

And did not poor papa himself teach me, 'a husband should be first of all?' But, oh, the sorrow when he wakes and misses me, and believes that I have fled to dishonor—as he will, he will! What else can he suppose? There will be none to speak the truth and clear me."

"Yes, Miss Dolly, I will!"

It was Rose's voice; low, as if she had instinctively taken her tone from the others, but distinct and clear. She stepped from the heavy shade of the trees as she spoke, and stood in their midst, quiet, pale, and determined.

The little party started and sprang apart as if a thunderbolt had suddenly fallen among them. The movement left Dolly next to Rose, and impulsively the faithful creature turned and flung her arms around her.

"Oh, Miss Dolly!" she sobbed tenderly. "My little mistress and my child in one, what are you going to do? No, no; don't fear," as the girl put one little hand upon her mouth; "I'm not going to speak loud. It isn't Rose that's going to shame you! That's the one,"—pointing directly at Cyril—"that's going to make you steal away, and leave sorrow and shame behind you! And is he your husband in truth? Oh, my dear, confide in me! are you indeed, indeed married?"

The surprise, the sudden bewilderment of Rose's presence, threw the whole party off their guard; beside, she had evidently heard all. Dolly never thought of refusing to answer.

"Yes," she cried with an answering embrace and caress. "He is my husband in truth, Rose."

That confession aroused Hastings at least to a sense of his danger.

"Who is this person?" he demanded.

Rose answered for herself.

"I am Mr. Lisle's servant and housekeeper these twenty years," she said. "I was but a slip of a girl when I came to him first to wait upon his young wife. I nursed Miss Dolly here, and love her this minute more truly than some do," with a significant glance at Cyril, "who should make her good name their first care, instead of asking her to bring stain upon it!"

Dolly gave a faint cry of alarm at this plain speaking.

"Rose," she said—"Rose, you forget yourself."

"Maybe so," replied the woman, doggedly; "but I don't forget you, dear!"

"She speaks the truth," said Cyril, moodily—"she speaks the truth!"

Hastings took instant alarm.

"She talks arrant nonsense, if that's the truth!" said he impatiently. "Who dreams of injuring your wife's good name? If her father conceives some false idea of her flight it will be only for a while; in a few months—nay, weeks, perhaps, you will be able to let him know the truth."

"He'll know the truth this night, or to-morrow morn," said Rose, with quiet resolution—"as far as I can tell it."

A look of fear passed over Cyril's face.

"This will ruin everything!" he cried. Dolly, this woman must keep our secret for awhile, or you destroy me."

Appealed to thus, Dolly, woman like, went over to her husband's side immediately.

"You must say nothing, Rose," she said, coaxingly, and taking the honest, hard, worn hands in her own little soft ones. "Promise me solemnly, if you love me, Rose, to say nothing until I give you leave to speak."

The woman looked down at her with tearful eyes, but shook her head determinedly.

"It's because I love you that I can't promise that," she said. "Could I hear them call you by a slight name, and stand by and hold my tongue? No, no, my darling! When it comes to that, they'll get the truth from me."

In vain they reasoned, expostulated, persuaded, nothing could alter Rose.

"I shall say that I know you are married," she persisted. "and God grant that that may be the truth! For indeed how can I tell but what you've been deceived? What do I know after all?"

Dolly burst in, indignantly.

"You insult me, and my husband, too! Of course I am married. Here are the proofs—in this satchel on Cyril's arm. I would show them to you if the night were not so dark. Oh, Cyril, take care of them!" she added with sudden solicitude. "I never realized how precious they were until now!"

At this juncture Fred Hastings made a suggestion.

"How would it be for Mrs. Rose to go to town with us?" he asked, softly. "She would have an opportunity then to satisfy herself that her mistress has not been wronged, and her presence would be much more desirable to your wife, Cyril, than that of a perfect stranger."

As he spoke he pressed his cousin's arm significantly, and whispered him:

"She knows too much. She must accompany us; we dare not trust or leave her!"

Dolly heard nothing of the whisper. She uttered a little cry of glad delight.

"Oh, if I could have Rose with me!" she said. Cyril smiled, relieved.

"You certainly can, my love," he said, "if she consents to go."

But she did not consent. The proposition pleased her at first, it was evident, and disarmed her—for she was a simple, honest creature—of some of her doubts and fears; she even hesitated for a little moment, but for a moment only.

"No," she said, "I can't go. Don't look so sad, Miss Dolly, dear; I'd like to go; my heart draws me to be with you, but my duty keeps me here. Who would there be to speak a word of comfort to the master to-morrow if I should desert him, too?"

She had not meant to utter a reproach, but Dolly's heart received one from her words.

"Alas!" she cried, "I have deserted him! I should have remembered duty, too, long ago!"

