# IN CUPID'S NET.

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( Continued )

[illegible] round her graceful neck, nor marr[illegible] but touching his cheek. I felt that just to have stood so for one moment I would have given my life.

I could not hear the step of my rival in his grass and I turned away with a low despairing cry. I ran to the iron gate by the river. The great grow to a just there, and I flung myself down to weep out the bitter pain at my heart. There was no one to see me, no one to hear me: I was alone under the broad night-sky. I could hear the bitter sound of my own sobs die away; and, as I lay there, I thought of the light of the Christmas star. Ah, whither had it led me? What should I do?

"Gracia," said a voice the sound of which made my heart leap—"Gracia, my poor child, what are you doing here? What is wrong?"

I sprang to my feet in an instant.

"Everything is wrong!" I answered passionately. "How did you know that I was here?"

"I heard that little cry of yours at the window," he replied. "Nay, do not be alarmed; no one else heard it. No one else saw you; but I did, and I followed you. Oh, Gracia, how I wish that you could be with us! How I hate to see you shut out as you are! It shall not be!"

But an angry spirit of opposition and sullenness came over me. Why should he care for me when the beautiful heiress whom he was going to marry was there?

"You cannot miss me," I said defiantly, "when you have all those pretty girls there."

"There is no face in the room one half so beautiful as yours, Gracia," he said earnestly.

"That is treason to Lady Aditha," I returned coldly.

"Lady Aditha, contrasted with you, is like a white rose by the side of a queenly damask," he said.

"Then why," I began, but hesitated.

"Why what?" he asked, with a smile.

I had been on the point of saying, "Why do you love her best then?"—but I checked the words.

"Gracia," he went on, "do you not see I want to bring about a complete change of affairs? My mother must——" He paused, and then said abruptly, "why, child, your face is all wet with tears!"

He caught me in his arms, and kissed me, with passionate murmured words—kissed me, he, the man whom I worshipped, he, the man who was to marry Lady Aditha! I tore myself away from him.

"How—how dare you?" I cried.

I was thinking of Lady Aditha. He believed I was angry with him.

"I could not help it, Gracia," he said tenderly—"I could not indeed! Those dark eyes of yours looked so beautiful half blinded by tears."

"I can kiss the tears from Lady Aditha's eyes!" I thought; and I hardened myself against him.

His handsome face grew pale and sad.

"Gracia," he said sorrowfully, "I thought you cared for me."

Once more I ran away from him because I could not control myself. If I had remained, I must have cried out that I loved him.

After that, life became a positive torture to me. Every one talked about Sir Adrian and Lady Aditha—how rich he was, how beautiful she was, and how graceful, what a grand marriage it would be.

One morning Mrs. Paterson, the housekeeper, gave me the keenest pleasure I had known for some time.

"Ah, Gracia," she said, "Lady Aditha is beautiful; but she cannot compare with you! If you were a lady born, she would be nowhere."

And I managed to extract some little comfort from that.

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August had passed, September was come, and the harvest-moon was shining. The visitors had been in the house some weeks, and there was no sign of their going. Since the night when he had found me weeping by the white gate Sir Adrian and I had been strangers. I avoided him, and was most miserable in consequence. I knew that he wanted to speak to me; but I would not give him a chance to do so.

One fatal morning I was told that every one had gone out. I had heard Sir Adrian ride off, and naturally concluded that Lady Aditha was of the party. I resolved, while they were all away and I had the opportunity, to go to the library to obtain a fresh supply of books. Great was my consternation, when I entered, to find Lady Aditha sitting there writing! She had declined going out at the last moment. I would have gone back at once; but it was too late.

"Come in," she said; "you will not disturb me."

I saw her look of intense surprise when I entered. She kept her eyes fixed upon my face for some time. Then she said almost abruptly—

"Who are you?"

I had but the old answer to give; but this time I varied it.

"I am Lady Caryl's companion," I replied.

She smiled graciously; and, when I saw how her smile enhanced her beauty, I asked myself in bitterness of spirit what chance had I?

