

"Only Waiting."

Only waiting till the shadows are a little longer grown;
Only waiting till the glimmer of the last day's beam is flown;
Till the night of earth is faded from the heart
Once full of day;
Till the stars of heaven are breaking through
The twilight soft and gray.
Only waiting till the reapers have the last
sheaf gathered home,
For the summer time is faded and the autumn
winds have come.
Quickly, reapers, gather quickly, these last
ripe nouns of my heart,
For the bloom of life is withered, and I hasten
to depart.
Only waiting till the glimmer of the day's
last beam is flown;
Then from out the gathered darkness holy,
deathless stars shall rise,
By whose light my soul shall gladly tread its
pathway to the skies.

MY STEP-SON.

MARGARET SCOTT M'RICHE.

I had been married just a year when my life experienced its first great trouble—a trouble self-increased by the willful pride and rebellion with which my headstrong girlhood met it.

Hitherto my path had been particularly sunny. The only child of wealthy and indulgent parents, I became engaged when eighteen years old to Kendal Darcy, a rising barrister, some years my senior, whom I loved with a warmth only equaled by my satisfaction when I found that the affection was mutual. My father warned him that such a spoiled child would prove troublesome; but Kendal had no fears on that point, and as yet our wedded life had cast little enough of shadow upon us.

Now and then I did indeed notice upon my husband's face a grave, preoccupied expression that I failed to understand, but I knew he was intrusted with important issues, and, loving his profession as he did, it was no wonder that his mind should entertain its concerns even when he rested from its duties in his beautiful home at South Kensington. I guessed not that scenes in his past life were the phantoms so frequently arising before him, haunting him even in his present happiness, unsuspected by his joyous girl-wife.

I was now about twenty years old, and happier than ever, for a beautiful infant boy had crept into life and love. Ah, what marvelous hopes clustered round the rose-pink *berceau*nette wherein reposed what the papers announced as our "son and heir!" Kendal used to pinch my cheeks, calling us a couple of babies, when he watched us together; but I knew he was as proud of our little Frank as myself, though his smile was so quiet and his looks were so subdued as he held the wee dimpled hand in his own.

Never shall I forget the morning when we became aware that baby was not the "son and heir"—that Kendal had a living son, and that I was a step-mother. We were breakfasting together in our favorite room, and the flowers were nodding in at us through the open windows, while the canaries sang their sweetest, when my husband received a black-bordered letter that turned his face ghastly white as he perused it. I hurried to get him brandy, fearing he was going to faint. I guessed that something was amiss in his banking or professional affairs, but I could not annoy him with questions, and silently I knelt beside him, putting my arms around him.

The story was told by and-by, quickly, abruptly; but it was very long ere I realized the truth—that I was a second wife. In the early day of our acquaintance Kendal had heard me speak despairingly of a friend's marriage, vowing that nothing should induce me to marry a widower; it was then that he had most unfortunately resolved to keep the fact of his previous marriage private; and I could well understand how much suffering the deception had caused him.

As a youth of twenty-one he had met his first wife, the pretty daughter of a yeoman-farmer, and the belle of the village where his guardian, Col. Grant, resided. Home from college for his vacation he was delighted for so pleasant an acquaintance to beguile the tedium of his stay at the Hall, and their dance at the harvest-home was the prelude to a very warm friendship. Their constant meetings in the sunny meadows and shady lanes were a most agreeable change from the hard studies in which Kendal had been engaged. No word but sympathetic friendship had been exchanged between them when he returned to college; but, while his labors there soon drove his pretty companion from his mind, her weaker nature was completely changed by the past few weeks. By-and-by he was recalled to the village by a stern note from his guardian, who informed him that Alice Graham was believed to be in a hopeless consumption, and that she had despairingly betrayed the secret of her love to her mother, who had, unknown to herself, appealed to Col. Grant for his aid.

Kendal was shocked indeed when he saw the girl he had left so rosy and blooming; and, though he knew he did not deserve all the blame his guardian and her friends evidently considered his due, he could not hold himself entirely innocent in the matter.

It was a sad affair. My husband spoke of it with trembling voice, and in deep agitation. It seemed as though the very tendrils of Alice Graham's life were twined round one who realized now that pity was the utmost feeling of his heart towards her. Her father insisted on marriage; his strictly honorable guardian advised the same course, seeing that "the difference of station had not prevented the courting." Her mother "didn't speak, but she looked in his face till his heart was like to break," while the village doctor believed it was the one chance for her cure, and Alice herself, on hearing whispers of such a scheme, appeared quite a new creature.

