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Chapter 4 - The Curtain Falls

FOR the rest of the day, and through the night, I was kept a close prisoner in my room, watched by a man on whose fidelity my father could depend.

The next morning I made an effort to escape, and was discovered before I had got free of the house. Confined again to my room, I contrived to write to Mary, and to slip my note into the willing hand of the housemaid who attended on me. Useless! The vigilance of my guardian was not to be evaded. The woman was suspected and followed, and the letter was taken from her. My father tore it up with his own hands.

Later in the day, my mother was permitted to see me.

She was quite unfit, poor soul, to intercede for me, or to serve my interests in any way. My father had completely overwhelmed her by announcing that his wife and his son were to accompany him, when he returned to America.

"Every farthing he has in the world," said my mother, "is to be thrown into that hateful speculation. He has raised money in London; he has let the house to some rich tradesman for seven years; he has sold the plate, and the jewels that came to me from his mother. The land in America swallows it all up. We have no home, George, and no choice but to go with him."

An hour afterward the post-chaise was at the door.

My father himself took me to the carriage. I broke away from him, with a desperation which not even his resolution could resist. I ran, I flew, along the path that led to Dermody's cottage. The door stood open; the parlor was empty. I went into the kitchen; I went into the upper rooms. Solitude everywhere. The bailiff had left the place; and his mother and his daughter had gone with him. No friend or neighbor lingered near with a message; no letter lay waiting for me; no hint was left to tell me in what direction they had taken their departure. After the insulting words which his master had spoken to him, Dermody's pride was concerned in leaving no trace of his whereabouts; my father might consider it as a trace purposely left with the object of reuniting Mary and me. I had no keepsake to speak to me of my lost darling but the flag which she had embroidered with her own hand. The furniture still remained in the cottage. I sat down in our customary corner, by Mary's empty chair, and looked again at the pretty green flag, and burst out crying.

A light touch roused me. My father had so far yielded as to leave to my mother the responsibility of bringing me back to the traveling carriage.

"We shall not find Mary here, George," she said, gently. "And we _ may_ hear of her in London. Come with me."

I rose and silently gave her my hand. Something low down on the clean white door-post caught my eye as we passed it. I stooped, and discovered some writing in pencil. I looked closer--it was writing in Mary's hand! The unformed childish characters traced these last words of farewell:

"Good-by, dear. Don't forget Mary."

I knelt down and kissed the writing. It comforted me--it was like a farewell touch from Mary's hand. I followed my mother quietly to the carriage.

Late that night we were in London.

My good mother did all that the most compassionate kindness could do (in her position) to comfort me. She privately wrote to the solicitors employed by her family, inclosing a description of Dermody and his mother and daughter and directing inquiries to be made at the various coach-offices in London. She also referred the lawyers to two of Dermody's relatives, who lived in the city, and who might know something of his movements after he left my father's service. When she had done this, she had done all that lay in her power. We neither of us possessed money enough to advertise in the newspapers.

A week afterward we sailed for the United States. Twice in that interval I communicated with the lawyers; and twice I was informed that the inquiries had led to nothing.

With this the first epoch in my love story comes to an end.

For ten long years afterward I never again met with my little Mary; I never even heard whether she had lived to grow to womanhood or not. I still kept the green flag, with the dove worked on it. For the rest, the waters of oblivion had closed over the old golden days at Greenwater Broad.