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[Written for the Morning Star.]

THE MOTHER'S ROUND.

HEMINE.

Each night, when Sleep in fond embrace
The children's forms has gently bound,
The mother seeks their resting place,
And makes her loving, noiseless round;
Passing from bed to bed with watchful care,
For each in mother-love hath equal share!

A precious burden to her life!
A cherished care by night and day!
Yet through the dreary years of strife
She wearies not nor turns away;
Hoping that when the pain and work are past.
Their hands may bring her joy and rest at last!

She bends above her baby's nest,
The birding of the household band—
And feels that o'er that sinless rest
Is spread, unseen, an angel's hand,
Ready to claim for Heaven's resplendent throne
The darling child she thinks is all her own.

She stands beside her only son,
The boy who bear's his father's name—
And prays that while their names are one
Their virtues, too, may be the same.
Yet sighs to think how manhood's distant years
May try his heart and wring her own with fears!

Beside her daughter's couch she kneels,
Her eldest, wisest, gentlest, best!
Ah! well, in later years, she feels
Those eyes shall watch above her rest,
Those hands, so small and helpless now, shall cheer
Her own dark night when age and grief draw near!

And now she thinks of other beds
That need no mother's tender care—
The weeping willow only spreads
Its mournful arms in silence there,
But Faith still murmurs, while the sad tears fall,
"Deny not Him a part who gave thee all!"

Her thoughts go thence to other homes
All dreary, desolate, and bare,
Beside whose beds no kind face comes
To watch the children sleeping there,
No prayer is said, no token ever given
To teach their hearts that God looks down from Heaven!

Such fancies thrill her heart with love
To Him who makes her home so bright,
Who, bending from His throne above,
Defends and guards it day and night;
And turning now to seek her needed rest
She knows whose care is truest, surest, best!

"Oh, bless them all," she softly cries,
"The children Thou hast lent to me,
And with my angels in the skies
Unite them through eternity,
Recalling them, when Death's dark night shall come,
From mother's arms, dear Father, to Thy home!"

[From the Catholic World.]

THE DOUBLE MARRIAGE.

FROM THE DIARY OF A SISTER OF MERCY.

CHAPTER I.

Just before vespers, as I came in from a visit to the hospital, Mother Frances, our superioress, called me to her, and said:

"Dear sister, you have been out nearly all day, and were up last evening; you can go into the church for vespers, and then you had better go to your cell."

After the services were ended, I remained a few minutes to say my prayers. When my time had expired, I went through the cloisters to my cell; and, just as I opened the door, I heard from the gate-bell a lond peal that rang through the silent house. I heard the door opened, and a hurried message delivered.

"Another call," I thought, and then came a quiet tap at my door. I opened it quickly, and Mother Frances entered, saying:

"I am grieved, sister, to disturb you so soon; but that poor girl, Mary MacNeal, is dying at the hospital, and she wishes most earnestly to see you."

"Is she indeed dying? why, I left her so much better."

"Yes; but a fatal change has taken place, and she has not long to live."

There was no time to think of my aching head and wearied limbs. I dressed again hastily, and, together with the messenger, soon arrived at the hospital.

At the entrance of the ward where Mary lay I met the nurse. "Oh! God be praised, sister, that you're come at last! Poor Mary's only cry is for you."

This Mary MacNeal was a young girl who had been brought up in our schools, and afterward maintained herself by dressmaking. Hard toil, poor fare, and want of exercise did their work; and Mary lay dying in the last stage of consumption. She was a good girl, and had been long under my especial care. That very afternoon she had implored me to be with her during her last moments. When I reached her bed, a calm, happy smile welcomed me, and the feeble, faint voice spoke a few words of greeting, "And ye'll say the rosary, sister?"

