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Chapter 30 - Anne In The Newspapers

MRS. KARNEGIE was a woman of feeble intelligence and violent temper; prompt to take offense, and not, for the most part, easy to appease. But Mrs. Karnegie being--as we all are in our various degrees--a compound of many opposite qualities, possessed a character with more than one side to it, and had her human merits as well as her human faults. Seeds of sound good feeling were scattered away in the remoter corners of her nature, and only waited for the fertilizing occasion that was to help them to spring up. The occasion exerted that benign influence when the cab brought Mr. Crum's client back to the hotel. The face of the weary, heart-sick woman, as she slowly crossed the hall, roused all that was heartiest and best in Mrs. Karnegie's nature, and said to her, as if in words, "Jealous of this broken creature? Oh, wife and mother is there no appeal to your common womanhood _here?_"

"I am afraid you have overtired yourself, ma'am. Let me send you something up stairs?"

"Send me pen, ink, and paper," was the answer. "I must write a letter. I must do it at once."

It was useless to remonstrate with her. She was ready to accept any thing proposed, provided the writing materials were supplied first. Mrs. Karnegie sent them up, and then compounded a certain mixture of eggs and hot wine. for which The Sheep's Head was famous, with her own hands. In five minutes or so it was ready--and Miss Karnegie was dispatched by her mother (who had other business on hand at the time) to take it up stairs.

After the lapse of a few moments a cry of alarm was heard from the upper landing. Mrs. Karnegie recognized her daughter's voice, and hastened to the bedroom floor.

"Oh, mamma! Look at her! look at her!"

The letter was on the table with the first lines written. The woman was on the sofa with her handkerchief twisted between her set teeth, and her tortured face terrible to look at. Mrs. Karnegie raised her a little, examined her closely--then suddenly changed color, and sent her daughter out of the room with directions to dispatch a messenger instantly for medical help.

Left alone with the sufferer, Mrs. Karnegie carried her to her bed. As she was laid down her left hand fell helpless over the side of the bed. Mrs. Karnegie suddenly checked the word of sympathy as it rose to her lips--suddenly lifted the hand, and looked, with a momentary sternness of scrutiny, at the third finger. There was a ring on it. Mrs. Karnegie's face softened on the instant: the word of pity that had been suspended the moment before passed her lips freely now. "Poor soul!" said the respectable landlady, taking appearances for granted. "Where's your husband, dear? Try and tell me."

The doctor made his appearance, and went up to the patient.

Time passed, and Mr. Karnegie and his daughter, carrying on the business of the hotel, received a message from up stairs which was ominous of something out of the common. The message gave the name and address of an experienced nurse--with the doctor's compliments, and would Mr. Karnegie have the kindness to send for her immediately.

The nurse was found and sent up stairs.

Time went on, and the business of the hotel went on, and it was getting to be late in the evening, when Mrs. Karnegie appeared at last in the parlor behind the bar. The landlady's face was grave, the landlady's manner was subdued. "Very, very ill," was the only reply she made to her daughter's inquiries. When she and her husband were together, a little later, she told the news from up stairs in greater detail. "A child born dead," said Mrs. Karnegie, in gentler tones than were customary with her. "And the mother dying, poor thing, so far as _I_ can see."

A little later the doctor came down. Dead? No.--Likely to live? Impossible to say. The doctor returned twice in the course of the night. Both times he had but one answer. "Wait till to-morrow."

The next day came. She rallied a little. Toward the afternoon she began to speak. She expressed no surprise at seeing strangers by her bedside: her mind wandered. She passed again into insensibility. Then back to delirium once more. The doctor said, "This may last for weeks. Or it may end suddenly in death. It's time you did something toward finding her friends."

(Her friends! She had left the one friend she had forever!)

Mr. Camp was summoned to give his advice. The first thing he asked for was the unfinished letter.

It was blotted, it was illegible in more places than one. With pains and care they made out the address at the beginning, and here and there some fragments of the lines that followed. It began: "Dear Mr. Brinkworth." Then the writing got, little by little, worse and worse. To the eyes of the strangers who looked at it, it ran thus: "I should ill re quite * * * Blanche's interests * * * For God's sake! * * * don't think of _me_ * * *" There was a little more, but not so much as one word, in those last lines, was legible

The names mentioned in the letter were reported by the doctor and the nurse to be also the names on her lips when she spoke in her wanderings. "Mr. Brinkworth" and "Blanche"--her mind ran incessantly on those two persons. The one intelligible thing that she mentioned in connection with them was the letter. She was perpetually trying, trying, trying to take that unfinished letter to the post; and she could never get there. Sometimes the post was across the sea. Sometimes it was at the top of an inaccessible mountain. Sometimes it was built in by prodigious walls all round it. Sometimes a man stopped her cruelly at the moment when she was close at the post, and forced her back thousands of miles away from it. She once or twice mentioned this visionary man by his name. They made it out to be "Geoffrey."

Finding no clew to her identity either in the letter that she had tried to write or in the wild words that escaped her from time to time, it was decided to search her luggage, and to look at the clothes which she had worn when she arrived at the hotel.

Her black box sufficiently proclaimed itself as recently purchased. On opening it the address of a Glasgow trunk-maker was discovered inside. The linen was also new, and unmarked. The receipted shop-bill was found with it. The tradesmen, sent for in each case and questioned, referred to their books. It was proved that the box and the linen had both been purchased on the day when she appeared at the hotel.

Her black bag was opened next. A sum of between eighty and ninety pounds in Bank of England notes; a few simple articles belonging to the toilet; materials for needle-work; and a photographic portrait of a young lady, inscribed, "To Anne, from Blanche," were found in the bag--but no letters, and nothing whatever that could afford the slightest clew by which the owner could be traced. The pocket in her dress was searched next. It contained a purse, an empty card-case, and a new handkerchief unmarked.

Mr. Camp shook his head.

"A woman's luggage without any letters in it," he said, "suggests to my mind a woman who has a motive of her own for keeping her movements a secret. I suspect she has destroyed her letters, and emptied her card-case, with that view." Mrs. Carnegie's report, after examining the linen which the so-called "Mrs. Graham" had worn when she arrived at the inn, proved the soundness of the lawyer's opinion. In every case the marks had been cut out. Mrs. Carnegie began to doubt whether the ring which she had seen on the third finger of the lady's left hand had been placed there with the sanction of the law.

There was but one chance left of discovering--or rather of attempting to discover--her friends. Mr. Camp drew out an advertisement to be inserted in the Glasgow newspapers. If those newspapers happened to be seen by any member of her family, she would, in all probability, be claimed. In the contrary event there would be nothing for it but to wait for her recovery or her death--with the money belonging to her sealed up, and deposited in the landlord's strongbox.

The advertisement appeared. They waited for three days afterward, and nothing came of it. No change of importance occurred, during the same period, in the condition of the suffering woman. Mr. Camp looked in, toward evening, and said, "We have done our best. There is no help for it but to wait."

Far away in Perthshire that third evening was marked as a joyful occasion at Windygates House. Blanche had consented at last to listen to Arnold's entreaties, and had sanctioned the writing of a letter to London to order her wedding-dress.