

VARIOUS

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THE WOODEN LEG

A number of years ago, when temporarily residing at a quiet sea-side resort in the south of England, time hung heavy on our hands. We had no conversable acquaintances, no books to fall back upon, nothing to excite any particular interest. Before quitting home we had promised to write to an aged invalid lady and her two daughters about anything that occurred during our stay at this sea-side retreat, but felt at a loss what to write about. At length something cast up. It was greedily seized upon, and formed the subject of a letter, which long after being forgotten, has been accidentally put into our hands by the elder of the two daughters, to whom it was addressed, with the remark that it had been the means of amusing her poor dear mamma, now passed away. The remark consoled us, for the letter was anything but brilliant. We offer our readers a copy, as a specimen of an attempt at squeezing literary material out of a dreadfully dull watering-place.

'Since coming to this retired spot, I have noticed two ladies with wooden legs. These require to be described separately, for the legs differ in character, and I daresay materially differed in price. They may be spoken of as legs Nos. 1 and 2. Leg number one consists of a rounded black pin of the old genuine wooden-leg type, and which is now very much less common than it used to be within my remembrance. The leg is neatly turned, with no disguise about it – a downright wooden leg as may be seen by all the world. To all appearance it does not form an entire leg. It evidently goes only as high as the knee. This half-leg, as it correctly should be called, belongs to a smart well-dressed young lady, who stumps about with it beautifully, though no doubt with considerable exertion. As the knee seemingly rests on a cushion, the lower part of the unfortunate limb projects behind, yet not in an ungainly way. Thanks to crinoline, the real leg and foot are to a certain extent shrouded from observation. However, one can see a kind of jerking out of the foot, on every movement of the red petticoat and tucked-up dress behind.

'While compassionating one so young and so beautiful on account of what appeared an irreparable misfortune, it is quite pleasing to see how smartly she goes about with her wooden leg. Gaily dressed, turban with a delicate feather, tucked-up dress, she walks on at a good pace, laughing, chatting, and in as high spirits as if nothing was the matter. With two young-lady companions she daily parades on the public Esplanade overlooking the shingly beach. Good manners of course forbid any one noticing the infirmity, and nobody pays any attention to it – a circumstance contributing to the young lady's sprightliness. It is at the oriel window of our apartments, which commands the Esplanade from end to end, that I have observed how cleverly the wooden limb is managed. Before moralising on the subject, let me say something of the other artificial leg.

'Leg number two, as I have called it, is an ambitious leg. It is a sham leg which makes an attempt to seem real, and I regret to say the attempt is not very successful. The owner is a lady somewhat *passée*. She is dull, I would almost say suffers under melancholy reflections. Beyond a doubt, her leg had been amputated above the knee, probably from having been seriously injured by some terrible accident. Looking at her as she walks along with a halt in her gait, I call up visions of the pain she has experienced, of her sufferings, of her blighted hopes, of her perpetual discomfort. I also picture the trouble she has had in seeking about for a good artificial leg maker. How she looked over an assortment of legs. How she at length fixed on a particular pattern, and was measured for one of the same kind. Just think of being measured for a leg! And think, also, of the servant coming into the

parlour, and saying: "If you please, ma'am, the man has come with the leg you ordered." Next, think of going up to your room and trying on the leg! How awkward it would at first feel – stump, stump, as you walked across the floor. Weeks would elapse before the leg became at all familiar.

'Although this artificial leg is to a certain extent a failure, it answers its purpose better than if it had been a mere unyielding wooden pin. The opinion I form is that there is a deficiency in the *mécanique*, for while the heel goes down, the forepart of the foot does not fall or take the ground neatly. I am told that all depends on the arrangement and easy working of the springs and other machinery. You may have a five-pound leg or a ten-pound leg, nay, I believe, a twenty or thirty-pound leg, according to the nature of the springs, pulleys, straps, and wheel-work. For anything I can tell, the leg in question was a five-pound leg. At least, it does not appear to be of a high order. A keen regard for economy in a matter of this kind is poor policy. I should say if you want an artificial leg that will look and act as nearly as possible like a real one, do not grudge the money. Get the best article in the market. Some people will remember the case of the Marquis of Anglesea, who lost a leg at Waterloo. His lordship procured an artificial leg which was so real in appearance and was so adroitly managed, through the agency of springs and so on, that he rode on horseback and danced at balls as if the sham leg consisted of real flesh and blood. There was a triumph of artificial leg making that would do credit to our own times.

