Right at Last

Elizabeth Gaskell

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Doctor Brown was poor, and had to make his way in the world. He had gone to study his profession in Edinburgh, and his energy, ability, and good conduct had entitled him to some notice on the part of the professors. Once introduced to the ladies of their families, his prepossessing appearance and pleasing manners made him a universal favourite; and perhaps no other student received so many invitations to dancing− and evening−parties, or was so often singled out to fill up an odd vacancy at the last moment at the dinner−table. No one knew particularly who he was, or where he sprang from; but then he had no near relations, as he had once or twice observed; so he was evidently not hampered with low−born or low−bred connections. He had been in mourning for his mother, when he first came to college.

All this much was recalled to the recollection of Professor Frazer by his niece Margaret, as she stood before him one morning in his study; telling him, in a low, but resolute voice that, the night before, Doctor James Brown had offered her marriage — that she had accepted him — and that he was intending to call on Professor Frazer (her uncle and natural guardian) that very morning, to obtain his consent to their engagement. Professor Frazer was perfectly aware, from Margaret's manner, that his consent was regarded by her as a mere form, for that her mind was made up: and he had more than once had occasion to find out how inflexible she could be. Yet he, too, was of the same blood, and held to his own opinions in the same obdurate manner. The consequence of which frequently was, that uncle and niece had argued themselves into mutual bitterness of feeling, without altering each other's opinions one jot. But Professor Frazer could not restrain himself on this occasion, of all others.

"Then, Margaret, you will just quietly settle down to be a beggar, for that lad Brown has little or no money to think of marrying upon: you that might be my Lady Kennedy, if you would!"

"I could not, uncle."

"Nonsense, child! Sir Alexander is a personable and agreeable man — middle−aged, if you will — well, a wilful woman maun have her way; but, if I had had a notion that this youngster was sneaking into my house to cajole you into fancying him, I would have seen him far enough before I had ever let your aunt invite him to dinner. Ay! you may mutter; but I say, no gentleman would ever have come into my house to seduce my niece's affections, without first informing me of his intentions, and asking my leave."

"Doctor Brown is a gentleman, Uncle Frazer, whatever you may think of him."

"So you think — so you think. But who cares for the opinion of a love−sick girl? He is a handsome, plausible young fellow, of good address. And I don't mean to deny his ability. But there is something about him I never did like, and now it's accounted for. And Sir Alexander —— Well, well! your aunt will be disappointed in you, Margaret. But you were always a headstrong girl. Has this Jamie Brown ever told you who or what his parents were, or where he comes from? I don't ask about his forbear, for he does not look like a lad who has ever had ancestors; and you a Frazer of Lovat! Fie, for shame, Margaret ! Who is this Jamie Brown?"

"He is James Brown, Doctor of Medicine of the University of Edinburgh: a good, clever young man, whom I love with my whole heart," replied Margaret, reddening.

"Hoot! is that the way for a maiden to speak? Where does he come from? Who are his kinsfolk? Unless he can give a pretty good account of his family and prospects, I shall just bid him begone, Margaret; and that I tell you fairly."

"Uncle" (her eyes were filling with hot indignant tears), "I am of age; you know he is good and clever; else why have you had him so often to your house? I marry him, and not his kinsfolk. He is an orphan. I doubt if he has any relations that he keeps up with. He has no brothers nor sisters. I don't care where he comes from."

"What was his father? " asked Professor Frazer coldly.

"I don't know. Why should I go prying into every particular of his family, and asking who his father was, and what was the maiden name of his mother, and when his grandmother was married?"

"Yet I think I have heard less Margaret Frazer speak up pretty strongly in favour of a long line of unspotted ancestry."

"I had forgotten our own, I suppose, when I spoke so. Simon, Lord Lovat, is a creditable great−uncle to the Frazers! If all tales be true, he ought to have been hanged for a felon, instead of beheaded like a loyal gentleman."

"Oh! if you're determined to foul your own nest, I have done. Let James Brown come in; I will make him my bow, and thank him for condescending to marry a Frazer."

"Uncle," said Margaret, now fairly crying, "don't let us part in anger! We love each other in our hearts. You have been good to me, and so has my aunt. But I have given my word to Doctor Brown, and I must keep it. I should love him, if he was the son of a ploughman. We don't expect to be rich; but he has a few hundreds to start with, and I have my own hundred a year"——

"Well, well, child, don't cry! You have settled it all for yourself, it seems; so I wash my hands of it. I shake off all responsibility. You will tell your aunt what arrangements you make with Doctor Brown about your marriage; and I will do what you wish in the matter. But don't send the young man in to me to ask my consent! I neither give it nor withhold it. It would have been different, if it had been Sir Alexander."

