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## CHAPTER I.

### SOMETHING AMISS.

Everybody knows Canterbury, with its Old-World charms and its ostentatious air of being content to be rather behind the times, of looking down upon the hurrying Americans who dash through its cathedral and take snap-shots at its slums, and at all those busy moderns who cannot afford to take life at its own jog-trot pace.

But everybody does not know the charming old halls and comfortable, old-fashioned mansions which are dotted about the neighboring country, either nestling in secluded nooks of the Kentish valleys or holding a stately stand on the wooded hills.

Of this latter category was The Beeches, a pretty house of warm, red brick, with a dignified Jacobean front, which stood upon the highest ground of a prettily wooded park, and commanded one of those soft, undulating, sleepy landscapes which are so characteristically English, and of which grazing sheep and ruminating cows form so important a feature. A little tame, perhaps, but very pleasant, very homely, very sweet to look upon by the tired eyes that have seen enough of the active, bustling world.

Mr. George Wedmore, of the firm of Wedmore, Parkinson and Bishop, merchants of the city of London, had bought back the place, which had formerly belonged to his family, from the Jews into whose hands it had fallen, and had settled there to spend in retirement the latter end of his life, surrounded by a family who were not too well pleased to exchange busy Bayswater for what they were flippant enough to call a wilderness.

Dinner was over; and Mr. Wedmore, in a snug easy-chair by the dining-room fire, was waiting for Doctor Haselden, who often looked in for a smoke and a game of chess with the owner of The Beeches.

A lean, fidgety man, with thin hair and grayish whiskers, Mr. Wedmore looked less at home in the velveteen suit and gaiters

which he persisted in wearing even in the evening, less like the country gentleman it was his ambition to be, than like the care-laden city merchant he at heart still was.

On the other side of the table sat his better half, in whom it was easy to see he must have found all the charm of contrast to his own personality. A cheery, buxom woman, still handsome, full of life and fun, she had held for the whole of her married life a sway over her lord and master all the greater that neither of them was conscious of the fact. A most devoted and submissive wife, a most indulgent and affectionate mother, Mrs. Wedmore occupied the not unenviable position of being half slave, half idol in her own household.

The clock struck eight, and the bell rang.

"There he is! There's the doctor!" cried Mrs. Wedmore, with a beaming nod. Her husband sat up in his chair, and the troubled frown which he had worn all the evening grew a little deeper.

"I should like you, my dear, to leave us together this evening," said he.

Mrs. Wedmore jumped up at once, gathering her balls of wool and big knitting-needles together with one quick sweep of the arm.

"All right, dear," said she, with another nod, giving him an anxious look.

Mr. Wedmore perceived the look and smiled. He stretched out his hand to lay it gently on his wife's arm as she passed him.

"Nothing about me. Nothing for you to be alarmed about," said he.

Mrs. Wedmore hesitated a moment. She had her suspicions, and she would dearly have liked to know more. But she was the best trained of wives; and after a moment's pause, seeing that she was to hear nothing further, she said, good-humoredly: "All right, dear," and left the room, just in time to shake hands with Doctor Haselden as she went out.

Now, while the host found it impossible to shake off the signs of his old calling, the doctor was a man who had never been able to assume them. From head to foot there was no trace of the doctor in

his appearance; he looked all over what at heart he was—the burly, good-humored, home-loving, land-loving country gentleman, who looked upon Great Datton, where his home was, as the pivot of the world.

However he was dressed, he always looked shabby, and he could never have been mistaken for anything but an English gentleman.

He shook hands with Mr. Wedmore, with a smile. These poor Londoners, trying to acclimatize themselves, amused him greatly. He looked upon them much as the Londoner looks upon the Polish Jew immigrants—with pity, a little jealousy, and no little scorn.

"Where's Carlo?" asked he.

"Oh, Carlo was a nuisance, so I've sent him to the stable," said Mr. Wedmore, with the slightly colder manner which he instantly assumed if any grievance of his, however small, was touched upon.