I knelt down and complied with her request. When we said the last gloria, Father Bernard came, and Mary received the last sacraments. I have stood by many a death bed; I have seen the strong man in his agony expire; I have seen the atheist, fearing, dreading God, die, with despair in his glazing eye and faithless heart; I have seen infants die with the smile of an angel on their little faces; in every form I have met with death; but I never knew a soul leave this world that seemed more fit for heaven than that of this young girl. The rosary in one hand, the crucifix in the other, she lay so calm and still. Ever and anon, as I wiped the death damp from the pale brow, she lifted her eyes as though to thank me. She seemed desirous to speak. I stooped over to catch the few struggling words, and they were:

"Thank God, I have always loved the Blessed Mother; she is with me now." And she murmured the sweet names of Jesus and Mary.

Then the slight breath stopped; anon it came again; again it went, and without a struggle that happy soul took flight. I closed the eyes, still wearing the lingering look of gratitude and love; I crossed the hands, and twined the beads around them, and then knelt down and said the litany for the dead. I was now preparing to leave the hospital, when the nurse came, and asked me if I would step for a minute into the next ward, just to speak to a poor old woman who seemed to be getting worse. This ward was quite full; but I noticed a bed I had seen empty in the morning, occupied; when I had finished talking to the old woman, I asked who the new comer was.

"Ah! sister, she's in an awful way, let her be who she may. I asked her this afternoon if she would see you or the priest, and I declare the look of her frightened me—it was so wild and fierce. But she's a lady, I am sure; for, though the poor feet of her were bare and bleeding, the few ragged clothes she had on were of the finest, and when she is in her senses, she speaks so lady-like; but she went on in a dreadful way, and told me not to talk to her of sisters or priests, but to do her the only kindness I could, and let her die alone; so there she lies, and not one bit or drop can I get down her."

"But, nurse, I must see her, poor thing! Perhaps I can help to soothe her."

I approached the bed carefully, shading the lamp with my hand. I set the light down on the table, and drew a chair to the bedside, and sat down upon it. Loud, heavy breathing, and quick, frightened starts, told me the patient slept. I gently drew aside the sheet, with which she had covered her face and head, and started at the picture that met my gaze. It was a woman, seemingly about two-and-twenty years of age; her face and neck were covered with a perfect mass of thick, glossy hair; it spread its rich profusion over the pillow and the bed-clothes. I took one of the tresses in my hand, and wondered at its length and softness. One small white hand was thrown above her head, and it grasped a portion of the hair so tightly that I could not move it, lest I should wake her. Before I had sat many minutes, the sleeper awoke with a loud, piercing scream, and a quick, fearful start. I laid my hands on her to soothe her.

"Do not be frightened," I said; "you are quite safe."

"Who are you?" she replied abruptly and sharply.

"I am a Sister of Mercy, and I am anxious to assist you."

"I don't want you; go away; you only torment me." She turned from me, and concealed her face.

"I am afraid you mistake me," I said very gently; "indeed, I only wish to do you good."

"Do me good? You cannot; leave me alone! Let me die as I have lived."

"God is good, and very merciful, my poor sister."

"Don't mention his name to me. Leave me! Let me be forgotten by God and man. Let me die, and do not torment me."

"God loves you with an infinite love—a love more tender than you can imagine."

"I tell you to go! I am cursed, hated! I want no good; I will listen to none. Your words are all in vain; save them and go!"

With these words she resolutely turned from me, and covered her face with the clothes, so that she could neither hear nor see me. I took my rosary, and knelt down, and said it for her; and ardently did I pray that the poor heart might be turned to God. When I had knelt above an hour, she turned fiercely round, and said:

"Are you still there? what are you doing?"

"I am praying for you, my sister."

"Praying for me!" and a wild fearful laugh sounded through the quiet room. "Praying for me; my name is forgotten in heaven. Don't do that. My mother is in heaven. Don't let my name be heard there, or she will know; but go away, and leave me. Heaven and earth have abandoned me; why need you care for me?"

The delirium and fever seemed to increase so rapidly, that I feared my longer stay would be useless. A torrent of words were pouring quickly from the parched lips; now a wild appeal, a fearful cry to God for mercy; then a dreadful outburst of reproaches and contempt against heaven; then a wild snatch of song, and a laugh so unearthly, it almost chilled the blood in my veins. Once, and once only, the loud voice grew calm and sweet, and a quiet look came upon the flushed face when she fancied she was a girl at home again, and her mother was speaking to her.