'Reflecting on the two cases of ladies with artificial legs that have come under my notice, I am struck with the oddity of the whole affair. Until these later times, it was customary to see old soldiers and sailors with wooden legs, and seldom any one else. Except on rare occasions, civilians did not get their legs shattered, ladies almost never. The progress of national improvement has changed all that. Railway accidents – properly speaking blunders through carelessness – have begun to enlarge the number of persons requiring artificial legs of some sort or other. Travellers are now in the category of soldiers going to battle – legs and arms fractured, ribs broken, dislocations of various kinds. Fortunately, mechanical science keeps pace with these disasters. Latterly great improvements have been effected in the construction not only of artificial legs, but of hands and arms. So that with sufficient care and a suitable expenditure, mutilation is robbed of half its horrors. The modern artificial leg-makers, of whom there are several in London – one notably in Oxford Street – may be styled public benefactors. Such assuagements do not the less incline us to sympathise with young ladies, who all at once when on a railway excursion come out of "an accident" with so bad a compound fracture of the leg that amputation and an artificial leg become necessary. Ladies pride themselves on their neat boots and feet, these being usually points for criticism. An artificial leg of any description finishes all that. Sad to contemplate. Hopes of marriage at an end. No more dancing or flirting, or hooking on with chatty parties of young gentlemen going to church. And what personal inconveniences! Unbuckling the leg at night on going to bed, and having to hop about or use a crutch when the leg is off. Putting on the leg in the morning. In sitting down, always some consideration as to how the leg is to be adjusted. Going up and down stairs, the real leg first at every step, and the artificial leg brought up behind it. The unpleasantness of ordering boots and shoes, and the still greater unpleasantness of being generally pitied.

'Such were some of the thoughts that passed through my mind. One thing puzzled me. How did it occur that the young lady with leg number one was so happy-looking? All my preconceived notions were upset. I had ventured to think of the bare possibility of you and your sister stumping down the street to church with an artificial leg – even a good ten-pound leg full of springs – and what a calamity either of you would consider it. But here to my amazement is a sweet gleesome maiden going about with a wooden leg of the simplest structure, and she seems to be in no respect affected with the misfortune. Now, said I to myself, that girl's conduct is a fine example of philosophy and pious resignation. Knowing that she is destined to be lame all her days, she submits with a good grace, puts a pleasant face on the matter. Deprived of certain hopes of happiness befitting her age and position, she has in her dire misfortune learned to say and feel, "Thy will be done." That is the notion

I have formed regarding her, and a consideration of the cheerful manner she endures her hapless infirmity does me good. The poor young thing is a practical example of resignation. She seems as if saying to me and others: "*You* pretend to have trials and vexations – look at me! You have been spared the discomfort of a wooden leg." I accordingly feel happier, than I might otherwise do. Thus Providence, while sending misfortunes, beneficently sends consolations, and in all circumstances we are not without reasons to be thankful.'

W. C.

THE LAST OF THE HADDONS

CHAPTER VII. – VANQUISHED

We were living very quietly. Mr Farrar was getting no nearer to convalescence, and all gaiety was still in abeyance. The few callers who made their appearance at Fairview were mostly new acquaintances, made since Lilian had returned home and her father had commenced giving large entertainments; and their visits were very 'few and far between.' They were politely interested in Mr Farrar's health; hoped his charming daughter would keep up her spirits; felt *quite* sure he was safe in Sir Clement's hands – Sir Clement was *always* successful; and so forth: then rustled smilingly away in their rich dresses; no doubt with the pleasant consciousness of having done all that could be expected. We on our side could well have spared them that amount of labour. Dear old Mrs Tipper was always depressed and conscious of her shortcomings after such visits; and Lilian would nestle up closer to me, as though making a silent protest of her own against such friendship as they had to offer. In truth, the greater part of those who came were merely rich; and the two or three elderly ladies who were not unlike Mrs Tipper, were too completely under the control of fashionable daughters to forget their grandeur and compare notes with her about past times, as they would have been only too glad to do. Mr Farrar had passed his old friends on the road to wealth, and had not yet quite succeeded in overtaking more distinguished ones. The little his daughter had seen of their great friends had not made her desire to see more.