Kendal was married then in obedience to Colonel Grant's wishes and the promptings of his own feelings, and, on his guardian's death from a fall in the hunting-field, he came into possession of a substantial provision. His legal studies had kept him much away from home, but he always treated his wife with the kindest consideration, and it was a real grief to him when, in consequence of the sudden tidings of Colonel Grant's accident, a premature birth cost the young mother her life. The baby-boy became Kendal's one solace in his double loss. I knew too well what he felt when he held his first-born in his arms, and my heart grew dry and hard at the thought that such emotions had been excited by another than my little Frank.

As Kendal's duties called him away from the village, Alice's mother proposed to take charge of the baby; and, seeing that she had lately adopted an orphan baby of a late neighbor and that it was thriving most admirably, he readily agreed to allow her a certain sum for the child's support. In a year or two, however he intended to take a London house for himself, and he made it distinctly understood that the child was to leave his grandparents then to be brought up under his father's roof.

About nine months had elapsed, when he heard from Mrs. Graham that the child had succumbed to an attack of croup. Wifeless and childless, he hurried down to look upon the tiny new-made grave, close to that of the mother—for little Willie was already buried. The farmer was ill with rheumatic fever, and Mrs. Graham was so worried and upset that Kendal did not speak with her long. He put away the past from him as a dream, and from that day to this he had never brought himself to visit the neighborhood again.

What, then, were his feelings on reading the letter received this morning? It was from the Vicar of Springmead, announcing the death of the aged woman Graham, who had been long a widow, and inclosing a letter addressed to "Willie's Father." During her last illness she had fully confessed to the clergyman the imposture of which she had been guilty, begging, however, that it might not be revealed to her son-in-law till she had passed beyond his wrath. Kendal's boy was still alive and nearly seven years old; it was her neighbor's child that died in infancy, but her great love for her grand-son and dread of losing him had tempted her to take advantage of the circumstance to retain her darling with her. The Vicar had soon traced Mr. Darcy, the barrister, to his abode, and he wrote that Mrs. Graham, even at the last, did not seem to realize the extent of her wrong-doing; it seemed to her partly excused by the indulgent care lavished on the child she had taught to call her "grannie," and by the fact that she had never accepted the help of a farthing from her son-in-law since she had imposed upon him. Since her husband's death the small farm had suffered great misfortunes; it appeared that it was now to be sold, and the proceeds to were pay the debts the widow's slender means had forced her to contract.

"My blue-eyed baby alive," cried Kendal, as if speaking to himself—"given back to me as it were from the grave! I can even forgive the cruel wrong in the joy that is swallowing up every other feeling—the joy to know that my son is not dead!"

At this moment I almost hated my husband; his heart seemed so far from me and my baby that a passion of jealous anger seemed rending my soul. With bitter, cutting words did I reproach him for his deceit, and his only answer was a silent look of pain; but when, incensed by his quiet manner, I began to hint that the child's training had not been such as to fit him for our house, I saw my husband angry with me for the first time in his life.

"A child of six or seven," said he, "can scarcely be considered as trained to perfection—even Frank at that age will sometimes need our fond correction; but I suppose he will be no less our much-loved son."

"Frank has nothing to do with the present," was my haughty reply; "my son will always be a gentleman." I was ashamed of my words as soon as spoken, but Kendal made no reply. He walked up and down the room for several minutes ere he said—

"I am going down to Springmead today, and shall probably bring Willie home on Wednesday evening. Come, mamma," he added tenderly, "I know I can trust your woman's heart towards him."

"You are mistaken," rejoined I quickly, "if you suppose I shall trouble myself in the least concerning him. I never arranged for the trying life of a step-mother. Frank's nurse has quite enough to do. But the boy is old enough to attend to himself now. If you take my advice, you will send him to a thoroughly select school for some time before you bring him home."

"You must allow me to decide that matter," said Kendal coldly. "My house is my son's home. I will take care that no trouble concerning him shall fall upon yourself or nurse. Millicent"—and he tried to take my hand—"do not let us prolong our first disagreement. You must know how deep my love is for my wife and our baby, but you would despise me in your heart if I felt no yearning towards my first-born."

I have no wish to make matters unpleasant," returned I, withdrawing my hand. "I only wish to know where the child is to sleep, for the nurse will object to have another in the nursery, and the rooms are all disposed of."

"He can have the small red room for a bedroom," answered Kendal curtly.

I had always meant to turn this room into a day-nursery by-and-by, and I was not at all pleased to find my plans frustrated. Without another word or look towards my husband, I hurried up stairs to my baby to pour into his unconscious

ears all my indignant and tumultuous feelings.

