

WAITING FOR THE ANGELS.

Waiting through days of fever,
Waiting through nights of pain,
For the wail of wings at the portal,
For the sound of songs immortal,
And the breaking of life's long chain.
There is little to do for our dear one—
Only to watch and pray.
As the tide is outward drifting,
As the gates of heaven are lifting,
And its gleam is on her way.

The tasks that so often tax her,
The children she held so dear,
The strain of the coming and going,
The stress of the mending and sewing,
The burden of many a year.

Trouble her now no longer;
She past the frost and care.
On her brow is the angel's token,
The look of a peace unbroken.
She was never before so fair.

You see, she is waiting the angels,
And we—we are standing apart.
For us there are loss and sorrow;
For her is the endless morrow,
And the reaping-time of the heart.

Margaret E. Sangster, in Harper's Bazaar.



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CHAPTER VIII.—CONTINUED.

"In the first place," he began, looking at her so steadily and keenly, with such strange attentiveness, that her eyes fell, she scarcely knew why, "this document purporting to be the last will and testament of Mrs. Jane Dunkirk was represented to be, and in truth did appear to be, in the handwriting of James Kieran, Esq., now deceased, but formerly a prominent New York lawyer. It was in evidence, and not disputed at all, that the late Mr. Kieran was for several years—a period embracing the date of this will—Mrs. Dunkirk's attorney, and, naturally, the person to whom she would intrust the drawing of this document. So far, very good. There is a fair degree of plausibility for us, just on the surface. But unfortunately competent evidence was produced by Hunter and Ketchum, showing that on or about the 19th of July, which is the date of our will, you know, and for a certain time previous and subsequent to that date, the late Mr. Kieran was in Europe, and therefore he could not have had any active personal share in this or any other transaction of like nature.



MRS. MAYNARD HAD RISEN EXCITEDLY.

that may have occurred in New York during that time. In short, they proved, by the utter impossibility of the thing, that the late Mr. Kieran did not draw that will, all our representations to that effect notwithstanding! There, you perceive, is their first point, as clear as noonday; it is something that we cannot possibly controvert."

"Can it be possible!" exclaimed Mrs. Maynard, looking up at him with the words. "They proved, did you say, Mr. North, proved that Mr. Kieran was in Europe as early as the 19th of July?"

"They proved it, Mrs. Maynard, in black and white; proved it by his own unconscious testimony; proved it, I regret to add, beyond a peradventure or a shadow of doubt."

"Oh," she cried impulsively, with a quick disdainful little gesture, "to think, Mr. North, that we should have failed to detect so fatal a discrepancy as that!"

"It is amazing," assented North dryly. "Nor is this all. You see, the fault lies primarily in that date. In the second place, one of the witnesses—let me see, what was his name?" He threw his head back reflectively, and the sharp, gray eyes swept the frescoed ceiling for an instant.

"Was it Norristown?" suggested Mrs. Maynard, faintly, as she twined the slender glittering links of her watch chain around her finger, in a preoccupied way.

"It was Norristown, thank you!" The sharp gray eyes returned with the words to Mrs. Maynard's face. "Well, then, it was shown conclusively that Norristown died exactly ten days previous to the date of the will (an unquestionable alibi, by the way) which important fact, in the judgment of the court, rendered all his subsequent proceedings invalid, at least within that jurisdiction."

"Norristown is dead?" echoed Mrs. Maynard, with a quick change of color. Then she added, in a tone of tragical despair:

"I perceive that you are right, Mr. North; shred by shred the unsubstantial fabric is going to tatters! What next?"

"Next," pursued North, with a rather inexplicable smile, "we come to the disclosures made by the experts. The whole affair, you see, has been mercifully sifted. Hunter and Ketchum are unrelenting."

"Unprincipled! Mercenary!" cried Mrs. Maynard, with a sudden little flash of resentment. "All that they wish is to secure for themselves handsome fees from the estate!"

"On, possibly," returned North, with indolent amusement. "Nevertheless, my dear Mrs. Maynard, whatever their motive, the fact remains—they are relentless. Up to this point the only evidence offered has been the ordinary verbal and documentary sort; but now

to clinch the previous testimony the experts are introduced."

"Experts?" repeated Mrs. Maynard in a tone of vague speculation.

