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R. H. Mason

RIGHTED AT LAST

BY MARY CECIL HAY

Author of "The Arundel Motto," "Nora's Love Test," "Back to the Old Home," Etc.

"Honor," he said, looking longingly in her sweet, pure face, and still holding her hand tightly in his own, "years ago, when you were a little one—my favorite then as always, and even then the very sunshine of my life—you used to bring your good-night kiss and lay it softly on my lips. Do you remember? And do you remember how I would never let Phoebe kiss me afterward? No, of course you do not. You were but a child; what could you know of such feelings, or of the dreams that were my very life-breath even then, and which you are trying now to kill for me?"

"If you could guess how unhappy you make me by talking so, Lawrence," the girl returned, still very gently, "I think you would not do it so often. Let us be just what we were in those times you have been talking of—cousins, as it were, or ward and guardian, which you will—but do not talk of other love between us. It is impossible. You know it, and have known it always, if you would only own it to yourself. You know, too, that I have no home but yours; and, if you were generous, you would not take every opportunity of making me unhappy with this worn-out subject. Oh, why," she cried, her hands clasped tightly to her breast, "should you have given me this passion you call love? You knew I never could love you. You have yourself told me how I would not go near you when I first came here, a little child! You have told me how your sister tried in vain to teach me to admire you, and Phoebe tried in vain to teach me to worship you, and you yourself tried—oh, so much more in vain!—to teach me to love you. Knowing all this, why do you speak to me so often, as you have done to-night? What right have I given you?"

"None. I have taken the right," said Lawrence, his breath quick and hard. "Your pride and indifference, through these ten years, have only made my love all the stronger—never mind why; we cannot understand these things—but you are a woman now, and must repay me for these years of pain and waiting. Honor. This long and slighted love of mine shall win a return. You cannot crush or kill it, for it is stronger than yourself, and will conquer you."

"I shall go away from here if you ever speak to me so again," said the girl, with a flash of wrath in her eyes; "or I must pass it by as something too—too trivial for notice."

"And I," returned Lawrence, speaking as sternly as he ever could to her, "shall never leave off telling you of my love until you own your love is mine at last."

She walked quietly from the room, even while he spoke; but he followed her, eager to do something for her even then.

"Why, Lawrence," she said, taking her candle from his hand, and by an effort speaking in her old tones, just as if that interview had never been, "there is a light in your room! Who is there?"



Was there ever a woman in the wide world who did not yearn to be the mother of a bright faced, happy, healthy, laughing, rollicking child? If there ever was such a woman, she was a bad one, and while there are many thoroughly bad men, there are very few thoroughly bad women.

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"Only Slimp," returned Mr. Haughton, looking with annoyance toward the line of light from the door of his private room. "He has a deed to copy for me, and he's late over it. Never mind him; he will not be here for breakfast."

"Those are good tidings," said Honor, emphatically; and, glancing at the door with an infinitesimal mimicry of Mr. Slimp's normal expression, she ran lightly and noiselessly up-stairs.

Mr. Haughton, smiling at the remembrance of her comical grimace, watched her till she turned out of sight, and then entered his own room, the stern and watchful man of business now, the unmoved man of the world.

"You have all your instructions, Slimp; so you can go to bed when you like. There will be breakfast for you in this room at seven, and you will be gone before I come down."

"Very well, sir," was Mr. Slimp's questioning assent. But he looked as if he understood an omitted margin to the words; and, if Honor had been there, she might have looked in vain for the deed he had been copying.

"Do the Temple thoroughly; study the records, and leave no stone unturned. I have written on the back of this card a few headings to remind you, and on the other side is the name. Keep the card carefully—I had trouble enough to get it."

Mr. Slimp took it from Mr. Haughton's hand deliberately; read the pencilled instructions through with still more deliberation; then turned the card round, and read the name engraved upon the other side—"Royden Keith."

CHAPTER V.