My husband tried no more to reconcile me to the fact of the child's residence with us. I saw that he was as displeased with my conduct as I was with his. But surely I had reason to be angry. Not only was I a second wife—a position to which I had a strong objection—but a vulgar farm-bred boy was to come among us, stealing from my baby the father's love and the rights of a first-born that should have been his.

Bitter tears did I shed that day beside the cradle when Kendal had left for Springmead with a "Good-by, Millicent," called from the bottom of the stairs. I imagined that I had already become less dear to him, and laid the whole blame of the unpleasantness upon the boy who had come between us.

"Never mind, my baby!" I cried, pressing my lips to little Frank's velvet cheek. "We will love and comfort one another through it all."

On Wednesday morning I received a long fond letter from my husband, full of tender words for myself and baby, blaming himself for his secrecy, and pleading very hard for a mother's love for his son, however, troublesome as he might prove at first. He said that he had already seen my parents, having stopped for that purpose when half-way to Springmead, and that they had treated him with forbearing kindness he could never forget. Instead of adding this letter to the precious packet in my dressing-case, I tore it up after the first perusal; I was far too angry with my fate to be just towards my husband.

I asked my cousin Mrs. Tudor to spend the day with me, and she came to lunch, accompanied by her two children, and her sister Miss Clemence—their presence would take away some of the awkward nervousness with which I looked forward to Kendal's return. I did not enlarge on the facts of the case, but told them simply that Mr. Darcy had been deceived as to the death of his first wife's child, taking it for granted that they were aware of a previous marriage. My cousins showed neither surprise nor curiosity, whatever their feelings may have been. Miss Clemence hoped Willie would be a good boy, and give me no annoyance; and Mrs. Tudor, turning to her boy and girl, expensively dressed in the height of fashion, hoped they would be good friends with the new cousin they would see that evening.

It was nearly six o'clock when a cab drove up to the door, and I heard my husband's voice through the open window. A tastefully-spread tea waited upon the table—for we had made the luncheon our dinner, as Archie and Beatrice Tudor could not be kept out late. We were laughing and chatting pleasantly, when Kendal came in; little Frank in his very best lace robe, lay fast asleep in my lap, and I had no intention of waking him by disturbing my position in any way.

My husband greeted my relatives very cordially, though I fancy he was disagreeably surprised at their presence; at any rate, he went back into the hall, saying, "run up stairs with Martha, Willie and get yourself tidy, for the tea is quite ready."

"I have engaged a nurse for Willie at a registry-office," said Kendal to me in an under-tone; "he is far from strong, and Martha will see to him entirely. Sturdy fellow this!" he added, turning to Miss Clemence as he bent to kiss the baby.

I knew that he wanted me to look at him, that he might read my feelings in my eyes, but I kept my face resolutely bent down, in deep displeasure that a servant had been added to our household independently of my own will and choice.

Kendal was thoroughly nervous when he brought his son into the room, and bade him shake hands all round. My careless glance as I touched his hand revealed a thin, pale child, very awkward and frightened, in a black sailor-suit of country make, presenting a marked contrast to the self-possessed little Tudors who stared at him with the curiosity incident to their age. It was a relief that he was not vulgar-looking; however I chose to mistake his shyness for ill-breeding, and determined to punish Kendal thoroughly through the child. Little Willie sat beside his father at tea, and finding his child so little noticed, Kendal lavished upon him a fondness that inflamed my jealousy every moment. His first choice at table being a slice of very rich cake, of which the smallest morsel was sufficient for children, my husband, with the thoughtlessness of a man, heaped his plate with it. I knew that such a meal after a long journey would certainly harm the boy, but I had not the grace to clothe my remonstrance pleasantly. I turned to Kendal with the cold remark—

"That slice should be divided between the three children; no child should eat so much rich cake."

"It won't hurt Willie," said Kendal obstinately; and without noticing me further, he turned to converse with Mrs. Tudor.

I noticed however that after the first taste little Willie only crumbled his food, gazing around the table with crimsoning cheeks, and gulping down his tea as though forcing back something in his throat. I was becoming as nervous as the child, for I had a horror of scenes, and I knew very well what was coming.

"Eat your cake, Willie, like a man," said my husband, as a lull in conversation took place.

"I am afraid he has a very poor appetite," remarked Miss Clemence; "he has eaten nothing as yet."