"Oh! Uncle Frazer, don't speak so. See Doctor Brown, and at any rate — for my sake — tell him you consent! Let me belong to you that much! It seems so desolate at such a time to have to dispose of myself, as if nobody owned or cared for me."

The door was thrown open, and Doctor James Brown was announced. Margaret hastened away; and, before he was aware, the Professor had given a sort of consent, without asking a question of the happy young man; who hurried away to seek his betrothed, leaving her uncle muttering to himself.

Both Doctor and Mrs. Frazer were so strongly opposed to Margaret's engagement, in reality, that they could not help showing it by manner and implication; although they had the grace to keep silent. But Margaret felt even more keenly than her lover that he was not welcome in the house. Her pleasure in seeing him was destroyed by her sense of the coldness with which he was received, and she willingly yielded to his desire of a short engagement; which was contrary to their original plan of waiting until he should be settled in practice in London, and should see his way clear to such an income as would render their marriage a prudent step. Doctor and Mrs. Frazer neither objected nor approved. Margaret would rather have had the most vehement opposition than this icy coldness. But it made her turn with redoubled affection to her warm−hearted and sympathising lover. Not that she had ever discussed her uncle and aunt's behaviour with him. As long as he was apparently unaware of it, she would not awaken him to a sense of it. Besides, they had stood to her so long in the relation of parents, that she felt she had no right to bring in a stranger to sit in judgment upon them.

So it was rather with a heavy heart that she arranged their future menage with Doctor Brown, unable to profit by her aunt's experience and wisdom. But Margaret herself was a prudent and sensible girl. Although accustomed to a degree of comfort in her uncle's house that almost amounted to luxury, she could resolutely dispense with it, when occasion required. When Doctor Brown started for London, to seek and prepare their new home, she enjoined him not to make any but the most necessary preparations for her reception. She would herself superintend all that was wanting when she came. He had some old furniture, stored up in a warehouse, which had been his mother's. He proposed selling it, and buying new in its place. Margaret persuaded him not to do this, but to make it go as far as it could. The household of the newly−married couple was to consist of a Scotchwoman long connected with the Frazer family, who was to be the sole female servant, and of a man whom Doctor Brown picked up in London, soon after he had fixed on a house — a man named Crawford, who had lived for many years with a gentleman now gone abroad, who gave him the most excellent character, in reply to Doctor Brown's inquiries. This gentleman had employed Crawford in a number of ways; so that in fact he was a kind of Jack−of−all−trades; and Doctor Brown, in every letter to Margaret, had some new accomplishment of his servant's to relate. This he did with the more fulness and zest, because Margaret had slightly questioned the wisdom of starting in life with a man−servant, but had yielded to Doctor Brown's arguments on the necessity of keeping up a respectable appearance, making a decent show, to any one who might be inclined to consult him, but be daunted by the appearance of old Christie out of the kitchen, and unwilling to leave a message with one who spoke such unintelligible English. Crawford was so good a carpenter that he could put up shelves, adjust faulty hinges, mend looks, and even went the length of constructing a box of some old boards that had once formed a packing−case. Crawford, one day, when his master was too busy to go out for his dinner, improvised an omelette

as good as any Doctor Brown had ever tasted in Paris, when he was studying there. In short, Crawford was a kind of A HREF="http://www.znet.com/~volterra/fox/theatre/crichton.html">Admirable Crichton in his way, and Margaret was quite convinced that Doctor Brown was right in his decision that they must have a man−servant; even before she was respectfully greeted by Crawford, as he opened the door to the newly−married couple, when they came to their new home after their short wedding tour.