"I did not know Lady Caryl had a companion," she observed.

She never removed her eyes from my face the whole time that I was in the room, and she persisted in talking to me. I wanted to go; but she asked me so many questions that I could not leave her.

My impression of her character from that interview was that she was proud, selfish, and liked money. What she thought of me I did not know, but I knew the result of our meeting. I knew that she must have spoken disparagingly of me to Lady Caryl, must have poisoned her mind against me, must have told her that I was a dangerous person to have in the house; for Lady Caryl sent for me, and, in her coldest, haughtiest manner, said—

"I thought I gave you instructions that, while our visitors remained here, you were to keep out of sight?"

"I have done so as much as possible," I returned bitterly.

"Yet I hear that you have intruded upon Lady Aditha Glyn. Mrs. Roper says it is a most indecorous thing. However, it shall not occur again. I have made arrangements for you to go to Heronsdale. Miss Kenyon has a school there for the education of young girls of the middle class, and she will no doubt consent to receive you."

"I am too old to go to school," I said.

"It is a question of manners, not of age," she retorted. "Pack your trunk to-day; you must leave Heron's Nest to-morrow."

Without another word I quitted the room, my heart swelling with indignation at the injustice that had been done me.

## IX.

I was to go; appeal was useless. I must leave the home that had been my only refuge, leave the presence dearest to me on earth. Oh, love with the bonnie blue eyes, I must say "Good-bye" to you! I had made up my mind what to do. I would go to Miss Kenyon's; but I would not stay there. I would make my way to London, and perhaps some day I might meet him again—I, a queen of song. I tried, but unavailingly, to stifle my pain with these reflections.

One thing however was clear—I had to [illegible] pace my [illegible] when I was a [illegible] and Mrs. Paterson's [illegible] in and London." [illegible] of the servants knew anything of it. Mrs. Paterson [illegible] to look [illegible] rooms.

Looking in the lumber-rooms was very much like looking for a needle in a haystack. They were three large rooms at the top of the house, lighted by skylights. One contained boxes of every imaginable kind and shape; but mine was not among them. The second was filled with old furniture and old pictures, and the third was a receptacle for everything that the old and ends it is possible to think of.

The third was the largest room of the three, and the brightest. I became quite interested in the variety of old and [illegible] things that I found. I remember every detail of the afternoon so well. It was four o'clock when I went into that room; the afternoon shadows lay long upon the grass, the birds were singing blithely.

Through the window in the roof came a ray of bright sunlight that fell upon the things that encumbered the floor. There was a violin that had not been used for years, an old easel, a pile of books, and a number of picture-frames. Everything was covered with dust, and large cobwebs hung from the ceiling. Evidently it was some time since the lumber-room had been touched.

My box was not there; but I found many things that attracted my attention. In a distant corner of the room, where it was not very light, I saw some old engravings covered with dust, and near them lay something that I recognized with a smile and a cry. It was the map of the county which I had seen last on the Squire's table when he was making his will. I remembered the wooden rollers, the blue twist, the peculiar colors. It was like seeing an old friend; and it brought that past picture so vividly before me that for some time I sat silent, looking at it.

At last I opened it, and something fell from it. I stooped to pick it up; and there, fresh as it was when I had seen it last, was the parcel I had seen the Squire pack up and tie with red tape. There was the closely-written sheet of parchment, there were the long strips of paper that looked like certificates, there were the letters that I had seen him enclose. Although I had never seen the packet since that eventful day, I knew it at once, remembering how the Squire had fastened the ends of the tape with wax.

A perfect fever of excitement possessed me: I knew that I had found the lost will. But there was something more wonderful still than this. On the outside cover, in the Squire's own handwriting, were these words—"To be opened by my daughter Gracia after my death." My eyes read, yet hardly saw the words. I fell upon my knees with the packet in my hands, for I had discovered—oh, thank Heaven, I had discovered the name of my father at last!