I went home, for I was of no use, and the nurse gave the poor sufferer an opiate before I left. I could not rest; that wild, beautiful face was before me, and those pitiful cries rang in my ears all night. The following morning I hastened to the hospital. I found my patient more quiet, and a good deal exhausted.

I procured a basin of cold water, and wetting a handkerchief, placed it upon her burning brow. Its coolness seemed to revive her; for after I had bathed her forehead for some minutes, she opened her eyes and said, in a faint voice, "Is that you, mother? bless you, thank you;" but after looking earnestly at me, she turned away with a despairing sigh I never shall forget. After I had well bathed her face and head, I gathered the long hair and arranged it neatly under a cap. How beautiful she looked! the red flush was gone, and her face was fair and white as marble. The slight eyebrows were marked so clearly and arched so beautifully, and the noble open brow was so fair, I could distinguish every vein. Again my tears fell upon her face as I stooped over her. She gave a quick start, and said, "Who are you?"

"I am a Sister of Mercy, one who loves you."

"Loves me! and is that tear for me?"

"Yes, not only one, but many more I have shed for you."

"O Sister!" and she turned and threw herself on my breast, "that is the first tear any one has shed over me since my mother died. My heart has been so proud, so full of bitter anger and hatred, that I thought nothing could ever again soften it; that tear was a dew-drop from heaven. A few moments since I fancied you were my mother, for your hand lay upon my head just as hers did when she used to come, night after night, and bless me; just as it did the night before I left her. O sister! do not let me lie in your arms, you are so good, and I have been so wicked and sinful."

"Nay, rest here; none are so sinful but there is love and mercy left for them."

"Mercy! can I, dare I, hope for it?"

"Hush, my child, you are tiring yourself out; now rest."

"And do you promise never to leave me till I die? Say, will you stay with me?"

"I will indeed do all I can; for the present I must go. Will you let me put this around you?" (It was a medal of the Immaculate Conception.)

"Yes," she replied, and took it with a trembling hand.

"Are you a Catholic?" I asked, startled by the haste with which she seized it.

"I am, sister," and then a burning blush came over her face. "I am, but a guilty, ungrateful one."

"Then will you say some short prayers, while I go and visit my other patients?"

"I will, but it is long since I have said a prayer."

At the end of an hour I returned, and found her weeping bitterly. She took my hand and kissed it. I tried to quiet her excessive grief. I said, "Do not cry, my child. Tell me, can I help you—can I do anything for you? My name is sister Magdalen; what shall I call *you*?" She looked up with a sad face, and replied, "My name is Eva." "Well, then, Eva, be comforted; if you have sinned, there is mercy and hope for you; if you are unhappy, there is comfort. Look at this;" and I gave her my crucifix—"does not this teach you to love and hope?" There was no answer, nothing but bitter sobs. I knelt down, and said the *Memorare*, and then, taking Eva's hand, I was about to speak, when she said, "Sister, sister, when I am better, and have strength to talk, I will tell you my history, and you shall teach me to be better."

Day after day passed on, and she became so ill that we thought she must die; but God so willed it that she began to improve, and, at last, was able to speak and think rationally again. One evening I sat by her bed, saying the rosary while she slept, when, looking suddenly at her, I found her eyes open, and fixed upon me intently.

"Sister Magdalen," she said, "I want to tell you my history; it is a very sad one. I have sinned and suffered—will you hear me."

"With pleasure, because when I understand you, I can the better help you."

And as she told it to me, I here give it.

CHAPTER II.

"I need not trouble you with the history of my childhood; it was spent alone with my dear mother, in a pleasant little village near Bristol, and was a very happy and innocent one. My father died before I was born, but he left an ample fortune to my mother. I was her sole care and treasure; next to me she loved and cared for our little church. The mission in our village was but a poor one; my mother was its chief support. To our care was given the sacristy, the chapel, the altar-linen, and flowers. I used to spend hours in dressing the altar and arranging the flowers. The memory of those hours has never died; it has lived with me ever; and even amid scenes of vanity and passion, it has hung about me like the fragrance of a flower.