Doctor Brown was rather afraid lest Margaret should think the house bare and cheerless in its half−furnished state; for he had obeyed her injunctions and bought as little furniture as might be, in addition to the few things he had inherited from his mother. His consulting−room (how grand it sounded!) was completely arranged, ready for stray patients; and it was well calculated to make a good impression on them. There was a Turkey−carpet on the floor, that had been his mother's, and was just sufficiently worn to give it the air of respectability which handsome pieces of furniture have when they look as if they had not just been purchased for the occasion, but am in some degree hereditary. The same appearance pervaded the room: the library−table (bought second−hand, it must be confessed), the bureau — that had been his mother's — the leather chairs (as hereditary as the library−table), the shelves Crawford had put up for Doctor Brown's medical books, a good engraving on the walls, gave altogether so pleasant an aspect to the apartment that both Doctor and Mrs. Brown thought, for that evening at any rate, that poverty was just as comfortable a thing as riches. Crawford had ventured to take the liberty of placing a few flowers about the room, as his humble way of welcoming his mistress — late autumn−flowers, blending the idea of summer with that of winter, suggested by the bright little fire in the grate. Christie sent up delicious scones for tea; and Mrs. Frazer had made up for her want of geniality, as well as she could, by a store of marmalade and mutton hams. Doctor Brown could not be easy in his comfort, until he had shown Margaret, almost with a groan, how many rooms were as yet unfurnished — how much remained to be done. But she laughed at his alarm lest she should be disappointed in her new home; declared that she should like nothing better than planning and contriving; that, what with her own talent for upholstery and Crawford's for joinery, the rooms would be furnished as if by magic, and no bills — the usual consequences of comfort — be forthcoming. But, with the morning and daylight, Doctor Brown's anxiety returned. He saw and felt every crack in the ceiling, every spot on the paper, not for, himself, but for Margaret. He was constantly in his own mind, as it seemed, comparing the home he had brought her to with the one she had left. He seemed constantly afraid lest she had repented, or would repent having married him. This morbid restlessness was the only drawback to their great happiness; and, to do away with it, Margaret was led into expenses much beyond her original intention. She bought this article in preference to that, because her husband, if he went shopping with her, seemed so miserable if he suspected that she denied herself the slightest wish on the score of economy. She learnt to avoid taking him out with her, when she went to make her purchases; as it was a very simple thing to her to choose the least expensive thing, even though it were the ugliest, when she was by herself, but not a simple painless thing to harden her heart to his look of mortification, when she quietly said to the shopman that she could not afford this or that. On coming out of a shop after one of these occasions, he had said —

"Oh, Margaret, I ought not to have married you. You must forgive me — I have so loved you."

"Forgive you, James?" said she. "For making me so happy? What should make you think I care so much for rep in preference to moreen? Don't speak so again, please!"

"Oh, Margaret! but don't forget how I ask you to forgive me."

Crawford was everything that he had promised to be, and more than could be desired. He was Margaret's right hand in all her little household plans, in a way which irritated Christie not a little. This feud between Christie and Crawford was indeed the greatest discomfort in the household. Crawford was silently triumphant in his superior knowledge of London, in her favour upstairs, in this power of assisting his mistress, and in the consequent privilege of being frequently consulted. Christie was for ever regretting Scotland, and hinting at Margaret's neglect of one who had followed her fortunes into a strange country, to make a favourite of a stranger, and one who was none so good as he ought to be, as she would sometimes affirm. But, as she never brought any proof of her vague accusations, Margaret did not choose to question her, but set them down to a jealousy of her fellow−servant, which the mistress did all in her power to heal. On the whole, however, the four people forming this family lived together in tolerable harmony. Doctor Brown was more than satisfied with his house, his servants, his professional prospects, and most of all with his little energetic wife. Margaret, from time to time, was taken aback by certain moods of her husband's; but the tendency of these moods was not to weaken her affection,

rather to call out a feeling of pity for what appeared to her morbid sufferings and suspicions — a pity ready to be turned into sympathy, as soon as she could discover any definite cause for his occasional depression of spirits. Christie did not pretend to like Crawford; but, as Margaret quietly declined to listen to her grumblings and discontent on this head, and as Crawford himself was almost painfully solicitous to gain the good opinion of the old Scotch woman, there was no rupture between them. On the whole, the popular, successful Doctor Brown was apparently the most anxious person in his family. There could be no great cause for this as regarded his money affairs. By one of those lucky accidents which sometimes lift a man up out of his struggles, and carry him on to smooth, unencumbered ground, he made a great step in his professional progress; and their income from this source was likely to be fully as much as Margaret and he had ever anticipated in their most sanguine moments, with the likelihood, too, of steady increase, as the years went on.

I must explain myself more fully on this head.