"Asleep, Phoebe?" At the sound of Honor's bright voice, and at the sight of her face round the half-opened door of Phoebe's bedroom, a head sprang from the pillow, and an eager whisper bade her come in and shut the door.

So Honor came in and shut the door obediently; then, putting her candlestick down upon the dressing-table, and taking up an easy position on the bed, she looked across into her cousin's face, and remarked, sententiously, that she was back again. And then her wakeful eyes went wandering round the little untidy chamber, as if it were all strange to them, with a shadow in them deeper than their wonder—a shadow which now and then did fall upon their brightness at odd times and in familiar scenes, as if, even yet, the life which had been hers ever since she could remember, had its dark, inscrutable corners which she searched in vain.

There was little to gaze upon in this bedroom of Phoebe's, so it was no wonder that the girl's eyes soon came back to the face opposite her, and rested there.

"Why, Phoebe," Honor said, then, "you have been crying!"

Phoebe was sitting up in bed with her hands locked about her knees, and her broad, Dutch-looking face—rather pretty, but soulless and self-absorbed—was flushed and stained with tears.

"Crying?" she stammered, and both the repetition of the word and the mortified gaze betrayed the dependence of the self-consciousness of her character.

"Why should you say so?" "I am led to that conclusion by the sight of tears. Am I as wise as the doctor's assistant who knew his patient had been eating horse because he caught sight of the saddle under the bed?"

"I did cry," replied Phoebe, plaintively, "because Lawrence would not let me sit up for you, as I'd promised, and because he hardly spoke to me all the evening."

"What a relief," remarked Honor devoutly.

"Not to me," sighed Phoebe; "you know it isn't."

"Yes, I know—I do know," rejoined Honor, pitifully, for how could she help pitying the girl who could perpetually court sympathy for having, unasked and with utter absence of pride or even self-respect, laid her shallow heart at her guardian's feet? "Yes, I know, Phoebe, and I only thought of myself when I spoke. But I do really believe that some day you will say, with me, that it is a relief when Lawrence does not speak."

"I never should," said Phoebe, with a sigh. "I'm not so surprised that he takes no notice of me when you are here; but when you are away it is worse. He does not talk at all then; he hardly stays in the room with us. Oh! Honor, I wish I didn't care! But I do; and—do you think he will ever be different?"

"I hope so, in many ways," said Honor, sagely; "but I think, if it ever came to happen that he offered his love to you, Phoebe, you would see, all at once, that it wasn't worth taking. Has it been very dull for you then, poor little Frau?" one of Honor's pet names for her Dutch-visaged cousin.

"Jane was as cross as she could be," spoke Phoebe, emphatically; "and she said lots of unkind things about your going to Deergrove, till Lawrence stopped her; he said afterward she was

ever to say anything about you before Mr. Slimp."

"Oh! he was here—I forgot that!" cried Honor, with a soft little laugh. "I saw him, I caught a delightful glimpse of him through the half-closed door—sitting so."

Phoebe laughed—though in a rather spiritless manner—at her cousin's quaint imitation of Mr. Slimp's attitude; and then Honor turned the subject delicately from that complaint which Phoebe delighted to outpour.

"Stop a minute, Phoebe. Give me time to get down from the bed, and I'll give you a rare representation of Theo's manners to-night; especially of her reception and her farewell."

The ceremony of greeting and speeding a decidedly poor relation—whose part in the scene was of course purely imaginary—was performed with perfect gravity, though its ludicrous side was evident from the laughter which chased away all Phoebe's discontent. Then followed a slight exhibition of Captain Hervey's languid deportment, and the elegant sleepiness which Mrs. Trent could always manage to maintain, undisturbed by the keen watch she kept upon her daughter, and the frequent lessons she vouchsafed to Honor.

Then Honor ceased her acting and took up her candlestick.

(To be continued.)

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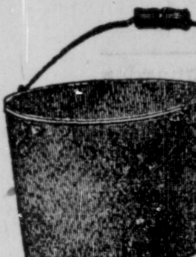
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