

THE ANGEL IN TROUBLE.

XLV.

"The fact is," said the Vicar, "this is no world for Angels."

The blinds had not been drawn, and the twilight outer world under an overcast sky seemed unspeakably grey and cold. The Angel sat at table in dejected silence. His inevitable departure had been proclaimed. Since his presence hurt people and made the Vicar wretched he acquiesced in the justice of the decision, but what would happen to him after his plunge he could not imagine. Something very disagreeable certainly.

"There is the violin," said the Vicar. "Only after our experience----"

"I must get you clothes--a general outfit.---- Dear me! you don't understand railway travelling! And coinage! Taking lodgings! Eating-houses!---- I must come up at least and see you settled. Get work for you. But an Angel in London! Working for his living! That grey cold wilderness of people! What will become of you?---- If I had one friend in the world I could trust to believe me!"

"I ought not to be sending you away----"

"Do not trouble overmuch for me, my friend," said the Angel. "At least

this life of yours ends. And there are things in it. There is something in this life of yours---- Your care for me! I thought there was nothing beautiful at all in life----"

"And I have betrayed you!" said the Vicar, with a sudden wave of remorse. "Why did I not face them all--say, 'This is the best of life'? What do these everyday things matter?"

He stopped suddenly. "What do they matter?" he said.

"I have only come into your life to trouble it," said the Angel.

"Don't say that," said the Vicar. "You have come into my life to awaken me. I have been dreaming--dreaming. Dreaming this was necessary and that. Dreaming that this narrow prison was the world. And the dream still hangs about me and troubles me. That is all. Even your departure----. Am I not dreaming that you must go?"

When he was in bed that night the mystical aspect of the case came still more forcibly before the Vicar. He lay awake and had the most horrible visions of his sweet and delicate visitor drifting through this unsympathetic world and happening upon the cruellest misadventures. His guest was an Angel assuredly. He tried to go over the whole story of the past eight days again. He thought of the hot afternoon, the shot fired out of sheer surprise, the fluttering iridescent wings, the beautiful saffron-robed figure upon the ground. How wonderful that had

seemed to him! Then his mind turned to the things he had heard of the other world, to the dreams the violin had conjured up, to the vague, fluctuating, wonderful cities of the Angelic Land. He tried to recall the forms of the buildings, the shapes of the fruits upon the trees, the aspect of the winged shapes that traversed its ways. They grew from a memory into a present reality, grew every moment just a little more vivid and his troubles a little less immediate; and so, softly and quietly, the Vicar slipped out of his troubles and perplexities into the Land of Dreams.

XLVI.

Delia sat with her window open, hoping to hear the Angel play. But that night there was to be no playing. The sky was overcast, yet not so thickly but that the moon was visible. High up a broken cloud-lace drove across the sky, and now the moon was a hazy patch of light, and now it was darkened, and now rode clear and bright and sharply outlined against the blue gulf of night. And presently she heard the door into the garden opening, and a figure came out under the drifting pallor of the moonlight.

It was the Angel. But he wore once more the saffron robe in the place of his formless overcoat. In the uncertain light this garment had only a colourless shimmer, and his wings behind him seemed a leaden grey. He began taking short runs, flapping his wings and leaping, going to and fro amidst the drifting patches of light and the shadows of the trees. Delia watched him in amazement. He gave a despondent cry, leaping higher. His shrivelled wings flashed and fell. A thicker patch in the cloud-film made everything obscure. He seemed to spring five or six feet from the ground and fall clumsily. She saw him in the dimness crouching on the ground and then she heard him sobbing.

"He's hurt!" said Delia, pressing her lips together hard and staring. "I ought to help him."

She hesitated, then stood up and flitted swiftly towards the door, went slipping quietly downstairs and out into the moonlight. The Angel still lay upon the lawn, and sobbed for utter wretchedness.

"Oh! what is the matter?" said Delia, stooping over him and touching his head timidly.

The Angel ceased sobbing, sat up abruptly, and stared at her. He saw her face, moonlit, and soft with pity. "What is the matter?" she whispered.

"Are you hurt?"

The Angel stared about him, and his eyes came to rest on her face.

"Delia!" he whispered.

"Are you hurt?" said Delia.

"My wings," said the Angel. "I cannot use my wings."

Delia did not understand, but she realised that it was something very dreadful. "It is dark, it is cold," whispered the Angel; "I cannot use my wings."

It hurt her unaccountably to see the tears on his face. She did not know what to do.

"Pity me, Delia," said the Angel, suddenly extending his arms towards

her; "pity me."

Impulsively she knelt down and took his face between her hands. "I do not know," she said; "but I am sorry. I am sorry for you, with all my heart."

The Angel said not a word. He was looking at her little face in the bright moonlight, with an expression of uncomprehending wonder in his eyes. "This strange world!" he said.

She suddenly withdrew her hands. A cloud drove over the moon. "What can I do to help you?" she whispered. "I would do anything to help you."

He still held her at arm's length, perplexity replacing misery in his face. "This strange world!" he repeated.

Both whispered, she kneeling, he sitting, in the fluctuating moonlight and darkness of the lawn.

"Delia!" said Mrs Hinijer, suddenly projecting from her window; "Delia, is that you?"

They both looked up at her in consternation.

"Come in at once, Delia," said Mrs Hinijer. "If that Mr Angel was a

gentleman (which he isn't), he'd feel ashamed of hisself. And you an orphan too!"