Margaret herself had rather more than a hundred a year; sometimes, indeed, her dividends had amounted to a hundred and thirty or forty pounds; but on that she dared not rely. Doctor Brown had seventeen hundred remaining of the three thousand left him by his mother; and out of this he had to pay for some of the furniture, the bills for which had not been sent in at the time, in spite of all Margaret's entreaties that such might be the case. They came in about a week before the time when the events I am going to narrate took place. Of course they amounted to more than even the prudent Margaret had expected; and she was a little dispirited to find how much money it would take to liquidate them. But, curiously and contradictorily enough — as she had often noticed before — any real cause for anxiety or disappointment did not seem to affect her husband's cheerfulness. He laughed at her dismay over her accounts, jingled the proceeds of that day's work in his pockets, counted it out to her, and calculated the year's probable income from that day's gains. Margaret took the guineas, and carried them upstairs to her own secretaire in silence; having learnt the difficult art of trying to swallow down her household cares in the presence of her husband. When she came back, she was cheerful, if grave. He had taken up the bills in her absence, and had been adding them together.

"Two hundred and thirty−six pounds," he said, putting the accounts away, to clear the table for tea, as Crawford brought in the things. "Why, I don't call that much. I believe I reckoned on their coming to a great deal more. I'll go into the City to−morrow, and sell out some shares, and set your little heart at ease. Now don't go and put a spoonful less tea in to−night to help to pay these bills. Earning is better than saving, and I am earning at a famous rate. Give me good tea, Maggie, for I have done a good day's work."

They were sitting in the doctor's consulting−room, for the better economy of fire. To add to Margaret's discomfort, the chimney smoked this evening. She had held her tongue from any repining words; for she remembered the old proverb about a smoky chimney and a scolding wife; but she was more irritated by the puffs of smoke coming over her pretty white work than she cared to show; and it wan in a sharper tone than usual that she spoke, in bidding Crawford take care and have the chimney swept. The next morning all had cleared brightly off. Her husband had convinced her that their money matters were going on well; the fire burned briskly at breakfast time; and the unwonted sun shone in at the windows. Margaret was surprised, when Crawford told her that he had not been able to meet with a chimney−sweeper that morning; but that he had tried to arrange the coals in the grate, so that, for this one morning at least, his mistress should not be annoyed, and, by the next, he would take care to secure a sweep. Margaret thanked him, and acquiesced in all plans about giving a general cleaning to the room; the more readily, because she felt that she had spoken sharply the night before. She decided to go and pay all her bills, and make some distant calls on the next morning; and her husband promised to go into the City and provide her with the money.

This he did. He showed her the notes that evening, locked them up for the night in his bureau; and, lo, in the morning they were gone! They had breakfasted in the back parlour, or half−furnished dining−room. A charwoman was in the front room, cleaning after the sweeps. Doctor Brown went to his bureau, singing an old Scotch tune as he left the dining−room. It was so long before he came back, that Margaret went to look for him. He was sitting in the chair nearest to the bureau, leaning his head upon it, in an attitude of the deepest despondency. He did not seem to hear Margaret's step, as she made her way among rolled−up carpets and chairs piled on each other. She had to touch him on the shoulder before she could rouse him.

"James, James! " she said in alarm.

He looked up at her almost as if he did not know her.

"Oh, Margaret!" he said, and took hold of her hands, and hid his face in her neck.

"Dearest love, what is it?" she asked, thinking he was suddenly taken ill.

"Some one has been to my bureau since last night," he groaned, without either looking up or moving.

"And taken the money," said Margaret, in an instant understanding how it stood. It was a great blow; a great loss, far greater than the few extra pounds by which the bills had exceeded her calculations: yet it seemed as if she could bear it better. "Oh dear!" she said, "that is bad; but after all — Do you know," she said, trying to raise his face, so that she might look into it, and give him the encouragement of her honest loving eyes, "at first I thought you were deadly ill, and all sorts of dreadful possibilities rushed through my mind — it is such a relief, to find that it is only money" ——

"Only money!" he echoed sadly, avoiding her look, as if he could not bear to show her how much he felt it.

"And after all," she said with spirit, "it can't be gone far. Only last night, it was here. The chimney−sweeps — we must send Crawford for the police directly. You did not take the numbers of the notes?" ringing the bell as she spoke.

"No; they were only to be in our possession one night," he said.

"No, to be sure not."