"Yes; chirographical experts, you know, to decide as to the genuineness of the signatures. Submitting the document to the usual tests, in connection with unmistakably genuine specimens of the handwriting of the attorney, the testatrix and the witnesses, the experts unhesitatingly swore that the will was a forgery from beginning to end. Thus you see, Mrs. Maynard," and here North leaned back in his chair and folded his arms composedly, half closing his eyes to complete the effect of a superficially indifferent manner, "they have made affairs extremely awkward for us. Who knows, now, for instance, who may be suspected of having had a hand in this business? Why, they may even honor me with some such suspicion; there's no doubt of the possibility!"

"Mr. North!"

Mrs. Maynard had risen excitedly, and she was now pacing restlessly to and fro, her trailing dress sweeping over the carpet in creamy folds. Her delicate dark brows were contracted, her expression was troubled, her tone edged with asperity.

"Mr. North! I must ask you not to trifl. Affairs are far too serious for that. Tell me, please, precisely how we stand. This forgery having been discovered, the will, of course, is set aside. Does the matter end there, or is it to be investigated?"

North was radiant.

"That is cleverly to the point!" he declared to himself with admiring approval; then to Mrs. Maynard he responded guardedly:

"Oh, there will be an investigation, of course. The affair is quite too serious, as you say—forgery and conspiracy, you know; state prison offense, if proven—to be passed over. For this reason," he added, with a significant glance at Mrs. Maynard, "I advise that you take immediate action in the matter."

"I, Mr. North?" she echoed, faintly, as she paused and looked appealingly at him.

He was leaning back languidly, the very picture of graceful composure, with his elbows resting on the arms of his chair, and his delicately white hands clasped idly, while he trifled with the solitaire ring on his little finger. Even in the midst of her troubled thoughts Mrs. Maynard's eye caught the fire and sparkle of the diamond. She had never noticed it before.

"I, Mr. North?" She repeated, with vague caution; for in North's glance and manner there was something subtle, intangible, that placed her, she knew not why, instantly upon her guard. "And pray, why should I move in an investigation?"

North waited for a moment to give a greater effect to his answer, while he steadily returned Mrs. Maynard's inquiring gaze. Then with deliberate emphasis he said:

"Why should you move in an investigation, Mrs. Maynard? The reason is obvious; to clear yourself of all suspicion of complicity in this forgery!"

She started, and her lips grew ashen. "Do they suspect me?" Her tone was scarcely audible; her breath came quickly in nervous, irregular gasps.

"How can I tell, Mrs. Maynard? Whatever suspicions there may be in regard to this affair, they are safely locked up thus far in the wise brains of our opponents. You and I are not likely to be the first ones to hear of them!"

There was an unmistakable significance in tone and words. He threw his head back with an indolent laugh, and looked up sharply to note the effect.

A quick color rose to her brow, a sudden flash came in her brown eyes, a nervous irritability betrayed itself in her manner; but the source of this very perceptible agitation he did not feel justified, at that point, in definite

"Mrs. Maynard, will you act upon my suggestion? Will you heed my earnest wish and advice? You do not know, you cannot realize, all that may be at stake, or you would not hesitate for one moment. I am not advising you at random; I have viewed the case from every possible standpoint, and I can see no other course for you to take. For myself I shall offer no defense. I am prepared to face whatever consequences I have incurred. Already our own lawyers suspect us; to-morrow—this very day—the truth may all become known. There is little time for you to act; your resolution must be taken at once. Will you promise that you will do as I have advised?"

There was no trace of lightness or mockery in his manner now; so intently interested was he in the result of this last bold venture that an earnestness quite different from anything that he had yet exhibited made his manner seem almost as tragical as Mrs. Maynard's.

She started to her feet, the color flushing vividly over her white face; a singular light, half defiant, half tender, but full of suppressed excitement, came into the beautiful brown eyes; a certain impulsiveness, which under ordinary circumstances was only half suggested in her manner, seemed to take possession of her. She looked for a moment as if suddenly lifted from the depths of despairing grief to the heights of a sublime daring, sacrifice, self-abandonment.

North rose quickly. He had a dim sense of impending danger, a confused intention of quelling the storm that he had evoked, before it could break upon his head. But fate kindly interposed in his behalf.

There was the sound of some one at the drawing-room door; starting a little and turning toward the door, Mrs. Maynard controlled herself by a visible effort, and said, in her ordinary tone:

"Is that you, Williams? Come in."

The footman, thus bidden, presented himself with a low bow and his habitual air of apology.

"Maj. Maynard's compliments," he said, "and will Mrs. Maynard soon be ready to drive?"

"Yes, Williams. In half an hour. Tell the major so," answered Mrs. Maynard, with irritable haste.