I knelt there with straining eyes and trembling hands, my heart too full for words, hardly daring to break the seals and read. "To my daughter Gracia"—that was why I had loved him then! The white-haired old man who had been so kind yet so strange to me, who had kissed me with tears in his eyes, yet, while knowing his relationship to me, had never spoken of it, was my father! Gracia Dacre! Thank Heaven, I had discovered my name!

Those moments were to me the most solemn of my life. I stood on the threshold of a mysterious shrine. I kissed the words "My daughter Gracia." Oh, my dear dead father, if I could but have kissed your face again!

Then, with the fervent words of a prayer on my lips, I broke the seals. I remember how the sunbeams from the roof-window fell across the papers, some of which were yellow with age. I remember the silence that reigned in the room, unbroken save by the rustling of the pages I turned in my hands. The first thing I read was the long letter which I had seen the Squire write on that well-remembered day in the library; and this was what it contained—

"My dear daughter Gracia,—I write this letter in your absence, and, as I write, I look at you and wonder what you will think of me when, after I have passed away, you know that I was your father. I wish I had the moral courage to tell you now, to take you in my arms and kiss you; but I am afraid and ashamed. I ought to be proud of you, for you are as beautiful as your mother, who was one of the loveliest women in Spain.

"You are my child, Gracia, yet I have never told you so. False pride withheld me. I will tell you the story of my life; then you can condemn or pity me as you will. Perhaps you will know for yourself some day how the Dacres love; perhaps you will know the fever and passion men call 'love.' It consumed me. She is dead—the beautiful Millicent whom I loved—and I will say no word against her—only this, that she betrayed me."

I remembered how he had uttered the name when he lay dying, and what a bright light had come into his face.

"She was a fashionable lady, my poor Millicent. I was only a country Squire; but I would have died for her, Gracia. She lured me on with sweet words and loving glances. I felt sure she loved me; but one day, when I asked her to be my wife, she gave me a cold contemptuous look and refused my offer with scorn. She killed the good within me; nevertheless nothing could extinguish my love for her. She married. Of her after-fate I need not speak; all England knows it, and she has long been dead.

"I became a confirmed woman-hater after that; and, what was worse, I grew proud of the reputation. I liked to hear men aver that no woman would ever win Wolfgang Dacre. I lived for years in a state of proud defiance, and then I went to Spain. I honestly believed that my heart was dead, and that no woman had the power to draw a smile or a sigh from me. I met your mother at Granada, where she was living with an uncle—for she was an orphan, Gracia; she had one of the loveliest faces that the sun ever shone on, and you are the living image of her. We were married in the Church of San Geronimo, Granada, and the long strip of paper you will find enclosed, marked No. 1, is the copy of the marriage certificate of Wolfgang Dacre of Heron's Nest, in the county of Kent, England, and Isola Valida of Granada, Spain. The original is to be found in the registry of the old Church of San Geronimo.

"Now I have a shameful confession to make. Your mother Isola was young and beautiful; she was deeply in love with me, but she was not as Millicent. I had believed myself madly in love with her; but, when I had been married a few months, I grew tired of her.

"Poor Isola! I tried to hide my feeling; but I am afraid she found out the truth. She was beautiful and loving; but she was not as Millicent. My very soul cried out for her, who had been dead so many years—Millicent, who had lured my heart from me only to fling it away. You will ask—and the question is a natural one—why, having married your mother, did I not bring her home to England and acknowledge her? My answer is this. First—and I am ashamed to confess it—I had lost all interest in her. Poor Isola! I did not care to bring her to England and introduce her to my friends. The second reason was, I had been so proud of my reputation as a woman-hater that I was ashamed to have it known that I had married.

"Then you were born, Gracia. I should have worshipped you had you been Millicent's child. You had Isola's eyes and all her dark loveliness. But there was no room, poor child, for you in my heart! When you were a year old, my old restlessness and the craving for change came over me, and I went away on my travels again. The paper marked No. 2 is the certificate of your baptism in [illegible]

[illegible]

me [illegible] how much it was in my power to make perhaps as great a sacrifice as any woman had ever made for a man, the greater because it would be completely concealed, and no one would ever know of it."