Cyril and Hastings had been whispering apart; the latter came forward now, with an air of resolution.

"It is too late to think of that, now, dear cousin," said he. "Believe me, there is nothing in the world so vain as a vain regret. We must go now, or we shall lose our train—it is, indeed, the greatest risk to Cyril to be here at all. Since Mrs. Rose, here, thinks it best not to accompany you, perhaps she will like to walk with you to the end of the lane, and bid you goodbye at the carriage."

Dolly turned appealingly to her old friend.

"You will go with me that far?" said she.

Again Rose hesitated.

"I'd go with you to the end o' the world, if it was right," she said. "But I won't help you to do wrong."

And then she thought:

"After all she must go with her husband, and I can do nothing to prevent it. Yes, I'll go," she said aloud.

Without another word they left the orchard, and started down the lane in the direction of the woods.

"The carriage is only a short distance away," said Cyril. And he drew himself a little apart with Hastings, leaving the women to converse alone.

"And will you really betray us to my father, Rose, in spite of my prayers? Then, at least, promise not to tell who my husband is, nor where he has taken me."

"I'll try, Miss Dolly. I'd do a good deal to serve you. He'll guess who it is, I reckon, but I won't say where you're gone. Indeed I can't," she added suddenly. "I don't know. If I heard him say where, I've forgotten it."

Dolly gave a sigh of relief.

"So best!" she said, earnestly, "You can't betray what you don't really know, and oh, the thought that my love may bring ruin to my husband tortures me. Our marriage had to be a secret one. It must continue a secret for awhile. I don't rightly understand why, myself, but I can imagine. He is a rich gentleman, Rose, while I am nobody—only a country girl."

Before Rose could utter the indignant protest which rose to her lips against Dolly's humble self-depreciation, Cyril joined them and drew his wife's hand within his arm.

"Here is the carriage," said he.

There it stood, sure enough, a large, closed carriage, with two sturdy horses, that pawed the ground and champed their bits impatiently—well rested, now, after their five-mile run from the neighboring town; for Fred Hastings knew better than to engage a conveyance in Greendale.

At the horses' heads stood Dick Ferret, and grinned and ducked his head with a rustic bow at their approach.

Rose caught sight of him.

"That ne'r-do-well!" said she, indignantly. "Ah, I knew there was mischief afoot when he came round!"

Then Cyril placed Dolly in the carriage, and bade Rose take a last good-bye and kiss of her.

At the same moment Hastings removed the long, loose coat he wore, and stood by with it thrown carelessly over his arm, but no one noticed that.

Dolly was weeping now.

"My love to poor papa," she sobbed, "my prayers for his forgiveness! I shall come back, please God, some day, to ask it for myself. Good-bye! Good-bye!"

"Gooe-bye, my lamb—my darling!" sobbed poor Rose, and leaned forward into the carriage to kiss the weeping girl.

That moment a strong, rough, sudden grasp was set upon her shoulder. She drew back her head with a stifled cry of alarm. Swift as a flash, and binding as a heavy cloud, Fred's coat fell around her head and shoulders, and she felt herself lifted bodily from the ground.

To throw up her hands, and tear at the stolid folds that almost smothered her, was her first instinct.

"They were putting her into the carriage! They were taking her away by force!"

All the consequences of such a proceeding flashed like lightning over her mind. No one to comfort her master—to clear poor Dolly's name—herself, too, deemed a guilty party to her flight! Oh, to her honest, faithful mind, such an accusation seemed intolerable! With the strength of desperation she tore at the coat, and, contriving to partly free her face, uttered one piercing scream.

It was answered instantly by a man's loud cry:

"What's the matter? What's the matter there?"

And on the instant a swift footstep came crashing through the quiet wood and a man sprang out beside them.

"What are you doing, you vilians?" said he,

boldly. Release that woman instantly!"

The wrap was over her face again, so that she could not speak, nor could he see her; but Dolly, clutching at Cyril's hand, as she shrank back into the darkest corner of the carriage, cried:

"It's Frank! Oh, my God! it's Frank!"

## CHAPTER XII DOLLY'S FLIGHT

An unreasoning and unreasonable hatred of his unconscious and hitherto unseen rival had possessed Cyril's mind from the first hour in which he had learned of that rival's existence—it blazed up into sudden fury now. What, should this fellow balk him at such a crisis of his life? Without one warning word or sound—scarcely pausing to realize himself what he was about to do—he flung upon Frank with all the concentrated force of jealous rage, and taking the unsuspecting sailor completely by surprise, hurled him heavily to the ground.

"Take that for meddling with my affairs!" he cried vindictively, as he threw a baleful glance at his fallen foe.

Frank lay still enough; his head had come in contact with a stone, and the blow had stunned him.