Dismayed to find himself the object of general attention, Willie hastily swallowed a piece of cake, and then what I had foreseen took place. He buried his face in his small thin hands, and pushing away his plate, burst out crying. If my husband had been absent, I must have taken

the mother's boy in my arms and hushed him as I did my own Frank; as it was, I looked at the sleeping child on the couch, and remarked that he would be ill all night if suddenly awakened. Miss Clemence told Willie nobody would love him if he was not well-behaved; Mrs. Tudor said something about "spoiled children;" Archie abruptly produced a stick of chocolate from his pocket and forced it between Willie's fingers, and little Beatrice twined her arms around his neck, whispering, "Please don't cry cousin."

"The child is tired," said I; "he cries only from fatigue. He had better go to bed and have something to eat there."

Kendal was very much annoyed at this public manifestation. He gave me a look almost of disgust at the indifference of my tones, and then, raising Willie gently in his arms, he carried him away. The last sound I heard was, "Grannie! I do want grannie!" and the wailing cry haunted me throughout the evening.

From that time a coldness arose between my husband and myself; while outwardly the same united couple, both were conscious that a barrier, in the shape of little Willie, really separated us. It so happened that this was term-time, when Kendal was constantly occupied from home; but, when we were together, I easily recognized the absence of his former little tendernesses, and my heart grew harder and harder against the child who I chose to believe, had usurped my place.

Willie was left entirely to the management of his nurse, a person whose clinging manners toward myself at once prejudiced me against her. She was constantly complaining to me of the wilfulness of her charge, and I told her at last that he had been under her control for several weeks, and I had hoped for a report of a slight improvement at least. My great wish was to get the child away to school; evil passions once encouraged pervert the better nature, and despite the occasional whispers of conscience, I threw off all responsibility concerning him, disliking even the sound of his voice or the mention of his name. If Kendal was displeased with his home training, why did he not send him away?

"That boy is always crying," said my husband irritably one morning, as he pulled on his gloves in the hall. "I wonder what is the matter now."

"It is perfectly dreadful at his age," returned I. "Mamma will be here next week, and I am sure the noise will quite upset her."

"Willie must go to school next quarter," said he; "it will be altogether better for him than this house."

He turned toward the door, for our fond adieux were things of the past; but I saw before us a return of the old happy days, when Willie should no longer be an ever-present source of disagreement, and my heart went out yearningly toward my husband.

"You might spare me a kiss," said I coloring, and put my hand on his arm.

There was a sort of affection in his look, as he answered sternly—

"When I have once seen you kiss my child, I shall know you care for such tokens from me. Till then, let neither of us present regard, Millicent."

"Be it so," said I, white with angry pride. "You will never see me kiss that boy. I hate the very sight of him!"

"Take care of what you are saying," remarked Kendal quietly; "those are dangerous words to utter."

He had just left the house when Willie's screaming reached a higher pitch than ever, and I hurried up-stairs in a rage, determined to exercise my authority for once, to show the child such an annoyance was unbearable. Pushing open the door of the room where Martha gave him his meals, I beheld a scene that fully accounted for his cries. The nurse held both his wrists in a cruel grasp, and was beating him unmercifully about the head.

"Say I'm tipsy again, you rascal!" said she in thick, stupid tones. "You'll tell your pa I was tipsy all night, will you, when I was rolling in agony with the spasms? I've half a mind to kill you, I have—and I will too, if you go tale-bearing to your pa?"

I wrenched the child from her hold, and confronted the astonished woman. My fear of intoxication was completely overpowered by my indignation, and I spoke calmly and decisively.

"Go to bed, Martha; you are unfit for your duties to-day. When you are better, I shall see you again."

Her angry gaze changed slowly into a dull stare as she perceived my firm expression, and she sank into an arm-chair, where I knew she would sleep off the effects of her over-indulgence. I slipped the door-key into my pocket, and retreated, in my excitement carrying Willie as an infant. Frank's nurse looked thoroughly surprised when I entered her domain with my step-son sobbing hysterically in my arms; but my recital did not astonish her.

"I had no idea it was as bad as that, ma'am," said nurse, "for Martha keeps herself to herself, and seldom allows her fellow-servants inside her rooms; but we all suspected she drank, for we smelt spirits enough."

"But why did nobody tell me?" I asked crying myself as nurse gently revealed the blue marks on Willie's shoulders. "This child has been treated barbarously."

"We'll, ma'am, we didn't think it our place to carry tales so long as you were satisfied. Many a time have I told Martha that Master Willie didn't ought to cry so much, but she always said she had your permission to punish him as she chose when he was troublesome."

I felt the reproach her words conveyed to my conscience, and I knew it was deserved.

"Get him some breakfast, nurse," said I; "the things were only half laid on the table, and he has had nothing this morning. Now, Willie, I want to know all

'bout Marth—come, tell mamma everything."

