



## CHAPTER XI—Continued.

The third, "stony-hearted" publisher had taken a good deal of trouble over the rejected MS. He had read it carefully, and inclosed the "reader's" opinion, shrewd, kindly, and, if severe, no unjust analysis of the whole; holding out a hope that after long years of study the author might succeed in finding a public, not for that but for something else of a different sort.

"Very kind of him," said Roderick, passively, "and in the meantime we may starve."

"Not quite that, dear," said Silence, gently. "You know we have enough for ourselves, if we live wholly to ourselves. Remember that Mrs. Grerson was saying the other day that the greatest evil of poverty was because people will not spend their money upon their own family and its needs, but in making a show before the eyes of the world. Now, this might be necessary at Richerden, but here, where we live so quietly—"

"Quietly, quietly! Blackhall will soon drive me mad with its quietness! To vegetate here upon a pound or two a week, so long as there was the remotest chance of working my way to something better! I can't do it; no man could."

"And no woman who really loved her husband would let him do it."

"Thank you, my darling, I thought you would say so. Even though you are a woman, you can understand. You will not be a coward? You will buckle on my breastplate, and let me plunge into the fight? Then, like our friend Macbeth—

"At least I'll die with harness on my back!"

She laughed—they both laughed. Ay, even through all their distress. There was in them that wonderful, ever-renewed spring of hope, in which pure natures is long before it runs dry.

"So that is settled. I will see Mr. Blackhall to-morrow about the possibility of letting Blackhall, and then, if we can let it, we will go to London at once."

Silence made no reply. Her drooped face turned white—then scarlet—then white once more.

"Come, wise little woman, what is the matter with you? You have given your consent, now give your opinion. Where shall we go, and when?"

"I think, if you will let it be so, I should like us to stay quietly here until the spring."

"Why? What possible reason?"

Silence put both her arms around her husband's neck, and looked at him, right into his eyes, a strangely solemn, tender, absolutely speechless look.

Then he knew.

## CHAPTER XII.

The very day after their return to Blackhall, Roderick, with a cheerful countenance, put his luckless MS. on the topmost shelf of the old oaken press in the dining-room, where nobody could get at it by anything short of a most resolute will and a step-ladder.

"Lie there, my magnum opus! till I have gathered sufficient opes to publish you at my own expense, and distribute a copy each to all my friends, who then will have become so numerous that I shall clear off thereby at least the first edition. For the rest," seeing, though his wife tried to smile, her eyes were brimming, "never mind, love, even if your husband was not born to be a writer—at any rate, you were a novelist, and a Jardine! Have you not considered?"

"It is because I am a gentleman and a Jardine that I do not need to consider," he answered, with that slight air of hauteur which, whether it were right or wrong, his wife loved, could not help loving, for it was a bit of himself. "No, dear; in my worst, that is, my idlest daze, I never was so foolish as to think there was any disgrace in work, any dignity in idleness; and now, when I have to earn my bread by the sweat of my brow, like old Adam and all the rest, down to poor Grandfather Paterson, I'll do it, and not be ashamed of it, either."

"Nor I. Nothing that my husband did could make me ashamed of him, except he did something wrong. But now—"

She stopped, her voice choking; and again, weak-minded little woman that she was, she cried—they both cried. Then they gathered up their courage for the new life which began the next Monday morning.

"It might have been—possibly any person would have said it—when these young folks would have said it—when this two pounds a week, so essential to them, came out of the softest bit in old Black's heart, rather than his full and really tightly shut purse; seeing it would be some months before an ignorant "gentleman," however capable, could be equal in value to an experienced workingman, even as foreman at a mill. But they did not know this, and without another word both cheerfully accepted the new life which was to begin the next Monday morning.

The hardest bit of it was the long hours—the separation from the dusk of the morning till after nightfall. Sometimes Roderick came in so tired that, instead of talking, he would just throw himself down—not on the sofa, that he always left for her, but on the rug at her feet—and fall asleep till bedtime, while she, anxious to use her busy fingers to the last available minute, sewed silently, watching him the while. If he had seen that watch! Does a man ever thoroughly comprehend how a woman loves him?