"My mother was the sweetest and most gentle of women; the early loss of her husband gave her a shock from which she never recovered; and she made a resolution at his death to devote her whole life to my education and to works of charity. I cannot think of her without tears; she was so patient and good, nor did I ever hear one unkind or hasty word from her.

"I grew up well skilled in all the accomplishments my mother loved and taught. One I was passionately fond of, and that was painting. I had a talent for it, and a cultivated taste.

"Imagine, sister, the course of a streamlet, with scarcely a ripple upon it, glittering in the bright sunlight, ever flowing calmly and gently, and you have a perfect image of my childhood.

"This lasted until I was sixteen. A few days after my birthday, a letter came from my mother's agent, a solicitor in London, requesting her immediate presence. Not liking to leave me behind lest I should be dull, my mother offered to take me with her. I was overjoyed at the proposal. London was a distant fairyland to me, and I knew no rest or peace until we started. We were to stay at Mr. Clinton's, a distant relative of my father's, who kindly offered us the use of his house. He was married, but his wife was dead, and he had one only daughter, with whom I soon became intimately acquainted. Bella Clinton was an elegant girl, and foremost among the leaders of fashion. I had not been there long before I began to blush for my country dresses, and astonished my gentle, yielding mother by the extravagant demands I made upon her purse. Ah! there I learned the fatal truth that I was gifted with beauty. I had heard strangers say at home, 'What a handsome child! how like her father;' but I never realized the fact until I stood ready dressed for my first ball, where Bella had persuaded my mother to accompany us.

"Bella had chosen for me a robe of pale pink satin and a rich lace skirt; she twined pale pink flowers in my long black hair, and golden bracelets around my arms, and then led me to her mirror, and said, 'I am almost jealous, Eva?' Ah! the face pictured there was very fair, the eyes were flashing with light, the cheek was tinged like a rose, the white neck and arms shamed even the pearls that gleamed upon them. Beautiful, bright, and sparkling the picture was; but would to heaven I had died as I stood there, for I was then innocent and good.

"You, perhaps, sister, never saw or cared to see a ball-room; on me the effect was electrical. Just as we entered, the sweet, fascinating melody of a popular waltz was floating round the room; the room itself was radiant with light and beauty; jewels were shining, feathers waving, rich satins were gleaming; and the wearers, to my novice's gaze, were like beings from fairyland.

"Miss Clinton was soon surrounded with friends, and I listened with astonishment to her witty repartees and animated conversation. I was introduced to many of her friends; our group or party was, I could not fail to perceive, the most select in the room. I sat by my mother, endeavoring to give my attention to some officer who was detailing a striking adventure, when a face and form suddenly attracted my attention; it was that of a noble looking man, with a head remarkable for the extreme beauty of its contour and the richness of its dark curls. The face, too, though not exactly handsome, was irresistibly attractive, from its aristocratic mould of feature and melancholy expression. His eyes were a singularly dark gray, shaded with long eyelashes; they had a tired, listless look. I watched this gentleman some few minutes, and then turning to my companion, said: 'Can you tell me who is that distinguished looking man standing just beneath the chandelier?'

"'Lord Montford. He is a clever man; but a very reserved, haughty character; he is known by the name of Le Grand Seigneur. I know him well, intimately; but I never can penetrate the veil of melancholy that hangs over him.'

"'Perhaps he is unhappy,' I said simply; 'is he married?'

"'No; he is one of the best *parties* of the season. Some say an early disappointment is the cause of his want of sociability; others say he has a distataste for the society of your charming sex.' And my informant made a low bow.

"A dozen more questions trembled on my lips; but not liking to continue the conversation, I remained silent. Suddenly looking up, I saw Lord Montford's eyes fixed upon me. I blushed, feeling like a guilty culprit. In a few minutes Miss Clinton came to me, and said:

"'Eva, you have made a splendid conquest. Here is Lord Montford asking to be introduced to you. Come with me.'

"'Indeed I cannot,' I replied, shrinking, scarcely knowing why.

"'Mrs. Leason, make her come,' said Bella, smiling to my mother.