The charwoman now appeared at the door with her pail of hot water. Margaret looked into her face, as if to read guilt or innocence. She was a protegee of Christie's, who was not apt to accord her favour easily, or without good grounds; an honest, decent widow, with a large family to maintain by her labour — that was the character in which Margaret had engaged her; and she looked it. Grimy in her dress — because she could not spare the money or time to be clean — her skin looked healthy and cared for; she had a straightforward, business−like appearance about her, and seemed in no ways daunted nor surprised to see Doctor and Mrs. Brown standing in the middle of the room, in displeased perplexity and distress. She went about her business without taking any particular notice of them. Margaret's suspicions settled down yet more distinctly upon the chimney−sweeper; but he could not have gone far; the notes could hardly have got into circulation. Such a sum could not have been spent by such a man in so short a time; and the restoration of the money was her first, her only object. She had scarcely a thought for subsequent duties, such as prosecution of the offender, and the like consequences of crime. While her whole energies were bent on the speedy recovery of the money, and she was rapidly going over the necessary steps to be taken, her husband "sat all poured out into his chair," as the Germans say; no force in him to keep his limbs in any attitude requiring the slightest exertion; his face sunk, miserable, and with that foreshadowing of the lines of age which sudden distress is apt to call out on the youngest and smoothest faces.

"What can Crawford be about?" said Margaret, pulling the bell again with vehemence. "Oh, Crawford!" as the man at that instant appeared at the door.

"Is anything the matter?" he said, interrupting her, as if alarmed into an unusual discomposure by her violent ringing. "I had just gone round the corner with the letter master gave me last night for the post; and, when I came back Christie told me you had rung for me, ma'am. I beg your pardon, but I have hurried so," and, indeed, his breath did come quickly, and his face was full of penitent anxiety.

"Oh, Crawford! I am afraid the sweep has got into your master's bureau, and taken all the money he put there last night. It is gone, at any rate. Did you ever leave him in the room alone?"

"I can't say, ma'am; perhaps I did. Yes; I believe I did. I remember now — I had my work to do; and I thought the charwoman was come, and I went to my pantry; and some time after Christie came to me, complaining that Mrs. Roberts was so late; and then I knew that he must have been alone in the room. But, clear me, ma'am, who would have thought there had been so much wickedness in him?"

"How was it that he got into the bureau?" said Margaret, turning to her husband. "Was the lock broken?"

He roused himself up, like one who wakens from sleep.

"Yes! No! I suppose I had turned the key without looking it last night. The bureau was closed, not locked, when I went to it this morning, and the bolt was shot." He relapsed into inactive, thoughtful silence.

"At any rate, it is no use losing time in wondering now. Go, Crawford, as fast as you can, for a policeman. You know the name of the chimney−sweeper, of course," she added, as Crawford was preparing to leave the room.

"Indeed, ma'am, I'm very sorry, but I just agreed with the first who was passing along the street. If I could have known"——

But Margaret had turned away with an impatient gesture of despair. Crawford went, without another word, to seek a policeman.

In vain did his wife try and persuade Doctor Brown to taste any breakfast; a cup of tea was all he would try to swallow; and that was taken in hasty gulps, to clear his dry throat, as he heard Crawford's voice talking to the policeman whom he was ushering in.

The policeman heard all and said little. Then the inspector came. Doctor Brown seemed to leave all the talking to Crawford, who apparently liked nothing better. Margaret was infinitely distressed and dismayed by the effect the robbery seemed to have had on her husband's energies. The probable loss of such a sum was bad enough; but there was something so weak and poor in character in letting it affect him so strongly as to deaden all energy and destroy all hopeful spring, that, although Margaret did not dare to define her feeling, nor the cause of it, to herself she had the fact before her perpetually, that, if she were to judge of her husband from this morning only, she must learn to rely on herself alone in all cases of emergency. The inspector repeatedly turned from Crawford to Doctor and Mrs. Brown for answers to his inquiries. It was Margaret who replied, with terse, short sentences, very different from Crawford's long, involved explanations.

At length the inspector asked to speak to her alone. She followed him into the room, past the affronted Crawford and her despondent husband. The inspector gave one sharp look at the charwoman, who was going on with her scouring with stolid indifference, turned her out, and then asked Margaret where Crawford came from — how long he had lived with them, and various other questions, all showing the direction his suspicions had taken. This shocked Margaret extremely; but she quickly answered every inquiry, and, at the end, watched the inspector's face closely, and waited for the avowal of the suspicion.