"She hasn't been quite so bad before," replied the little fellow, looking up into my face, "but she is always sipping some stuff from a bottle in her pocket, and it makes her so cross. Last night she was angry because I was in here playing with baby, and she sent me to bed without supper. She said that I told tales to the other servants, and that I had no business here; she told me you wouldn't have me touch baby because I was only his step-brother, and I was in his way, and you'd be glad if I was dead—but that's a story isn't it?"

He fastened upon me his great earnest blue eyes, just like my husband's. I was crying fast—crying away all my unnatural hardness—and for answer I stooped down and kissed him.

"I knew it was a story!" said Willie, "I do like you to nurse me, mamma; it feels like grannie."

"Did Martha dress you this morning, Master Willie?" asked nurse, returning with some bread and milk and a little minced chicken.

"No, she sat up in the chair all night. She was asleep this morning when I went to see if breakfast was ready. I had dressed myself, and I woke her up and told her so. I began to cry and said she was tipsy when she stared so oddly at me, and then she hit me because I tried to get away to tell papa."

"Master told me I was never to interfere with Martha, but just attend to baby," said nurse indignantly, "else I'd have found out directly why he was screaming. Never mind, Master Willie it's all right now."

"Nurse," suggested I, "I think we could have Master Willie's little bed in here. I wish you could undertake both the children, or, at least, try it for a time I can rely on you, and of course your wages would be altered. He would not be much in your way."

"I am quite agreeable, ma'am," said nurse. "Baby has taken wonderfully to Master Willie, and he always does what I tell him; but I can't have that naughty cough in my nursery, sir, I tell you."

"I don't cough for fun, nurse," declared Willie. "I'll try to keep quiet—I will indeed."

"He has a nasty hacking cough at nights," said nurse to me, when Willie with the tears all dried, was playing bo-peep with baby in the *berceau*nette. It goes right through you, ma'am. I doubt if he's long for this world after all."

"What a foolish idea!" said I hastily, looking at the white face and slender frame, and wondering, with a sudden flash of horror, if my lack of love was thus to be punished by Heaven. The womanly yearnings, crushed hitherto by jealousy, broke down every barrier then. I was myself at last, and my heart opened wide to take in my husband's child.

I longed to see and speak to Kendal again, and looked forward anxiously to his return. I was sadly disappointed when Mr. Tudor came in to tell me that my husband who shared his chambers, had been summoned to Exeter on legal business and might be detained some days.

He had sent a list of certain requisites, and these I packed at once and dispatched to the station to follow him. I could not bring myself to write one line of all that I felt.

Mr. Tudor soon relieved my disquietude as to dealing with Martha. After a brief interview between them, in which he acted for Kendal, she quietly accepted a month's money in lieu of notice, and bestowed herself and her belongings in a cab, with a few threats and impertinences concerning myself and her late situation which highly amused the cabman.

"She's gone!" shouted Willie, clapping his thin hands for joy. "Won't I have a good time now, mamma?"

After this Willie's health did not seem to improve, and, broken-hearted, I realized one morning, as the rising sun was parting the gray clouds in the east, that all my care for my patient was in vain. A slight attack of pleurisy, anxiously watched by myself and a West-end physician I had summoned, had taken a fatal turn on the previous evening, and we had telegraphed directly to his father, who had proceeded to Ireland from Exeter.

Closer my boy clung to me with all his feeble strength. Baby was crying in the nursery, missing my presence there; but even his voice could not draw me from that bed-side. I would have died myself to save my other child, cut off in the very blossom of his days—a victim perhaps to the neglect which had left his warning cough unattended to. Unspeakably dear had Kendal's son become to me of late; his innocent lips had prattled to me of better things than my careless thoughts had hitherto heeded.

One evening footsteps came hurrying up-stairs, and I was quickly pushed aside by my husband's hand. I knew what his first born was to him as I noticed his evident distress. His emotion pained the child, who was placid himself with the shadow of coming peace.

"Doctor Steane, tell me there is hope—there must be hope—there must be hope!" appealed my husband to the physician, who stood at the foot of the bed.

"I'm not afraid, papa dear," said Willie faintly, as Doctor Steane sadly shook his head.

"But I cannot let you go, my poor little boy!" A solemn silence fell over us, broken only by my husband's sobs; my own heart was too full to find relief in tears. I started convulsively when at the last there came a great cry, "My mama!" and the little arms were stretched towards me. How could I ever have willfully put away my boy's tenderness? Just then I would at any cost have purchased a renewal of our term of love.

The rest is all to me as a dream, a vision of frightened faces, morning shadows superseding the candlelight, and a little

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