The footman promptly retired; then, turning again toward North, Mrs. Maynard continued with an evident effort to speak lightly, though her tone and words contrasted strangely with the death-like pallor of her face:

clearly thus far, Mrs. Maynard? Do you quite comprehend my meaning?"

He broke off anxiously here and awaited her response.

Mrs. Maynard was again restlessly pacing the floor with head slightly bowed and hands clasped listlessly before her. One moment of silence intervened between North's question and her answer; then, turning and looking gravely at him, she said:

"Thus far I think I understand you, Mr. North, but I confess there is something beyond your words that I cannot quite divine. I am in no mood for penetrating mysteries when they touch upon a matter of such vital importance; but I will endeavor to comprehend your meaning so far as you will trouble yourself to render it intelligible to me."

She turned from him with the words and continued her slow pacing. North reflected gravely upon her answer; then, failing to make anything satisfactory of it, he hastened his meditated cup of tea.

"Thank you, Mrs. Maynard," he said, calmly. "That is all I can possibly ask. Now, I venture to predict that you would have no difficulty whatever in convincing the court, Hunter and Ketchum, and the public generally, that the latter hypothesis is correct—that the entire responsibility of this forgery rests upon myself. Very good; suppose, then, that you consent to adopt this measure, which is certainly open to you, and I agree to close my lips and make no sign; or, to make matters pleasanter all around, take myself off suddenly to Europe. In such a case your first step will be to move at once in an investigation."

North spoke slowly and distinctly, realizing all the daring of this venture, all the disastrous consequences of a false move. He was nerved for any result, prepared for an adroit change of base if Mrs. Maynard's countenance or manner should warn him that he had gone too far in his assumptions. He had hardly expected this; yet he was not prepared for the overwhelming confirmation that his suspicions now received.

"I, Mr. North?" she echoed, faintly, as she paused and looked appealingly at him.

He was leaning back languidly, the very picture of graceful composure, with his elbows resting on the arms of his chair, and his delicately white hands clasped idly, while he trifled with the solitaire ring on his little finger. Even in the midst of her troubled thoughts Mrs. Maynard's eye caught the fire and sparkle of the diamond. She had never noticed it before.

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"That dreadful man! He insists upon my driving with him this morning, and he will not be put off, though I have pleaded every possible excuse. It is very rude to send you away, Mr. North, but the major's will is our law, and he has to be humored like a child."

North slowly walked across the drawing-room with his head bent and his eyes fixed upon the carpet until he reached the arch doorway with its sweeping portiere; then, turning around, he lifted his head and looked calmly at Mrs. Maynard across the little distance separating them. There was a faint flush of excitement on his face, a smoldering fire in his eyes, a curious touch of repression in his manner; strangely, too, a suggestion of triumph that he vainly sought to suppress.

"I am obliged to go now, Mrs. Maynard," he said, slowly, "but I shall see you soon again. In the meantime I ask you to consider very seriously the suggestion that I have offered. It is vitally worthy of your attention."

Again the color came and went in her cheeks, her breath fluttered and her white fingers closed convulsively together. It was evident that at his words some powerful tide of emotion had swept over her, almost overwhelming her with its force, but, quickly rallying, she controlled herself so resolutely that both voice and manner were icily calm when she answered him.

"Your suggestion, Mr. North?" There was a delicate sarcasm in her tone as she repeated the words. "It is unworthy of me—I will not give it a second thought! Have you so little true idea of me, then? Do you really believe me to be capable of the utter heartlessness of such a course? Oh, never! Even if I did not blame myself so bitterly for this—and my self-reproach is unspeakable!—I could never consent to take such a course as that. Whatever consequence may threaten you, whatever consequence may overtake you, incurred for my sake!" her voice was but faintly audible here, and her eyes, now filled with tears, fell before the grave steady gaze of his—let me share!"

North bowed his head and stood a moment a very effective figure, tall, slender and motionless, outlined against the portiere. His whole attitude expressed more than the most vehement words could have told of deep overwhelming emotion; but his eyes, as they were bent upon the floor, flashed only with a cool and merciless triumph.

"So I was right!" he thought—with a cruel, passionate exultation. "Has she not admitted it completely? Now, for proofs more tangible, and then I shall hold everything in my own hands!"

The brief dramatic silence came to an end, and in quite his usual tones North said, lifting his eyes to Mrs. Maynard's face:

"When may I come again to consult with you further about this matter, Mrs. Maynard?"

There was a weary effort shown in the answer that came in low tones from the still white lips:

"I am at leisure every morning except Wednesdays. Come when you will—when it is necessary."