Carlo was a young retriever, which Mr. Wedmore, in the stern belief that it was the proper thing in a country house, had encouraged about the house until his habits of getting between everybody's legs and helping himself to the contents of everybody's plate had so roused the ire of the rest of the household that Mr. Wedmore had had to give way to the universal prejudice against him.

The doctor shook his head. Lack of capacity for managing a dog was just what one might have expected from these new-comers.

Mr. Wedmore turned his chair to face that of the doctor, and spoke in the sharp, incisive tones of a man who has serious business on hand.

"I've been hoping you would drop in every night for the last fortnight," said he, "and as you didn't come, I was at last obliged to send for you. I have a very important matter to consult you about. You've brought your pipe?" The doctor produced it from his pocket. "Well, fill it, and listen. It's about young Horne—Dudley Horne—that I want to speak to you, to consult you, in fact."

The doctor nodded as he filled his pipe.

"The young barrister I've met here, who's engaged to your elder daughter?"

"Well, she was all but engaged to him," admitted Mr. Wedmore, in a grudging tone. "But I'm going to put a stop to it, and I'll tell you why." Here he got up, as if unable to keep still in the state of excitement into which he was falling, and stood with his hands behind him and his back to the fire. "I have a strong suspicion that the young man's not quite right here." And lowering his voice, Mr. Wedmore touched his forehead.

"Good gracious! You surprise me!" cried the doctor. "He always seemed to me such a clever young fellow. Indeed, you said so to me yourself."

"So he is. Very clever," said Mr. Wedmore, shortly. "I don't suppose there are many young chaps of his age—for he's barely thirty—at the Bar whose prospects are as good as his. But, for all that, I have a strong suspicion that he's got a tile loose, and that's why I wanted to speak to you. Now his father was in a lunatic asylum no less than three times, and was in one when he died."

The doctor looked grave.

"That's a bad history, certainly. Do you know how the father's malady started?"

"Why, yes. It was the effect of a wound in the head received when he was a young man out in America, in the war with Mexico in '46."

"That isn't the sort of mania that is likely to come down from father to son," said the doctor, "if his brain was perfectly sound before, and the recurrent mania the result of an accident."

"Well, so I've understood. And the matter has never troubled me at all until lately, when I have begun to detect certain morbid tendencies in Dudley, and a general change which makes me hesitate to trust him with the happiness of my daughter."

"Can you give me instances?" asked the doctor, although he began to feel sure that whatever opinion he might express on the matter, Mr. Wedmore would pay little attention to any but his own.

"Well, for you to understand the case, I must tell you a little more about the lad's father. He and I were very old friends—chums from boyhood, in fact. When he came back from America—where he went from a lad's love of adventure—he made a good marriage

from a monetary point of view; married a wharf on the Thames, in fact, somewhere Limehouse way, and settled down as a wharfinger. He was a steady fellow, and did very well, until one fine morning he was found trying to cut his throat, and had to be locked up. Well, he was soon out again that time, and things went on straight enough for eight or nine years, by which time he had done very well—made a lot of money by speculation—and was thinking of retiring from business altogether. Then, perhaps it was the extra pressure of his increased business, but, at any rate, he broke out again, tried to murder his wife that time, and did, in fact, injure her so much that she died shortly afterward. Of course, he had to be shut up again; and a man named Edward Jacobs, a shrewd Jew, who was his confidential clerk, carried on the business in his absence. Now, both Horne and his wife had had the fullest confidence in this Jacobs, but he turned out all wrong. As soon as he learned, at the end of about twelve months, that Horne was coming out again, he decamped with everything he could lay his hands on; and from the position of affairs you may guess that he made a very good haul. Well, poor Horne found himself in a maze of difficulties; in fact, his clerk's fraud ruined him. Everything that could be sold or mortgaged had to go to the settlement, and when his affairs had been finally put straight, there was only a little bit left, that had been so settled upon his wife that no one could touch it. He made a good fight of it for a little while, with the help of a few old friends, but, in the end, he broke down again for the third time. But he escaped out of the asylum and went abroad, without seeing his friends or his child, and a few months afterward the announcement of his death in an American asylum was sent by a correspondent out there. Happily there were no difficulties about securing the mother's money for the son, and it was enough to educate the boy and to give him a start; but, of course, he had to begin the world as a poor man instead of a rich one. Perhaps that was all the better for him—or so I thought until lately."