I would [illegible] them. They should never know, [illegible] what I had done for him. I gathered up the papers quickly, folded and wrapped them up in them, [illegible] the same case. At the end is Lady Caryl, evidently just on the point of coming up to me.

## CHAPTER X.

We looked each other steadily in the face. In her eyes there were anger, [illegible], and curiosity; in mine [illegible] was pouring for the first time we met as equals; but I must not say so. Then she glanced at the white bundle in my arms.

"What have you been doing upstairs?" she asked. "I sent for you some time since, and was told that you had been up the lumber-rooms all the afternoon. What have you been doing?" "I do not know what may be there, and I do not like any person to go prying about the house as you have done."

I looked at her in wonder. It was of my house she was speaking; the house and all it contained were mine, not hers; but for Sir Adrian's sake I must not provoke it. I saw that her anger was at a white heat. In all probability Lady Aditha had been speaking of me again, and irritating her against me.

"What have you been doing in those rooms?" she demanded.

"I went first to look for my box, since your ladyship has decided to send me from the only home I have in the world. I could not find it; but I have been looking over the contents of the rooms."

"An exceedingly impertinent thing! You had no right to do anything of the kind," she said angrily.

"What would she say," I thought, "if she knew what I had found there—if she knew what I had wrapped in apparently careless fashion in my apron? What a fall her pride would have!" And I could not prevent the exultation I felt from showing itself in my eyes. She saw it, and grew even more curious.

"What have you there?" she demanded.

"I decline to tell you, Lady Caryl," I answered firmly. "It is something that belongs not to you, but to myself."

"You have taken it from those rooms!" she cried.

"I have; but it is my own," I returned calmly.

"Nothing here is your own," she said hotly, her face growing pale with anger; "everything belongs to me. You have no right to carry from this house a single thing without my permission."

Involuntarily my hands closed round my white apron and its contents. I knew that I was going to destroy the papers; but for those few minutes I felt proud of the knowledge that I was mistress of the house and all it contained.

"Will you let me pass, Lady Caryl?"

"No," she exclaimed; "you shall not pass until I know what you have there wrapped up in your apron."

"Then I shall have to stay here for ever, for I shall show what I have to no one."

"You will show it to me," she said, biting her lip.

I paused for a few moments to consider the position. It would indeed serve her right to let her see the papers; and for a moment the temptation to show them to her was strong; but I had resolved to make the sacrifice for my love's sake.

"I have no wish to irritate or to use violence," her ladyship went on more calmly; "but I will see what you have there. If you refuse to show me I shall send for the butler and one of the footmen, and they shall take it from you."

Of course she could do that, and in the hands of those strong men I should be powerless. They would take the documents from me in an instant, and then——Ah, my love with the bonnie blue eyes, that should never be! I clasped the packet closer more tightly.

"Lady Caryl," I implored, "be just to me. I swear to you that what I have here belongs to me, and to no one else. Please let me pass and forget. I will leave the house, and never return."

But she would not listen to my appeal. I saw that she was debating in her mind whether she should take my parcel from me by force or not, but evidently her sense of propriety conquered.

"I must and will see what you are secreting there," she said, knitting her brows. "Choose at once. I shall either call the men or you must give to me of your own free will what you have hidden there."

"That I will never do," I returned resolutely.

"Come down to my room," said Lady Caryl peremptorily. "I do not see why I should stand in this draught. Go before me to my boudoir."

And I obeyed her. Ah, what would she have said had she known what I carried in my apron?

We went into the boudoir, and then she closed the door.

"Put what you have in your hands upon the table," she commanded.

I declined to do so.

"I intend to see what it is," said Lady Caryl firmly.

And I as firmly declared she should not.

Was it a good or an evil spirit that led Sir Adrian to the door just at that moment?

"Can I speak to you, uncle?" he asked. "I will not detain you long."

"Come in," she answered. "I am glad to see you, Adrian."