"'Go, Eva,' my mother said; and I went. My first impulse was to run away when I saw that tall, stately form bending before me; but he looked at me with so kindly an expression of interest and admiration that I accepted the invitation for the next quadrille with less of fear and restraint than I had hitherto felt. When the quadrille was over, Lord Montford took me into the refreshment-room.

"'It is no idle compliment to tell you, Miss Leason, that I enjoyed that dance more than I have done anything for years.'

"'Why?' I answered innocently, looking up with astonishment. He smiled and answered:

"'If I wished to flatter you, I should say because you are more beautiful and graceful than any lady I have seen for some time; but the real truth is, that I can perceive this is your first ball, and the freshness of your ideas is something novel to me.'

"'Are not my ideas like other people's?'

"'Far from it.'

"'I am very sorry,' I began, half hesitatingly; 'indeed, I wish to be like every one else.'

"'Never wish so again, Miss Leason; wish always to be just as you are now.'

"Just at this moment my mother and Bella joined us, and he relinquished my arm.

"'Why, Eva,' said Miss Clinton, 'Surely you have some charm. I have known Lord Montford for years, and I never saw him so animated or so happy before.'

"But I need not dwell longer on this part of my life. Day after day, evening after evening, Lord Montford was by my side; and yet so quietly were these meetings conducted, that it always seemed that chance directed them. As Bella ceased jesting, my mother did not notice his attentions. I soon began to look upon seeing him as the only thing worth living for. I had no thought save for him. As yet no *word* of love had passed his lips, though I could not but perceive that he regarded me with no common interest.

"One day, as we were all in the drawing-room, my mother suddenly announced her intention of returning home—almost directly. I looked at Lord Montford, and saw an expression of pain upon his face. I rose and went to the window to hide the tears that were starting to my eyes. In an hour after this, a servant brought me a note from Lord Montford, filled with expressions of love, and asking for an interview, and praying that I would not mention it to any one, even to my mother. I knew this was wrong, and this was the first false step in my career. I knew concealment from my mother was, in such a case, wrong; but stronger than the voice of conscience, stronger than the whispers of my angel guardian, stronger than the promptings of faith and obedience was the passion that reigned in my heart. I wrote a few words. My mother, Mr. Clinton, and Bella were going out to dine. I pleaded indisposition and remained at home. I promised in the afternoon to grant Lord Montford the interview he desired. I went, when three o'clock came, to the library, and I left in an hour the affianced bride of Lord Montford. One thing surprised me, and that was, that he used the most urgent entreaties that I would not mention our interview, or its result, to any one. Imprudently I promised.

"The day came when we left London, and yet no word would Lord Montford suffer to be spoken of our engagement. He stood in the hall as we passed from the house, and he hastily whispered to me:

"'You shall hear from me soon, Eva, and my letter shall explain all.'

"I could scarcely bear the quiet, tranquil beauty of home; my whole time was spent in wishing for, and thinking of the promised letter.

"At length it came, and I went with it tightly held in my hand, to my own room. I cannot now remember all it said, but the concluding words I remember, and they were these: 'And now, Eva, I have told you how dear you are to me, how you have come across my dark, dreary life like a bright sunbeam; without you I shall again become a dull, melancholy misanthrope; with you I may become a good and useful man. Will you refuse, Eva, to help me! One thing more. A reason of the utmost importance prevents me from at present making public our engagement and marriage—a reason so potent that, if you refuse secrecy, we must part. Say, Eva, shall this be? Will you sacrifice my love, my hope, my happiness for a scruple?'

"And so with a prayer for my consent, the letter ended; and then I laid it down and wept—aye, wept—for there was a calmer, holier feeling in my heart than I had known for a long time; and the struggle was hard. My mother, could I leave her thus? How had she nursed me! loved me! and with what pleasure and pride had she looked forward to my settling in life!

Her sweet face came before me in all its goodness and purity. No—I could not leave her, I could not thus deceive and disappoint her.—There was the church, too, with its altars and flowers; who would tend them? I could not go, and so I resolved—a resolution, alas! too soon to be broken.

"At this moment a hand was gently laid upon my shoulder, and looking up hastily, I saw my mother.