'Arthur says I shall enjoy being in society when once I get used to it; but – Do you think I shall, dear Miss Haddon?'

'There must be some advantage in mixing with people, dear; but you know I have been as little accustomed to what is called society as you have.'

'I sometimes think it is that which makes it so nice to be with you. You are so different from the people who come here, and so like those I knew in the dear old vicarage-life. You never say a thing merely because it is polite to say it.'

'I hope I do not say things it is impolite to say, goosy,' I smilingly replied. It was so pleasant to know that I found favour in her sight.

'I wish Arthur's sister were more like you, Mary;' hesitatingly and gravely. 'She makes more loving speeches – she is always saying that she longs for the time to come when we can be more together; and yet we never seem to draw a bit nearer to each other; sometimes I almost fear we never shall.'

No; they never would. I had seen quite enough of Mr Trafford's sister to know that Lilian and she would always be far enough apart in spirit. Mrs Chichester was a great favourite with, and in much request by the world to which she belonged. 'A young and attractive woman – a charming widow, who had been unfortunate in her marriage;' said her friends. 'A manœuvrer, who had married an old man for his money, and found too late that it was all settled upon his grown-up children by a former marriage;' said others. She was called very sensitive and good and sweet. I only know that her sweetness and goodness were of a very different texture from Lilian's.

As I watched them together, Mrs Chichester, with her pretty vapid face, graceful languid air, and soft voice, uttering a string of ultra-affectionate speeches, and Lilian shyly responding in her own fashion with a low murmured word, a warm flush on her cheeks, or a little half-gesture, I think I rated them both at their true value.

Mrs Chichester was the only lady who came to Fairview upon intimate terms; and she only came when she could make her escape, as she termed it, from a host of engagements. I had my

suspicions that she did not find her 'dearest Lilian' quite so congenial as she affirmed. There was a grave uncompromising truth about Lilian which I believe Mrs Chichester found rather difficult to get on with for any length of time. In time I noticed something else: Mrs Chichester's visits were generally made on the days we expected Robert Wentworth.

For the first two or three times of our meeting, she took great pains to cultivate me, declaring that she foresaw we were to become great friends. But after a while I appear to have ceased to interest her; although she was none the less sweet and pleasant to me on the occasions we had anything to say to each other. In truth, I believe that neither her brother nor she took very cordially to me; though both seemed to consider it necessary to keep up the appearance of doing so. Had they been more open about their sentiments, they would not have offended me. I had no right to expect more from them than I gave; and I really gave very little.

Arthur Trafford might perhaps have been taken more into my favour than was his sister, but for his engagement to Lilian. As an every-day young man, with artistic tastes, there was nothing in him to positively object to. But such negative goodness was not, I told myself, sufficient for Lilian's husband. Her husband ought to be able to appreciate her in quite a different way from that of Arthur Trafford. I am not sure that he even knew the best part of her.

I think the principal reason for his not taking to me was jealousy. Lilian was a little too much absorbed in her new friend to please him. With his sister it was different; and I was very much amused by her tactics. It requires little intelligence to defeat schemers, who generally plan on the supposition that some complicated machinery will be used to circumvent them, and who are thrown out in their calculations when one does nothing. Mrs Chichester began to adopt the tone of being rather afraid of Miss Haddon; and some of her little speeches about my unapproachableness and so forth, reached the ears they were not intended for.

'If I did not see that you take to her so much, dearest, I should fancy her unsympathetic and cold – one of those natures one never can feel at home with. – O yes;' in reply to an earnest protest from Lilian; 'good of course; extremely, I have no doubt; but I am so enthusiastic in my friendships, and she quite chills me.'

It so happened that there was another hearer of this little speech besides myself. Our dinner-party had been enlarged that evening by the presence of Mr Wentworth as well as Mrs Chichester, and we had all dispersed afterwards, leaving Mr Farrar and his sister in the drawing-room for their after-dinner rest. I had contrived to slip away from the others, and went down to my favourite seat on the low wall a little more readily than usual, turning my back upon Fairview. As Mrs Chichester's speech sounded very close to me, I stood up. She would be able to see me across the gooseberry and currant bushes, and so be warned not to say more than she would like to do in my presence. But she and her companion had passed on, and were, I thought, already out of sight. I was sitting down again, when a voice by my side quietly asked: 'Of whom were they speaking?'