He led the way back to the other room without a word, however. Crawford had left, and Doctor Brown was trying to read the morning's letters (which had just been delivered); but his hands shook so much that he could not see a line.

"Doctor Brown," said the inspector, "I have little doubt that your man−servant has committed this robbery. I judge so from his whole manner; and from his anxiety to tell the story, and his way of trying to throw suspicion on the chimney−sweeper, neither whose name nor whose dwelling he can give; at least he says not. Your wife tells us he has already been out of the house this morning, even before he went to summon a policeman; so there is little doubt that he has found means for concealing or disposing of the notes; and you say you do not know the numbers. However, that can probably be ascertained."

At this moment Christie knocked at the door, and, in a state of great agitation, demanded to speak to Margaret. She brought up an additional store of suspicious circumstances, none of them much in themselves, but all tending to criminate her fellow−servant. She had expected to find herself blamed for starting the idea of Crawford's guilt, and was rather surprised to find herself listened to with attention by the inspector. This led her to tell many other little things, all bearing against Crawford, which a dread of being thought jealous and quarrelsome had led her to conceal before from her master and mistress. At the end of her story the inspector said ——

"There can be no doubt of the course to be taken. You, sir, must give your man−servant in charge. He will be taken before the sitting magistrate directly; and there is already evidence enough to make him be remanded for a week, during which time we may trace the notes, and complete the chain."

"Must I prosecute?" said Doctor Brown, almost lividly pale. "It is, I own, a serious loss of money to me; but there will be the further expenses of the prosecution — the loss of time — the" ——

He stopped. He saw his wife's indignant eyes fixed upon him, and shrank from their look of unconscious reproach.

"Yes, inspector," he said; "I give him in charge. Do what you will. Do what is right. Of course I take the consequences. We take the consequences. Don't we, Margaret?" He spoke in a kind of wild, low voice, of which Margaret thought it best to take no notice.

"Tell us exactly what to do," she said very coldly and quietly, addressing herself to the policeman.

He gave her the necessary directions as to their attending at the police−office, and bringing Christie as a witness, and then went away to take measures for securing Crawford.

Margaret was surprised to find how little hurry or violence needed to be used in Crawford's arrest. She had expected to hear sounds of commotion in the house, if indeed Crawford himself had not taken the alarm and escaped. But, when she had suggested the latter apprehension to the inspector, he smiled, and told her that, when

he had first heard of the charge from the policeman on the beat, he had stationed a detective officer within sight of the house, to watch all ingress or egress; so that Crawford's whereabouts would soon have been discovered, if he had attempted to escape.

Margaret's attention was now directed to her husband. He was making hurried preparations for setting off on his round of visits, and evidently did not wish to have any conversation with her on the subject of the morning's event. He promised to be back by eleven o'clock; before which time, the inspector assured them, their presence would not be needed. Once or twice, Doctor Brown said, as if to himself, "It is a miserable business." Indeed, Margaret felt it to be so; and, now that the necessity for immediate speech and action was over, she began to fancy that she must be very hard−hearted — very deficient in common feeling; inasmuch as she had not suffered like her husband, at the discovery that the servant — whom they had been learning to consider as a friend, and to look upon as having their interests so warmly at heart — was, in all probability, a treacherous thief. She remembered all his pretty marks of attention to her, from the day when he had welcomed her arrival at her new home by his humble present of flowers, until only the day before, when, seeing her fatigued, he had, unasked, made her a cup of coffee — coffee such as none but he could make. How often had he thought of warm dry clothes for her husband; how wakeful had he been at nights; how diligent in the mornings! It was no wonder that her husband felt this discovery of domestic treason acutely. It was she who was hard and selfish, thinking more of the recovery of the money than of the terrible disappointment in character, if the charge against Crawford were true.

At eleven o'clock her husband returned with a cab. Christie had thought the occasion of appearing at a police−office worthy of her Sunday clothes, and was as smart as her possessions could make her. But Margaret and her husband looked as pale and sorrow−stricken as if they had been the accused, and not the accusers.

Doctor Brown shrank from meeting Crawford's eye, as the one took his place in the witness−box, the other in the dock. Yet Crawford was trying — Margaret was sure of this — to catch his master's attention. Failing that, he looked at Margaret with an expression she could not fathom. Indeed, the whole character of his face was changed. Instead of the calm, smooth look of attentive obedience, he had assumed an insolent, threatening expression of defiance; smiling occasionally in a most unpleasant manner, as Doctor Brown spoke of the bureau and its contents. He was remanded for a week; but, the evidence as yet being far from conclusive, bail for his appearance was taken. This bail was offered by his brother, a respectable tradesman, well known in his neighbourhood, and to whom Crawford had sent on his arrest.

