

# THE NEW ISABELLA

By MARGARET LEE.

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She found a seat in the train, and turning her face to the window appeared to be absorbed in the well known scenery. But her secret was eating her vitality. She could not get away from it. Several of her acquaintances, observing the misery in her face, refrained



"Your brother is now as free as ever," from greeting her. There is a marked family resemblance in our country villages and their scattered residences, large and small. When the train stopped at the gayly painted little station, Miss Barclay hurriedly left it, passed through the waiting room and took the path leading to the main street, on which her brother's house was situated. She knew every step of the way, and having only her sun umbrella to carry she walked rapidly, indifferent to the dusk and the solitude. She was realizing bitterly that trifles would never again ruffle her. Existence was now but the endurance of never ending grief and terror. How to act so as to do right—this was the problem. The burden fell too great to bear. As she struggled with herself, putting her womanhood in the balance with her pride of family honor and her brother's rescue from legal punishment, she became aware of a man's steps behind her, and she turned instinctively to see how near the stranger was to her.

He was tall and broad shouldered and wore a large, slouched hat, and even as she looked he spoke:

"Belle, don't you know me?"

In a moment she was clinging to him, with kisses and tears of joy.

"Oh, Jasper, you!"

"How is Mollie?"

"Very ill. But you are here."

"For a few hours only. Oh, my girl!"

His sob shook his strong frame.

Miss Barclay gazed at him and then looked about them without letting go of him.

"Come, some one may see you," she gasped.

"In a minute. Give me time. Messenger was all kindness. He sent me Mollie's letter and hinted that if I came here he would not let me be arrested. So until tomorrow night I can stay with Mollie."

"Oh, how good of him!"

"Yes. I did not expect consideration from him. Now, if you will go ahead, just prepare Mollie. Get the children out of the way. I'll see them tomorrow."

Miss Barclay hastened to the house, bewildered by her brother's words. She could not grasp the explanation of his appearance. Gradually it dawned upon her that Howe was acting under Mr. Messenger's directions. What would Jasper think if he knew the price demanded for all this seeming kindness?

The children were on the porch watching for her figure in the gloom, and a shout of welcome brought her to the contemplation of her present duties. They had waited for her and supper was ready. She kissed them and took them to the dining room, and having seated them at the table ran up to Mrs. Barclay's room. The poor woman was lying as she had been ever since her husband's flight, her eyes wide with expectation of some new horror. Her voice was only audible.

"Belle, how long you have been away? Did you see Mr. Messenger?"

"Oh, yes. After a pause, 'He is really trying to help us.' Miss Barclay was lighting a candle concealed under a pink glass tumbler.

"Well, dear?"

"Mollie, there will be plenty of time to talk about him next week. Some one is coming to see you—Mr. Messenger managed it for your sake—Jasper."

"Jasper!"

Mrs. Barclay sat up, with a quick cry of joy. The next moment her husband was holding her. In the dim light his sister was shocked at his appearance. She joined the children and tried to eat, tried to think, but in vain. Visions danced before her eyes. Her brother, pale, haggard, a fugitive, his wife clinging to him with unchanged love. Mr. Messenger's figure bending toward her, the office for background. Again Mr. Howe confronted her, proffering friendship.

Fortunately the children demanded attention. She entertained them until bedtime, and finally saw them all sleeping, rosy cheeked and smiling.

Occasionally she could hear the murmur of voices from her brother's rooms, and at 10 o'clock she carried in milk and crackers for Mrs. Barclay. Her brother sat by the bed, and husband and wife were crying.

"Try and sleep, Belle. I'll look after Mollie through the night."

"Sleep! Miss Barclay had forgotten how it felt to sleep dreamlessly and awaken thoroughly refreshed. She went to her own room. The youngest child, a fair boy of 3, was slumbering in his crib. She bent over him and touched with her lips his little rings of golden hair that lay damp on his pretty head. The child appeared strongly to her heart. Suppose her brother could go among strangers and bring

up his children among new scenes. Six people might be saved from misery by the sacrifice of one, and the sacrifice could remain a secret. She knelt by the crib and instantly rose to her feet. She could not pray while contemplating this step. Should she take it, prayer for her would be ended forever. To know herself to be an outcast among men was a condition to be dispassionately considered, but to be by her own act shut out from God—that it was impossible to conceive. Of what use was she in the world? She was dependent, ignorant and it would seem very friendly, since the people in whose love she had trusted had failed her. Perhaps this sacrifice was a duty. Her conscience would not support the mental effort. Thus the struggle continued—affection, pride and intellect arrayed against conscience. At dawn she still debated the question, and then she fell asleep, only to awaken and reconsider it.

That Sunday was one that could never be forgotten. It was made up of miserable scenes between parents and children, husband and wife, brother and sister. No ray of hope, no prospect of change, no consolation, brightened it for a moment. At dusk the fugitive would depart, if anything more unhappy than when he arrived.

Late in the afternoon he found his sister alone in a small library that opened from the parlor. She had gone there to avoid him, dreading an explanation of his visit.

"Are you reading, Belle?" he asked with hesitation.

"No. I was only thinking."

"Mollie tells me that you have seen Mr. Messenger about me, Belle. What do you suppose will be the end of all this? He seems inclined to mercy. What do you think?"

"More than I can put into words."

She stretched out her hands, and her brother held them and gazed down at her troubled face. "Jasper, can any one else do anything for you?"

He shook his head.