'Mr Wentworth!' I ejaculated in some surprise at his having found out my retreat. I thought no one penetrated beyond the kitchen gardens.

Robert Wentworth and I were becoming fast friends. The few times we had met at Fairview had been sufficient to shew me that I had found a friend, and no ordinary one. Moreover, I had built up a little romance about him. Though I had so soon discovered the mistake I had made in supposing that he was engaged to Lilian, I believed that he loved her, as only such men can love; and while I heartily wished he held Arthur Trafford's place in her heart, I felt all a woman's sympathy for one whose hopes were wrecked, and who yet could bear himself so manfully. This had in the outset inclined me to make friends with him more than with any one else who visited Fairview. The more I knew of him, the more I found to respect.

As I have said, I was not without a suspicion that Mrs Chichester regarded him with favourable eyes; and I will do her the justice to say that I believe she was in this instance false to her creed, and loved him for himself, though he was as yet said to be only a rising man. 'He had not worked and

struggled in vain, thought one or two who had watched him with some interest; and there was now some chance of his succeeding at the bar,' said Arthur Trafford.

'Of whom were they speaking?' he repeated. It was his habit always to get an answer.

'Of me. I think you must have guessed as much as that.'

He laughed; sitting down by my side.

'Then why are you so philosophic about it? Do you think it is good to be cold and unsympathetic?'

'It may be good to be cold and unsympathetic – to *some* things.'

'What things?'

But I was not going to be drawn into a discussion in that direction. He was always trying to lead me into abstract talk, and sometimes I enjoyed taking a little flight with him; but I reserved to myself the right of choosing the direction we should take.

'What things?'

I jestingly replied that I would leave him to determine what things.

'You appear to very decidedly turn your back upon some things.'

'I enjoy that view.'

He turned his eyes upon it for a moment. 'It is pretty enough in its way.'

'In its way, indeed!' Then I presently went on: 'It is a way of quiet loveliness, which has a great charm for me in its suggestions of peace and rest. That house amidst the trees, by the hillside, has a special attraction for me. Even you must allow it is a charming retreat.'

'That low house? It is well enough; but' – turning his eyes upon my face, he added sharply: 'What do you want with rest and peace and charming retreats? What right have you to be sighing for them?'

'Right? Surely every one has a right to them that can get them?'

'The right is only *fairly* won by working for it; and what have you done? I mean of course, in comparison with what you have the power to do.'

I suppose I looked my surprise. He went on more gravely: 'Pardon me, but I gave you credit for being one of the last to desire "inglorious ease." I believed that even your life here, with its many demands, is not quite enough for the exercise of your full strength. Rest and peace are for the weak and vanquished.'

'Then I suppose it is feeling weak and vanquished which makes me incline towards them.'

'A little morbidness, more likely; the need of something to fight against. And yet,' he added musingly, 'there ought to be enough to exercise your energies here.'

'There is enough to satisfy the most belligerent,' I replied, laughing outright. 'I assure you there is ample opportunity for the exercise of any power I may possess in that direction.'

'And you acknowledge yourself vanquished?'

'Not by anything here, Mr Wentworth.'

'I beg your pardon;' gravely. Then, with the abruptness of friendship, he presently added: 'Did Trafford give you the *Westminster*? The paper I marked ought to interest you.'

'No; he forgot, I suppose.'

'Oh, I see. I must be my own messenger next time, or – employ Becky. You shewed some discrimination in giving her a step in life.'

'Becky! Do you know her?'

'A little.'

'Please do not be mysterious.'

'I made her acquaintance when – You do not think I was so inhuman as to let you go that day without keeping you in sight, in order to make sure you came to no harm. And – Well, I did not feel quite sure about you, so kept about the place until I came upon Becky; and we two struck up a friendship.'

'It was good of you.'

'Was it? I am too much accustomed to analyse motives to be quite sure about that.'

'And you have been in Becky's confidence all this time!' I murmured a little confusedly, with the consciousness of what that might mean.