So Crawford was at large again, much to Christie's dismay; who took off her Sunday clothes, on her return home, with a heavy heart, hoping, rather than trusting, that they should not all be murdered in their beds before the week was out. It must be confessed, Margaret herself was not entirely free from fears of Crawford's vengeance; his eyes had looked so maliciously and vindictively at her and at her husband as they gave their evidence.

But his absence in the household gave Margaret enough to do to prevent her dwelling on foolish fears. His being away made a terrible blank in their daily comfort, which neither Margaret nor Christie — exert themselves as they would — could fill up; and it was the more necessary that all should go on smoothly, as Doctor Brown's nerves had received such a shook at the discovery of the guilt of his favourite, trusted servant, that Margaret was led at times to apprehend a serious illness. He would pace about the room at night, when he thought she was asleep, moaning to himself — and in the morning he would require the utmost persuasion to induce him to go out and see his patients. He was worse than ever, after consulting the lawyer whom he had employed to conduct the prosecution. There was, as Margaret was brought unwillingly to perceive, some mystery in the case; for he eagerly took his letters from the post, going to the door as soon as he heard the knock, and concealing their directions from her. As the week passed away, his nervous misery still increased.

One evening — the candles were not lighted — he was sitting over the fire in a listless attitude, resting his head on his hand, and that supported on his knee — Margaret determined to try an experiment; to see if she could not probe, and find out the nature of the sore that he hid with such constant care. She took a stool and sat down at his feet, taking his hand in hers.

"Listen, dearest James, to an old story I once heard. It may interest you. There were two orphans, boy and girl in their hearts, though they were a young man and young woman in years. They were not brother and sister, and by−and−by they fell in love; just in the same fond silly way you and I did, you remember. Well, the girl was amongst her own people; but the boy was far away from his — if indeed he had any alive. But the girl loved him

so dearly for himself, that sometimes she thought she was glad that he had no one to care for him but just her alone. Her friends did not like him as much as she did; for, perhaps, they were wise, grave, cold people, and she, I dare say, was very foolish. And they did not like her marrying the boy; which was just stupidity in them, for they had not a word to say against him. But, about a week before the marriage−day was fixed, they thought they had found out something — my darling love, don't take away your hand — don't tremble so, only just listen! Her aunt came to her and said: 'Child, you must give up your lover: his father was tempted, and sinned; and, if he is now alive, he is a transported convict. The marriage cannot take place.' But the girl stood up and said: 'If he has known this great sorrow and shame, he needs my love all the more. I will not leave him, nor forsake him, but love him all the better. And I charge you, aunt, as you hope to receive a blessing for doing as you would be done by, that you tell no one!' I really think that girl awed her aunt, in some strange way, into secrecy. But, when she was left alone, she cried long and sadly to think what a shadow rested on the heart she loved so dearly; and she meant to strive to lighten his life, and to conceal for ever that she had heard of its burden; but now she thinks — "Oh, my husband! how you must have suffered" — as he bent down his head on her shoulder and cried terrible man's tears.

"God be thanked!" he said at length. "You know all, and you do not shrink from me. Oh, what a miserable, deceitful coward I have been! Suffered! Yes — suffered enough to drive me mad; and, if I had but been brave, I might have been spared all this long twelve months of agony. But it is right I should have been punished. And you knew it even before we were married, when you might have been drawn back!"

"I could not; you would not have broken off your engagement with me, would you, under the like circumstances, if our cases had been reversed?"