"Even Messenger's consideration is a mystery to me. I don't know that my coming has done Mollie any good. To part again, knowing what is coming, is going to kill her. If I had the courage, I'd blow out my brains. It would settle all accounts. I suppose I'll come to it sooner or later. I cannot live thus, begger and outcast, listening with dread for the steps of my pursuers."

"You could be arrested here?"

"Oh, yes."

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Miss Barclay sat down facing the window and gazed at the pretty budding foliage and the sunset coloring beyond.

"Mollie, did you tell him about Mr. Howe?"

"No. I never thought of the man. Is it Mr. Howe who is to help us?"

"I cannot tell. Everything is so indefinite."

Mrs. Barclay sighed.

"You are not so hopeful as Jasper. I suppose men understand each other better than we can."

Miss Barclay rose, speaking excitedly:

"Mollie, what are you talking about?"

"Why, Jasper says that the president of the bank has a plan that will save him from prison if it can be carried out."

"And he told you what it was?"

"No. He said it would be wiser to wait until something was decided upon. You see, I am so weak. I suppose he did not want to raise my hopes too high. I could not bear disappointment."

"He was right, Mollie. I am so glad to see you looking so much brighter. I suppose if Jasper were saved from this terrible punishment you would recover your health. It is not too late."

"I really believe that I could, Belle. I feel so much stronger already, as if a great weight were taken off my heart."

"Poor Mollie!"

Mrs. Barclay put her hand on Miss Barclay's arm.

"Belle, how good you are! Jasper says that if he is saved it will be all due to your energy and devotion. It is wonderful what courage you have had, and strength. While I, his wife, sank under this blow, you rose to the emergency. Jasper has always said that you were different from ordinary women."

Miss Barclay was silent. Her extraordinary gifts were leading her in a strange path. She was to become a victim to her sisterly affection. She spoke decidedly.

"Mollie, if you will take heart and try to be courageous, you will help me. I want you to think of cheerful matters until, as Jasper says, something definite is decided upon."

"I only wish to please you, Belle."

"I see the children coming. We must control ourselves."

To her great surprise, Miss Barclay slept that night dreamlessly and refreshingly. Exhausted nature asserted its rights. Monday found her strong and equal to the consideration of everybody's side. In the afternoon a neighbor brought her a letter, with the remark:

"I thought I could save you a walk to the postoffice, and that was the only thing in your box."

Miss Barclay glanced at the strange address and quickly opened the envelope. The paper was fine and the handwriting very legible.

To Miss Barclay:

Your abrupt departure on Saturday afternoon has induced me to write to you in regard to the subject we were discussing. It will be necessary for me to know your decision by Thursday at noon. I cannot make excuses to the police authorities, although I can put an end to all action on their part.

I hope you have given this matter sensible consideration. Believe me, you take old-fashioned views of life—views which I am happy to say are fast becoming legendary. This is a material age. Existence is short; we know nothing of the future. To enjoy is the object of our best thoughts. Pleasure is the watchword of the period. Let us grasp all that we can crowd into our narrow limits.

I offer you all that money supplies—luxuries, amusements, freedom from anxiety, your brother's present safety and future prosperity.

Why hesitate? Why judge the present by a dead past? To whom are you responsible? Who has the right to judge you? Circumstances bend and shape our little careers. We should at least have the privilege of choosing ease and enjoyment while suffering from the evil effects of wrongs committed by others. Consider the advantages of your present position—young, beautiful and beloved, you are offered the opportunity to do a noble action without entailing suffering upon yourself or others. It is impossible at this era to regard yourself as a victim or a sacrifice. History records women capable of doing all that I ask of you for much less worthy motives.

Place your brother in safety; give him occupation; let his family join him, and then be free to enter upon the enjoyment of all that the world can offer and my devotion can secure to you. I shall expect to see you on Thursday, say, at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. Until then matters will remain as they are, but you must come with your decision. P. M.

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mean? There could be but one interpretation of it. He dared not trust himself to let her read his thoughts; he had not the courage to express them. So this was his brother, but he saw only an open prison door. She pressed her hands together and waited. The minutes passed. No one came to her. The silence was ominous, and she grew suspicious. At length she went in search of him. She had suddenly thought of Mr. Howe and also remembered that in her anxiety she had forgotten to mention him and his proffered friendship to Jasper. It would be better for Jasper to hear all that had happened during his absence.

She went to his room, and finding the door ajar entered silently. Mrs. Barclay was lying on a lounge near the window.

High up at a window a maiden once stood.

The flames and the smoke swept around; Despair filled her breast as she gazed at the crowd—

'Twas seventy feet to the ground; A hero rushed up through the fiery mass. The death demon howled for his own. But the fear-stricken maiden was snatched from his teeth

By the valorous Major Mahone.

With the heart of a lion all the dangers he met;

He knew not the meaning of fear; In peace and in war he was dauntless—

and yet

We must shatter the idol right here; The man who had rushed into ruin's embrace.

Who had bled on the bullet-swept field, When the dentist's cold forceps were thrust in his face.

Forgot all his valor and "squealed."—Cleveland Leader.

"TATTERS."

After baffling the unholly greed of the train conductor for tickets by flashing an annual pass in his face, the country editor threw his feet up on the opposite seat and told the following story:

"Of course, I didn't escape being a victim of the rage for 'woman's' editions which swept over the land a few months ago. The ladies of a local society descended upon me and I surrendered took two pipes, a pound of smoking tobacco and a fishing-rod and decamped, leaving