'More than she imagines, perhaps; since she is no match for me in diplomacy. I need not tell you she is leal.'

'No.'

'How different the ring of those two voices!' he presently added, as the others again approached by the path running parallel with the wall upon which we were sitting, and on the other side of the kitchen garden, separating and screening us from observation, and across which came the voices of Mrs Chichester and Lilian.

'I am glad that is evident to others as well as to me,' I rejoined. 'I like to think they are dissimilar in the least as well as the greatest points. Lilian will never become a woman of fashion.'

'Not while what she typifies is out of date.'

I knew that he meant the enthusiasm and romance – the delicate purity of her mind, which was so harmoniously typified by her style of beauty. Then following out my thought, I absently added: 'And you are his friend.'

'We were together at Eton and Oxford. Our families are distantly related; and he being four or five years my junior, was placed by his father in some degree under my charge, though we were in different sets.'

'I can imagine that.'

'He was a favourite at the university; and' – as though searching about in his mind for some other good thing to say – 'His love for her is sincere.'

'Yes; thank God, it is that!'

'Mr Wentworth and Miss Haddon! I had not the least idea of finding you here!' It was Mrs Chichester speaking, with the prettiest air of surprise as she emerged from the side-path, though the keen glance with which she measured the distance between him and me was not unobserved by one of us. 'What a delightful retreat! May I join you?' – sitting down by my side with a graceful little addendum about feeling fatigued, and having found herself somewhat *de trop* with the lovers.

'And gentlemen are so very frank with sisters in such cases – are they not? Are you blest with brothers, Miss Haddon?' And so on, a list of questions which brought out the facts that I was not only lacking in brothers, but many other blessings.

'Quite alone in the great world, and an orphan. How very sad!'

Someway, whenever Mrs Chichester attempted to talk sentiment, it was apt to degenerate into bathos; more perhaps from the contrast between her face and manner and what she said, than from the words themselves.

'And past the age for charity schools, Mrs Chichester,' I smilingly replied.

'Oh, but indeed, indeed, you must not think I meant anything of that kind!' Then, turning towards Mr Wentworth in a pretty distressed way, she entreated him to help her to persuade me that she had really meant no harm. 'I assure you I had not the slightest intention to give offence; do, pray, believe it, Miss Haddon.'

Mrs Chichester was always so terribly afraid of offending Miss Haddon, and so extremely and obviously cautious lest any word of hers should remind me of my position.

'Unfortunately the facts remain, however kind you may be about it, Mrs Chichester,' I gravely replied. 'I *am* an orphan, and alone in the great world.'

'And so completely defenceless – so weak, and easily vanquished,' gravely put in Robert Wentworth.

'Ah, now you are laughing at me!' she ejaculated, an angry light in her eyes. 'I expected more courtesy from *you*, Mr Wentworth.'

'I assure you I was only repeating Miss Haddon's own sentiments, Mrs Chichester.'

This was too bad. I suppose he meant it as a punishment for my little exhibition of weakness. But I decided that the punishment was too great for the offence, so quietly took up the gauntlet and bided my time.

Mrs Chichester diverged to other topics. Dear Lilian, so sweet and good and trusting; so entirely unsuspecting of people, and so forth; to which we could easily assent. But I was not sufficiently enthusiastic upon the subject to please Mrs Chichester, it seemed; and she took great pains to assure me that she did not in the least degree exaggerate dear Lilian's perfections. But though he gravely assured me that she did not, and even went so far as to hope that in time I should become as fully alive to Miss Farrar's good qualities, I was not to be piqued into giving warmer expression to my feelings. I only gave him a smile for reply. Then I did what I believe was more satisfactory than words to Mrs Chichester; rose and walked away, altogether unheeding Robert Wentworth's almost pleading protest.

'The moon is just rising, Miss Haddon; and the view will be at its best presently.'

But I chose to punish him for his bit of treachery; and walked off, reminding them that it still wanted half an hour to tea-time. When the half-hour had expired, they re-entered the drawing-room, where I was sitting in pleasant communion with Mrs Tipper – both looking rather grave, not to say out of humour.

'Do you always avenge yourself in that crushing way, Miss Haddon?' he asked, coming to my side for a moment.