"'Eva, are you ill, my darling, or unhappy? Why are you here alone, and miserable?'

"I made no reply, but laid my head upon my mother's breast and cried aloud. Those were the last tears I ever shed there. I even feel now her soft hand caressing me, and drawing back the hair from my brow, while she soothed me as though I had been a little child.

"'I am ill and tired, mother,' I said, at length.

"'I see you are, Eva.' And she laid me down gently, and sat by me until I slept. Two days afterward I was out, and turning round the road that led to the wood, I met Lord Montford. I found he had arrived that day, and had been waiting many hours for a chance of seeing me; but he looked so pale and ill I scarcely knew him. Let me tell the result in few words. I promised him to leave home, mother, and all things, and to accompany him wherever he would.

"'It is but for a short time, Eva,' said he, 'and then we will return, and your mother will forgive us and bless us.'

"'Why not wait for the short time?' I said, for my face burned where my mother's tears had fallen.

"'I cannot; you do not know the reasons, Eva. But do not refuse me. You are the last tie that binds me to life and hope.'

"And he arranged that early the next morning I should meet his carriage in the park; that we should go straight to London, and there be quietly married; and then go on the same day to Paris.

"That night, sister, I never slept. Many times I half knelt to pray, and perhaps had I prayed, God would have heard me; but there was that in my heart that would not let me; and so, in wearily pacing my room, in bitter weeping and grief for my mother, in passionate tears, when I remembered my promise, in hard struggle and indecision, did I pass my last night under my mother's roof. When morning dawned, I tried to go and look at my mother; twice, thrice, I half opened the door, and, shuddering, closed it; and with my heart half breaking at leaving her, and yet drawn on irresistibly, I passed from my home a guilty fugitive, a cruel, willful child. I went out into the pure, sweet, morning air, and it fanned so softly my burning face; the birds were singing such glorious carols of praise; the flowers were lifting their fair heads, drooping with dew; peace, and beauty, and joy were all around me; but in my heart were darkness and sorrow, grief and remorse. Suddenly a strong arm twined around me, and a low voice, whose tones I knew and loved too well, poured into my ears a rapture of love and thanks. And in a whirl of time that seems to me now a dream, I was married and in Paris. Immediately on our arrival at Paris, my husband wrote to my mother, telling her of our marriage, conjuring her for a time not to reveal it, and begging her forgiveness and blessing. An answer came, and my mother's gentle love spoke in every line, yet her heart seemed broken as she wrote. Trusting that time would reveal the mystery of my husband's strange desire for concealment, I threw myself into the vortex of pleasure and gayety. The hours passed like golden moments. I knew no wish, no caprice, that my husband did not immediately gratify. The most devoted love and ardent affection were lavished upon me; he was ever with me; if for one hour we were separated, he flew to me the next. Smiles chased the melancholy and languor from his brow, and the light in his eyes was to me brighter than the rarest jewel he loved to adorn me with. It was short but brilliant, this dream of mine; its bliss was dearly purchased. You will think the story that I am going to tell you strange, but there are stranger in the world.

CHAPTER III.

"I told you, sister, how devoted I was to painting; and this taste my husband spared no pains to gratify. He took me, one day, to one of the most splendid picture-galleries in Paris, and there, amongst other *chef d'œuvres*, I noticed a most beautiful picture of St. Mary Magdalen. I stood entranced before it; it represented a graceful, slender figure kneeling before a rustic altar. The hands were clasped in prayer, and the face was slightly raised toward heaven; but anything so exquisite as the blended look of remorse and love upon those splendid features I never saw; it was as though the raining tears had softened the dazzling beauty and brightness of the large, liquid eyes, and had blanched the roses on both cheek and lip, and had left over the fair face a lingering light, soft and spiritual. Long golden tresses waved over her shoulders, and lay (even as she knelt) upon the ground in their profusion and luxuriance. Hope and love were written on the noble brow, while such humility, such self-abasement were expressed in the prostrate, kneeling figure, that at one glance the history was read. I forgot time, place, and all things—my whole soul absorbed in the wondrous beauty of the picture.

[CONCLUDED ON EIGHTH PAGE.]