"I do not know. Perhaps I might; for I am not so brave, so good, so strong as you, my Margaret. How could I be? Let me tell you more. We wandered about, my mother and I, thankful that our name was such a common one, but shrinking from every allusion — in a way which no one can understand, who has not been conscious of an inward sore. Living in an assize town was torture; a commercial one was nearly as bad. My father was the son of a dignified clergyman, well known to his brethren: a cathedral town was to be avoided, because there the circumstance of the Dean of Saint Botolph's son having been transported was sure to be known. I had to be educated; therefore we had to live in a town; for my mother could not bear to part from me, and I was sent to a day−school. We were very poor for our station — no! we had no station; we were the wife and child of a convict — poor for my mother's early habits, I should have said. But, when I was about fourteen, my father died in his exile, leaving, as convicts in those days sometimes did, a large fortune. It all came to us. My mother shut herself up, and cried and prayed for a whole day. Then she called me in, and took me into her counsel. We solemnly pledged ourselves to give the money to some charity, as soon as I was legally of age. Till then the interest was laid by, every penny of it; though sometimes we were in sore distress for money, my education cost so much. But how could we tell in what way the money had been accumulated?" Here he dropped his voice. "Soon after I was one−and−twenty, the papers rang with admiration of the unknown munificent donor of certain sums. I loathed their praises. I shrank from all recollection of my father. I remembered him dimly, but always as angry and violent with my mother. My poor, gentle mother! Margaret, she loved my father; and, for her sake, I have tried, since her death, to feel kindly towards his memory. Soon after my mother's death, I came to know you, my jewel, my treasure!"

After a while, he began again. "But, oh, Margaret! even now you do not know the worst. After my mother's death, I found a bundle of law papers — of newspaper reports about my father's trial. Poor soul! why she had kept them, I cannot say. They were covered over with notes in her handwriting; and, for that reason, I kept them. It was so touching to read her record of the days spent by her in her solitary innocence, while he was embroiling himself deeper and deeper in crime. I kept this bundle (as I thought so safely!) in a secret drawer of my bureau; but that wretch Crawford has got hold of it. I missed the papers that very morning. The loss of them was infinitely worse than the loss of the money; and now Crawford threatens to bring out the one terrible fact, in open court, if he can; and his lawyer may do it, I believe. At any rate, to have it blazoned out to the world — I who have spent my life in fearing this hour! But most of all for you, Margaret! Still — if only it could be avoided! Who will employ the son of Brown, the noted forger? I shall lose all my practice. Men will look askance at me as I enter their doors. They will drive me into crime. I sometimes fear that crime is hereditary! Oh, Margaret! what am I to do?"

"What can you do?" she asked.

"I can refuse to prosecute."

"Let Crawford go free, you knowing him to be guilty?

"I know him to be guilty."

"Then, simply, you cannot do this thing. You let loose a criminal upon the public."

"But, if I do not, we shall come to shame and poverty. It is for you I mind it, not for myself. I ought never to have married."

"Listen to me. I don't care for poverty; and, as to shame, I should feel it twenty times more grievously, if you and I consented to screen the guilty, from any fear or for any selfish motives of our own. I don't pretend that I shall not feel it, when first the truth is known. But my shame will turn into pride, as I watch you live it down. You have been rendered morbid, dear husband, by having something all your life to conceal. Let the world know the truth, and say the worst. You will go forth a free, honest, honourable man, able to do your future work without fear."

"That scoundrel Crawford has sent for an answer to his impudent note," said Christie, putting in her head at the door.

"Stay! May I write it?" said Margaret.

She wrote: —

"Whatever you may do or say, there is but one course open to us. No threats can deter your master from doing his duty.

"Margaret Brown."

"There!" she said, passing it to her husband; "he will see that I know all; and I suspect he has reckoned something on your tenderness for me."

Margaret's note only enraged, it did not daunt, Crawford. Before a week was out, every one who cared knew that Doctor Brown, the rising young physician, was son of the notorious Brown, the forger. All the consequences took place which he had anticipated. Crawford had to suffer a severe sentence; and Doctor Brown and his wife had to leave their house and go to a smaller one; they had to pinch and to screw, aided in all most zealously by the faithful Christie. But Doctor Brown was lighter−hearted than he had ever been before in his conscious lifetime. His foot was now firmly planted on the ground, and every step he rose was a sure gain. People did say that Margaret had been seen, in those worst times, on her hands and knees cleaning her own door−step. But I don't believe it, for Christie would never have let her do that. And, as far as my own evidence goes, I can only say that, the last time I was in London, I saw a brass−plate, with "Doctor James Brown" upon it, on the door of a handsome house in a handsome square. And as I looked, I saw a brougham drive up to the door, and a lady get out, and go into that house, who was certainly the Margaret Frazer of old days — graver; more portly; more stern, I had almost said. But, as I watched and thought, I saw her come to the dining−room window with a baby in her arms, and her whole face melted into a smile of infinite sweetness.