'I always defend myself in the best way I can when it comes to blows, Mr Wentworth,' I gravely replied.

'And this is the young lady who fears being weak and vanquished!'

'Not with such weapons as have been used to-night, Mr Wentworth.'

'Well, do not talk any more about wanting rest and peace after shewing how much you enjoy planting a home-thrust.'

'We were talking of a very different war and a very different peace to this.'

'I suppose we were; and in that case it is for me to cry *peccavi*.'

'Yes.'

'Well, I will think about it. One should never do that on impulse. Meantime, good-night.'

I gave him my hand with a smile. He then bade the others good-night, and took his departure.

Mrs Chichester seemed to have lost her self-control a little. She certainly found it difficult to be quite as sweet and gracious to me as usual that night. I believe, too, that she had tried her influence upon Lilian with respect to me, for the latter was more than usually tender and loving when she came to my room that night for our little *tête-à-tête*. There was just the difference which might be expected in one of her nature after hearing anything against a friend.

'I love you, dear Mary – I love you. You must let me say it to-night.'

'Why to-night, of all nights in the year?' I smilingly rejoined.

'Because it does me real good to say it – because I must.'

'And it does me real good to hear you say it. Dear Lilian, do not you see how precious your love is to *me*?'

I suppose that there was something in the tone which satisfied her. The shadow passed from her face, and she looked her bright happy self as she began to talk 'Arthur' again. She had long since divined that such talk did not fatigue me.

'I really believe you must have a love-story of your own locked away somewhere, or you would never be able to listen so patiently to me as you do,' she laughingly ejaculated, intuitively lighting upon the true reason for my sympathy, one evening when she had been more effusive on the subject than usual. 'Ah, now I am sure of it!' she added, her quick eyes, I suppose, detecting a consciousness in mine. 'And, O Mary, when shall I be thought worthy to hear it?'

'As though you were not that now! Dear Lilian, I should like you to know – of course you shall know; and yet I think I must ask you to allow me to defer the telling it a little longer?'

'Of course I will. But I really think I can guess – a little. If I am only right, how delightful it will be!'

Had I allowed her to go on – had I listened and explained, instead of shrinking nervously away from the subject, would it have altered the future? I was still shy and reserved about unlocking my treasure, even for Lilian's eyes. I have acknowledged my morbid weakness upon the point, and it did not decrease. But I very soon had something besides myself to think about.

CHAPTER VIII. – 'THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW.'

Mr Farrar grew suddenly and rapidly worse; and the doctors, hastily summoned, saw that it was necessary to be frank and explicit with Mrs Tipper and me as to his true state. His disease was approaching a fatal point, and his time was very short, they affirmed. Before we had time to prepare Lilian for the shock, the fiat went forth that the end might be expected in a few hours. Poor Mrs Tipper shut herself up with her grief; and to me was deputed the painful task of making the truth known to his child. She was at first completely overwhelmed. That his state was a critical one she had not had the slightest suspicion. She had got accustomed to his invalid ways; and hearing nothing to the contrary, had taken it for granted that he was surely if slowly progressing towards convalescence; telling herself that at the very worst he would go on in the same way for years.

I think that Mrs Tipper – and even he himself – was deceived in the same way.

I quietly tended Lilian through the first agony of her grief; but did not let it subside into despair, making an appeal (which I felt to be most effectual with one of her nature) to her unselfishness.

Her father needed her love more than he had ever yet needed it, and tears and grief must be kept back so long as it was in her power to comfort and sustain him. She responded at once. Choking back her sobs, and bathing her face to efface as much as possible the outward signs of her misery, she presently whispered that I might trust her now. 'Only you must promise not to leave me – promise to keep near me, Mary?'

'I will, Lilian; if there be no objection made to my doing so.'

At first it seemed as if no objection would be made. When Lilian was ushered, awestruck and silent, into the darkened room, where the spirit was already struggling to free itself from the weakened body, I saw the dying man's eyes turn upon us with a faint gleam of satisfaction; and I was about to follow her to his bedside, the nurse's warning looks telling me that my assistance would soon be required, when the latter beckoned me towards her, where she stood just outside the door.

'Something on his mind, Miss; can't die till it is told,' whispered the woman, as she made a gesture for me to close the door and leave the father and child together alone.

