all the criminals, to prey upon the world. But I am astonished that a man of your intelligence should adopt such fanatical and revolutionary ideas."

"We will not discuss views at present, colonel. Let us keep to the case in hand. You think, then, that in spite of the girl's heredity and regardless of her environment she should be held responsible and that if guilty she should be punished?"

"I do. Such people must be made an example to others if we would lessen that class of crime."

"And what of her father? He is living yet, a man of good heritage and exceptional environment. Yet he committed the same crime. What of him, colonel?"

"Why, of course he ought to be punished likewise, though evidently this occurred so long ago that I doubt if anything could be done at this late day."

"I thank you for your candid opinion. Now we will go back, if you please, to my first visit here. You may recall the fact that the matron suggested that you should adopt the child?"

"The silly speech of a silly woman."

"Yes; but it gave me an idea. She also expressed the opinion that the shape of the hands is an evidence of the breeding and claimed, as she put it, that this particular infant had blue blood in its veins. Now, follow me, colonel. These words had just been uttered when you leaned over the crib, and the baby grasped your thumb. Thus her hand and yours were brought together."

"Well?"

"I noted a peculiar crook—it was scarcely a deformity, though quite marked—a curious curvature of the little finger of the baby's hand; and, strangely enough, colonel, I observed identically the same peculiarity in your little fingers."

"Do you dare to insinuate, sir, that I—"

The colonel was so angry that he fairly bellowed, but Mr. Mitchell interrupted him and calmly added:

"That you are the child's father? Not at all, colonel. The idea never

even occurred to me. But I will tell you what I did think. The fact that you, an aristocrat, could have such a deformity proved conclusively that it was not impossible that this wife, with her crooked finger, might have blue blood in her veins, as the matron suggested."

"Oh! That was your deduction, was it? Well, go on; go on, sir! Come to an end! I am tired of this affair!" The colonel mopped his forehead and seemed mightily relieved.

"You will know all in a few moments. I shall not weary you with the details of my investigation. Suffice to say that I traced the infant to its mother, though, as you are aware, I was forced to bring the two together before I could obtain the latter's confession. In the mother, however, I found that which greatly emphasized the value of the crooked finger as evidence. Her little fingers are similar to her child's and to yours, colonel. That is the point. Do you see it?"

This time the colonel did not bluster. There was that in Mr. Mitchell's voice which indicated that he spoke from fact, from possible ill wishers. We receive patients here without demanding their real names, purposely, that the children may not be too easily traced. This is our idea of the truest charity. So also we make no registry of those who take children away. The adoption may be as secret as the new parents may desire, all this for the child's sake."

"But how do you know that these children may not be ill treated?"

"Oh, we do not lose sight of them, but their whereabouts is known to but two persons, our matron and one other lady, a patron, one of our board of directors. We have two persons in the secret, fearing that were there but one her death would break our connection with our charges."

"Oh! Then I am to understand that your matron may know where this child is?"

"Yes. Perhaps she will see you. I will explain your desire to her."

Five minutes later a woman entered, one of those whose faces teach us that even the very old may be beautiful. Perhaps long years of kindness to others had in some way created in her face a moral beauty whose purity was reflected in her countenance.

"Here is a mother to all the motherless!" thought Mr. Mitchell.

"You wish to speak to me, gentlemen?" said she in a voice as gentle as the flow of a rippling brook.

"We wish very much to trace a child who has been adopted from this institution," said Mr. Mitchell. "This gentleman is her father."

"Yes. The doctor has told me of whom you seek information. I do not mean to be unkind, but this is a profound secret which you wish me to divulge. I cannot without good reasons disclose it even to the father who comes after his child so late. I must first consider the interests of the girl."

Mr. Mitchell found himself in a quandary. It would be impossible to disclose his purpose to this old lady. She would very properly hesitate to accept his story without investigation, and that would entail a delay which would entirely upset his plans. He deemed it best, therefore, to resort to circumlocution.

"But suppose that I tell you that this gentleman is rich; that he can give his child a very luxurious home?"

The matron smiled as she answered: "She has every luxury now that money can buy. She has more than that—the love of a mother who worships her. Her adopted father is dead, and he has bequeathed \$5,000,000 to her."

Both men started in amazement. What a fortune for an outcast! What a difference between her fate and her sister's! But Mr. Mitchell was much pleased and replied:

"You seem to keep a fairly accurate knowledge of your charges even after they leave you. Why, it is nearly 18 years, is it not?"

"The girl is quite as old as that, but we have a regular system. The parents are required to report to us regularly and occasionally to send us a photograph. In this way we have some corroboration of what they write us. If the children are not well cared for, we often detect it by a comparison of their pictures, taken from year to year."

"Then you have this girl's photograph also?"

"Yes, indeed, many of them."

Mr. Mitchell now endeavored to gain his point by strategy. Taking a photograph from his pocket, he suddenly held it before the old lady and asked: "Do you recognize that?"

"Why, it is—"

The matron was taken by surprise, yet so careful was she of her secret that she stopped before mentioning the name which had risen to her lips. But Mr. Mitchell was satisfied and completed the sentence for her: "It is Perdita!" said he.

(To be Continued.)

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