"And what are these signs of a morbid tendency that you spoke of?" asked the doctor.

"Well, in the first place, after being almost extravagant in his devotion to my daughter, Doreen, he now neglects her outrageously—comes down very seldom, writes short letters or none. Now, my

daughter is not the sort of girl that a sane man would neglect," added Doctor Wedmore, proudly.

"Certainly not," assented the doctor, inwardly thinking that it was much less surprising than it would have been in the case of one of his own girls.

"In the second place, he is always harping upon the subject of Jacobs and his speculations—an old subject, which he might well let rest. And, in the third place, he has become moody, morose and absent-minded; and my son, Max, who often visits him at his chambers in Lincoln's Inn, has noticed the change even more than I, who have fewer opportunities of seeing him."

The doctor was puffing stolidly at his pipe and looking at the fire.

"It is very difficult to form an opinion upon report only," said he. "Frankly, I can see nothing in what you have told me about the young man which could not be explained in other and likelier ways. He may have got entangled, for instance, with some woman in London."

Mr. Wedmore took fire at this suggestion.

"In that case, the sooner Doreen forgets all about him the better."

"Mind, I'm only suggesting!" put in the doctor, hastily. "There may be a dozen more reasons—"

"I shall not wait to find them out," said Mr. Wedmore, decisively. "He and Max are coming down together this evening. My wife would have them to help in organizing some affair they're getting up for Christmas. I'll send him to the right-about without any more nonsense."

"But surely that is hardly—"

"Hardly what?" snapped out Mr. Wedmore, as he poked the fire viciously.

"Well, hardly fair to either of the young people. Put a few questions to him yourself, or better still, let your wife do it. It may be only a storm in a teacup, after all. Remember, he is the son of your old friend. And you wouldn't like to have it on your conscience that you had treated him harshly."

The doctor's advice was sane and sound enough, but Mr. Wedmore was not in the mood to listen to it. That notion of an entanglement with another woman rankled in his proud mind, and made him still less inclined to be patient and forbearing.

"I shall give Doreen warning of what I am going to do at once," said he, "before Horne turns up."

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. He was obstinate himself.

Mr. Wedmore crossed the long room to the door, and opened it sharply.

The hall was full of people and of great bales of goods, which were piled upon the center-table and heaped up all around it.

"Doreen!" he called, sharply.

Out of the crowd there rushed a girl—such a girl! One of those radiant creatures who explain the cult of womanhood; who make it difficult even for sober-minded, middle-aged men and matrons to realize that this is nothing but flesh and blood like themselves; one of those beautiful creatures who claim worship as a right and who repay it with kindness and brightness and sweetness and laughter.

No house was ever dull that held Doreen Wedmore.

She was a tall girl, brown-haired, brown-eyed, made to laugh and to live in the sunshine. Nobody could resist her, and nobody ever tried to.

She sprang across the hall to her father and whirled him back into the dining-room, and put her back against it.

"Dudley's come!" said she. "He's in the hall—among the blankets!"

"Blankets!"

"Yes." She was crossing the room by this time to the doctor, whom she had quickly perceived, and was holding out her hand to him. "You must know, doctor, that we are up to our eyes in blankets just now, and in bundles of red flannel, and in soup and coals. Papa has been reading up Christmas in the country in the olden time, and he finds that to be correct you must deluge the neighborhood with those articles. They are not at all what the people want, as far as I can make out. But that doesn't matter. It pleases papa to demoralize

the neighborhood; so we're doing it. And mamma helps him. She dates from the prehistoric period when a wife *really* swore to obey her husband; so she does it through thick and thin. Of course, she knows better all the time. She could always set papa right if she chose. Whatever happens, papa must be obeyed. So when he wants to run his dear old head into a noose, she dutifully holds it open for him, when all the time she knows how uncomfortable he'll be till he gets out."

"You're a saucy puss, Miss!" cried her father, trying to frown, but betraying his delight in his daughter's merry tongue by the twinkle in his eyes.