He looked with wonder from her to me, and then at the white bundle in my arms.

"What is it?" he asked hurriedly. "What is the matter with you and Gracia, mother?"

"Adrian," said Lady Caryl, "I shall be glad if you will support my authority. I have made arrangements for Gracia to go to Miss Kenyon's at Heronsdale. For many reasons I do not think it advisable that she should remain here. Lady Aditha has been speaking to me about it, and she is of the same opinion."

To my great surprise, he muttered something about Lady Aditha that was not at all complimentary.

"I told Gracia to-day," her ladyship went on, "that I wished her to pack up and go. Under the pretext of seeking for a box, she has spent the whole of this afternoon in the lumber-rooms, and it seems to me that she has taken what she liked from them."

Ah, thank Heaven, his face flushed with anger at the cruel words! Then his eyes were turned with infinite tenderness on me.

"Mother, you cannot possibly know what you are saying," he cried.

"I do," she returned stiffly. "Gracia has spent the afternoon in those rooms, and I met her stealing down the staircase with this bundle in her arms. I want to know what it contains. She refuses to tell me; and, as she persists in her refusal, I have brought her here, and shall compel her to let me see what she is carrying away with her."

If she knew—if she only knew!

"Mother, I am surprised at you!" he cried indignantly. "I can hardly believe that you can say such cruel things. I would trust Gracia with my life."

Then I found my voice.

"Sir Adrian," I said, "I assure you that what I have here is my own, entirely my own, and belongs to no one else."

"I believe you, Gracia," he returned confidently.

"And I, Adrian," said Lady Caryl, "call upon you to help me to assert my authority, and to force that rebellious girl to obey me, and tell me what she is carrying from that room."

"Sir Adrian!" I cried.

"My son!" appealed Lady Caryl.

He looked from one to the other in great distress, at a loss what to say, indignant for my sake, yet his respect for his mother pre-

[illegible]

"Gracia," he said at last, "I am quite sure that what you have there is your own. I do not doubt your word; but could you not, as my mother wishes it, tell her what you have in your apron?"

It was hard to have to refuse his request; but I must do it to save him.

"I am so very sorry," I replied; "but indeed I cannot, Sir Adrian."

"You see, Adrian," observed her ladyship, "that she will not and does not."

He looked deeply grieved, but turned to Lady Caryl.

"Mother," he said, "I had almost forgotten what I came for. The Duchess of Morley, your old schoolfellow, is here. She has but a few hours to stay, and she wishes to see you."

"The Duchess of Morley!" repeated Lady Caryl hurriedly. "I am delighted. But what shall I do with Gracia?" I am quite determined that she shall not conquer me. I will see what she has there."

"Let me settle that for a time," he replied. "Gracia, you trust me to do so, do not you? Let me take charge of it."

My heart gave a bound. How could I say "Yes"? How could I say "No"?

He turned to a little buhl cabinet that stood near.

"Give it to me, Gracia," he said. "I will lock it up here until we have time to go into the matter."

It was a moment of terrible suspense to me.

"Will you promise me," I asked, "that no hands shall touch it—not even your own—and that no one shall see it?"

"I promise," he said gravely.

"You will give it back to me unopened and untouched?"

"Yes," he replied.

I fastened my white apron more tightly round the little parcel, tied the ribbon strings into the closest knots, and then handed it to him.

He placed the parcel in the buhl cabinet, locked it, and gave me the key.

"That is to prove how I trust you," he said earnestly. "Do not remove that parcel until you have made some arrangement with my mother. I trust you. Now, mother," he said, turning to her ladyship, "come and see the Duchess. She will be impatient; and to-night or to-morrow we can settle this unpleasant business;" and he kissed her.

"You will not oppose my wish, Adrian, that Gracia leaves the house at once," said Lady Caryl.

"My dearest mother, we will see to that to-morrow, when everything will be peacefully and happily arranged. Now, smile and look bright, or the Duchess will think you are not happy."

Lady Caryl smiled.

"You are a good son to me, Adrian," she said gently; "you never vex me."