But, the working days done, there were the blessed Sundays, he never knew how blessed, he said, till he became a "working-man." Church over, his wife sent him to take a long stroll over the hills, while she gathered round her for an hour the little class of mill girls, taught for so many years by Miss Jardine. Roderick sometimes grumbled at this, but she said, gently, "We each do our work. I think this is mine; let me do it." And by the time he came to tea it was done, and the jealous fellow had his wife to himself for the whole evening.

Those sweet Sunday evenings, when "the rain was on the roof"—for winter set in that year—how comfortable they were! The two, shut in together, cheerfully, and without any outward sign, Brain never idle; feet never still, or, if

through the hardest test of married life—even such young married life as theirs—constant companionship; not love, not passion, scarcely even affection—for all these can sometimes exist without it, at least for a long time—but simple companionship, that priceless friendship which is "love without his wings."

"Suppose you had been a goose, Silence," he said one day. "Suppose you had expected me to be always making love to you, instead of talking to you like a sensible woman; suppose you had not cared for the things I care for, but wanted something totally different—dressing and dancing and going out of everything, and it often seemed, doing everything."

She laughed merrily. "And suppose you had to go down to the mill every day, and all day long, it 'amused' him, he said, and indeed he always came home looking so busy and cheerful that she was glad of the change for him. But it was a life of perfect ease. And then, it was full of day-dreams.

"Are you not dull sometimes?" said Roderick one day, when he came in a little earlier than usual, and found her sitting sewing by the fading October light, but with such a smile on her lips, such bliss in her eyes.

"Dull? How could I? I was only thinking."

"I have been thinking, too; only I would not tell you till I was quite sure of myself," said he, as he sat down beside her. "Silence, I do really believe your husband is not such a goose as he seems. Black says so; and Black, though an oddity, is by no means a bad fellow."

Silence smiled. She had oftentimes battled against her husband's dislike to the honest man, whose roughness "rubbed him up the wrong way," as he said, even worse than Mrs. Macagan. Now under the rough rind had he discovered the pleasant kernel. Things had evidently righted themselves.

"He objected strongly to me at first because I was a gentleman, which was as great a distinction in his way as getting him down a boor because he wore a rough coat and had manners to match. Now, we both understand one another better. I have been working with him at the mill for fourteen days, and what do you think is the result?"

He spoke with a buoyancy of tone and manner such as Silence had not seen in him for weeks.

"Something is going to happen—that is, if my wife does not object, which, being a very sensible woman, I don't think she will. I am actually going to earn my daily bread."

She turned round—her lips quivering. "Now, don't begin to cry about it, Mrs. Jardine, my dear; it isn't breaking stones upon the road, or anything very dreadful; and the bread I shall earn will not be too luxurious—only two pounds a week—one hundred pounds a year, which is my precise value just at present. Flattering?—but it is something. I am rather proud of my position as bread-winner—I, that never earned half-penny in all my days."

He spoke a little fast, and with a flushed cheek. She put her hand upon his head and held it, with a soft, firm hold.

"Tell me all."

"There is not much to tell. You know how fond I always was of machinery—indeed, once I begged to be made an engineer, but my—they at home (the never-never) were 'interested' enough, and it is too late now, Black said. But he also says, as a mill-owner I might find my turn for mechanics extremely useful. I could watch, examine, perhaps even invent; indeed, during these two weeks I have made a suggestion or two which he is pleased to consider 'admirable.' Mr. Jardine," he said to me this morning, "you were but a capitalist and could start a mill, or a workingman, who required to earn your bread as overseer or foreman—you'd do." And I started him by telling him I was a workingman, and I did require to earn my bread; and if he thought I deserved foreman's wages, I would take them gratefully, and— Why Silence, my darling! Not crying?"

But she was, though she dried her tears at once. "Oh, Roderick! and this is done for me!"

"For you and—it," he whispered, and then there was a long pause of speechless peace.

"I don't wish to make myself out a martyr, not the least in the world," said Roderick at last. "I like my work—I like all work, but this especially. And Black is by no means a bad fellow to work with when you only know him. There is that great difference in our ages which prevents jarring—and then, he has such a veneration for the family."

"Yes, that is it. But there, too, lies the difficulty. To be foreman at a cotton—You, a gentleman and a Jardine! Have you not considered?"

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