"Is he dead?" queried Dick Ferret, anxiously, while Dolly sobbed with terror. Cyril bent down over his victim.

"Dead? No!" said he, with a sigh of relief, "He's stunned, that's all; he'll revive presently."

"Then let us make the most of his insensibility," said Fred, eagerly. "My captive here—she's no light weight, I can assure you—has either fainted or choken for want of air. Help me to get her into the carriage, and let's be off."

They lifted the unconscious Rose into the coach and placed her beside her terrified and weeping mistress.

"Oh, poor Rose! poor Rose!" cried Dolly. "How cruel, oh, how cruel and wicked we are! Are you going to take her with us after all than?"

Cyril clasped her in his arms.

"My darling, yes. It is the only way; we have to much at stake to trust her. My poor, pale dove, how you tremble. I have not hurt the fellow, Dolly dear. Before we are fairly out of sight he will be upon his legs again."

And with that he drew her to a seat beside him, leaving Rose to Hastings' care; then Dick Ferret, having first taken the precaution of dragging Frank to the side of the road, mounted to the seat, gathered up the reins and drove swiftly and quietly away.

Away, away, as fast as the eager horses could go to the town some five miles off where the carriage had been hired and where they were to take the train. This was the place where Dolly had been married, but in the darkness she did not recognize it.

Long before they arrived, however, Rose showed symptoms of returning animation. She moaned and stirred feebly, and the color came back faintly to her lips and cheeks.

"She is recovering thank God!" cried Dolly who had been tending her with assiduous care. "Oh, I am thankful!"

Fred looked at Cyril gloomily.

"Yes; she is recovering," he said. "And now the struggle begins over again. This woman will give us trouble."

"What do you suggest?" asked Cyril anxiously. Already it had become a habit with him to lean upon and be guided by "Cousin Fred."

"Something very simple. We can manage her while she is unconscious, but if she revives at the station she will give us all away. Let us keep her unconscious, then."

Cyril stared.

"How are you going to do that?" said he.

I have something in my pocket that will serve," said Hastings, quietly, "and do her no harm, either."

And a little later, as they approached the town, and Rose sat up, all wild and trembling still, and rejecting with bitter reproaches Dolly's attempts at consolation, he drew from his pocket a small vial, and pouring some of its contents upon his handkerchief, applied it to her nostrils.

A strong, peculiar, sickly odor instantly filled the coach.

"Smell it," cried Hastings, holding it over her mouth and nostrils with gentle but resolute force. "It will revive you."

Instead of that, it flung her back into unconsciousness.

In a few minutes her ineffectual struggles ceased, and she lay passive, with closed eyes and breathing heavily.

Dolly laid one hand upon her heart, and gasped painfully.

"Air" she said, "oh, give me air. That heavy, that heavy, sickening odor poisons me! What is it, Cyril?"

Cyril put the window down before replying; a heavy and suspicious frown was on his face as he turned toward Fred once more.

"Its chloroform," he said answering Dolly. Then to Fred: "May I ask what induced you to bring it? You had no anticipation of this woman's interference with our plans. Is it possible that you misjudge me so far as to imagine

I would have allowed its use in—in another case?"

His tone was one of mingled indignation and suspicion.

Fred shrugged his shoulders with almost a Frenchman's easy grace, and smiled.

"Dear boy, what a suspicious devil you are," he said lightly. "I carry the drug about me in the interest of a raging tooth, which nothing else will relieve. Its presence in my pocket upon this occasion is as accidental as it is providential, I assure you."

And Cyril was satisfied. His cousin's influence with him was very strong, and increasing every day. He did not see nor suspect the look of scorn that rested on him through the darkness: he had no clew to his friend's(?) unspoken thoughts.

"The fool! Does he think I should have troubled myself to consult him in 'that other case?' I would dose his pretty wax doll with chloroform just as soon as another, and he stand by and be none the wiser, either."

The drug was administered again while waiting for the train, and when it arrived Rose was carried, sleeping heavily, to a berth in the sleeping car. Cyril engaged a whole compartment and Dolly, quite wearied out, lay down and was soon asleep. Hastings undertook to watch over Rose.

"I shall keep her in this state until we reach New York," he said. "She is strong enough; it will do her no harm. It is but a few hours, anyhow."

And easy-going Cyril, looking down at the unresisting figure on the bed, and realizing how much trouble she might have given them, fairly broke forth in gratitude.

"You certainly are the cleverest fellow, Fred, and the most invaluable! What on earth should I have done without you? And as to the chloroform—well, I didn't quite like that, at first; I thought—but no matter; your having the bottle in your pocket to-night was the best piece of luck in the world."

Hastings smiled.

"It was pure luck," he said. "A mere lucky accident, I assure you."

Cyril held out his hand.