And then—Heaven bless him!—he came over to me. He took my hands in his, not heeding his mother's presence.

"I am so sorry, Gracia. There is some mistake, my dear. I will see it rectified."

Her ladyship's eyes flashed with anger.

"How long did you say the Duchess would remain?" she asked coldly.

"Some hours, mother," he replied.

And then Lady Caryl, taking her son's arm, quitted the room.

They left me standing there, with the key of the buhl cabinet in my hands. I remained motionless for a few moments, then went to my own room, feeling bewildered, and as if I were in a dream.

I could hear, after a time, the sound of the piano; and I knew that Lady Aditha was singing, and felt that Sir Adrian was standing by her side, as he would never again stand by mine.

It seemed to me the very irony of fate. I was the Squire's daughter and heiress; this was my own house. If those below had known who I really was, even the Duchess herself would have been pleased to see me, and would have congratulated me. But the sacrifice was for Sir Adrian; and I would have sacrificed more for him. What pleasure would money or lands give me if I knew that I was robbing him of either?

I would go on the morrow, but not to Miss Kenyon's. I would make my way in the world, pass out of their lives, and some day in the long years to come I would come back just once to Heron's Nest and look at them all again, unseen myself—look at Sir Adrian, with the handsome face and the bonnie blue eyes—my love, whom I should love, until I died—look at his beautiful young wife and his stately mother; then——

But here I found myself with the tears running down my face. Was it for this I had followed the light of the star to the lustre-gate?

## CHAPTER XI.

After a time I grew uneasy. I knew that Sir Adrian was the soul of honor, and that I had the key of the buhl cabinet; but what if by any accident those papers should be seen? It would be easy for me to give up the comfort and luxury of the grand old mansion; but I could not bear the thought of his doing so. Yet, if he had the faintest notion of what the papers contained, I knew he would see justice done.

The more I dwelt on the idea of my sacrifice the better it pleased me. Now indeed I could give a proof of my love, although it was known only to Heaven. Now it was not merely a phantom love that I could see in my own mind; here was a tangible proof of how dearly I loved him. What greater sacrifice could a woman make?

My love should never leave Heron's Nest for me. He should live here with his beautiful young wife and children, while I went out alone into the cold world. For him should be the pleasure, for me the pain; for him the bright happiness of life, for me its unutterable woe; for him the wine, for me the lees—and he would never know what he owed to me. Perhaps, when I was on my death-bed, I might tell him. But no; that would spoil all. My sacrifice must be complete. On my gravestone I would have only the one word "Gracia," even as my mother had simply the word "Isola." My heart was on fire with the desire of self-sacrifice; and I even loved the pain I felt, because it was for his good.

But I must have the papers, whether it was dishonorable or not. He trusted me; but I must break his trust, and let him think what he would. I must get those documents and destroy them, come what might. How was it to be done? Lady Caryl spent a great deal of her time in her own room; but when darkness set in, and while she was in the drawing-room listening to Lady Aditha's singing, I might steal into the boudoir and take them away. Then, when I had made away with them, I would go to Sir Adrian, tell him that I had betrayed his trust, that the packet was gone, and give him back the key.

But the night would not grow dark; the harvest moon came brightly, and a lovely subdued light lingered in the sky. My very pulse thrilled with impatience. What if Lady Caryl should be seized with a sudden caprice to see for herself what the papers contained? My plan of self-sacrifice would be vain then. Ah, no, my love—I would rather be buried alive with the packet in my arms!

I listened, with my heart throbbing painfully, on the grand staircase, where stood a marble statue of the goddess Flora with a basket of roses at her feet. There was no sound, except of music from the drawing-room, where Lady Aditha was singing. The servants seemed to be all in their own part of the house; there was no one to see or to hear. The moonlight streamed through the windows of the hall, and lay in great white patches on the staircase; it silvered the roses at the goddess's feet, and by its light I crept slowly, quietly down-stairs, thinking, as I went of the night when I had followed the light of the Christmas star.