I was not a little startled; but stood hesitating on the threshold of the room a moment, not quite liking to leave Lilian alone, inexperienced as she was, with the dying man, yet still more averse to be present at any family revelations, when, in reply, I suppose, to some whispered question from him, Lilian said: 'Only the nurse and Miss Haddon, dear papa.'

'You have taken to her – and she likes you, I think – she may be able to help you;' slowly and brokenly said Mr Farrar. 'Yes; send the other away. Only Miss Haddon and yourself.'

I hesitated no longer. Telling the nurse to remain in the adjoining room, I re-entered, and carefully closing the door, advanced towards Lilian, on her knees by the bed-side, with her face hidden upon the hand she held. I put my arm round her, and said with quiet distinctness, for I saw that there was no time to be lost in words: 'I love Lilian, Mr Farrar; and if she needs a friend, you may trust me.'

His fast glazing eyes rested upon me for a moment, as he murmured 'Haddon of Haddon;' and then his gaze and his thoughts wandered away again.

'Is there anything you wish to have done, Mr Farrar?' I presently asked, fancying that he was trying to concentrate his mind upon something, and found an increasing difficulty in so doing.

'Send for – Markham – bring the draft' —

'Of your will?' I asked, rapidly connecting the name, which I knew to be that of his lawyer, with the word 'draft,' and hoping that I thus followed out his meaning.

'Yes – will – sign – Haddon of Haddon.' Even at that moment, I saw he attributed my power of catching his meaning to be a consequence of my being a Haddon of Haddon.

'I will send at once, Mr Farrar.' I went to the door, told the nurse to bring the butler to me without a moment's delay, and waited there until he came.

'Is my poor master?' —

'Do not speak, except to answer a question please, Saunders; but listen carefully. Do you know the address of Mr Farrar's solicitor, both of his private residence and the office?'

'Yes, Miss.'

'If you cannot ride, send a groom to the railway station without a moment's delay; and telegraph to Mr Markham, both at his residence and the office, these words: "Mr Farrar is dying; come at once, and bring the draft of the will." Please repeat it.'

He repeated the words; and then with an answering nod to my one word, 'Immediately,' went off to do my bidding.

I turned into the room again, closing the door. I had obeyed Mr Farrar promptly and literally, as at such a crisis it seemed best to do; but I could not see the importance of the proceeding. Lilian was his only child, and would not suffer any pecuniary loss even if there were no will. But one thing struck me, even at that moment: it was singular that a business man like Mr Farrar should have delayed making his will until now. And why did he appear so troubled and restless? Why did he look anywhere but into his child's eyes, raised so tenderly and lovingly to his?

'Dear papa, speak to me – look at me!' she pleaded.

'Eighty thousand, and business worth' —

'O papa, darling; one little word to your child. I'm Lilian, papa.'

'Keys – cabinet – Haddon of Haddon.'

I followed the direction of his eyes; went softly and quickly to the dressing-table, brought from it several bunches of keys, ranged them separately on the counterpane before him, and pointed to each, watching his eyes for the answer.

'This! And now which key?' I held each key up, and slowly passed it over the ring until his eyes told me that I had come upon the right one; then again following the direction of his eyes, I crossed over to a cabinet which stood between the windows opposite his bed, and unlocked it. It opened with doors, upon a nest of drawers; and I pointed to each, going slowly down one side and up the other until I had found the right one. It contained a small packet sealed and addressed, and a bundle of letters. I held up the letters first.

'Burn.'

'I will burn them, Mr Farrar.'

'Burn!'

I saw that it must be done at once; put them into the fender, struck a match, and set light to them, stirring them well about until they were only tinder. For a suspicion had crossed my mind that it was quite possible there might be something connected with Mr Farrar's past life, the evidence of which it was desirable to keep from his daughter's knowledge. At anyrate, he had a right to have his letters destroyed if he so wished it, and his mind was manifestly relieved by its being done.

'Parcel!'

I brought the little packet to his bed-side. 'Do you wish anything to be done with this, Mr Farrar?'

He looked at it a moment, and then turned his eyes upon his child. 'Forgive – be good to her.'

'To whom, dear papa?' murmured Lilian.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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