"And that's the right sort of woman for a wife," said the old doctor, enthusiastically. "I must say I think it's a bad sign when young girls think they can improve upon their own mothers."

"She doesn't mean half she says," said her father, indulgently.

"Oh, yes, she does," retorted Doreen. "And she wants to know, please, what it is you have to say to Dudley."

The doctor rose from his chair, and Mr. Wedmore frowned.

"And it's no use putting me off by telling me not to ask questions. I'm not mamma, you know."

"I intend to ask him — something about you."

It was the girl's turn to frown now.

"Please don't, papa," said she, in a lower voice. "I know you're going to worry him, and to put your hands behind your back and ask him conundrums, and to make all sorts of mischief, under the impression that you are putting things right. And if you only just wouldn't, everything would soon be as right as possible. While if you persist —"

But Mr. Wedmore interrupted her, not harshly, as he would have done anybody else, but with decision.

"You must trust me to know best, my dear. It is better for you both that we should come to some understanding. Haselden, you'll excuse me for half an hour, won't you? And you, Doreen," and he

turned again to his daughter, "stay with the doctor here, and try to talk sense till I come back again."

And Mr. Wedmore went quickly out of the room, without giving the girl a chance of saying anything more.

## CHAPTER II.

### MAX MAKES A DISCOVERY.

Doreen's bright face lost a little of its color and much of its gayety as her father disappeared. The doctor felt sorry for her.

"Come, come; cheer up, my dear," he said. "If he loves you honestly, and I don't know how he can fail to do so, a few words with your father will put matters all right. There is nothing to look so sad about, I think."

But Doreen gave him one earnest, questioning look, and then her eyelids fell again.

"You don't know," she said, in a low voice. "Papa doesn't understand Dudley; but I think I do. He is very sensitive and rather reserved about himself. If papa interferes now, he will offend him, and Dudley may very likely go off at once, and perhaps never come near me again. He is proud—very proud."

"But if he could behave like that," replied the doctor, quickly, "if he could throw over such a nice girl as you for no reason worth speaking of, I should call him a nasty-tempered fellow, whom you ought to be glad to be rid of."

"Ah, but you would be wrong," retorted Doreen, with a little flush in her face. "It is quite true that he has neglected me a little lately, written short letters, and not been down to see me so often. But I am sure there was some better reason for his conduct than papa thinks. And if I feel so sure, and if I am ready to trust him, why shouldn't papa be?"

The doctor smiled at her ingenuousness.

"Your father is right in claiming that he ought to be made acquainted with the young man's reason for conduct which looks quite unwarrantable on the face of it," said he.

But Doreen gave a little sigh.

"I don't think that a man has a right to turn inquisitor over another man, just because the second man is ready to marry the first man's daughter," said she. "And I'm sure papa wouldn't have stood it when *he* was young."

The doctor laughed.

"He ought to put up with any amount of questioning rather than lose the girl of his choice," said he decisively. "And if he has the stuff of a man in him he will do so."

"But he is unhappy. I know it," said Doreen.

"Unhappy!" cried the doctor, indignantly. "And what's he got to be unhappy about, I should like to know? He ought to be thanking Heaven on his knees all day long for getting such a nice girl to promise to marry him. That's the attitude a young man used to take when I was young."

"Did you go down on your knees all day long when Mrs. Haselden promised to marry you?" asked Doreen, recovering her sauciness at the notion. "And why should he do it till he knows what sort of a wife I am going to make? And why should he go down on his knees more than I on mine? When there are more women in the world than men, too!"

The doctor shook his head.

"Ah, there is no arguing with you saucy girls," said he. "But I know that I, for my part, don't know of a man in the whole world who is worthy to marry one of my daughters."

As the doctor finished speaking, the door was opened quickly, and Mr. Wedmore came in, looking white and worried.

Doreen ran to him with an anxious face.

"What have you done, papa, what have you done? Did you see him? What did you say? What did you say?"

Mr. Wedmore put his arm around his daughter, and kissed her tenderly.

"Don't trouble your head about him any more, my dear child," said he in a husky voice. "He isn't worth it. He isn't worthy of you."

Doreen drew away from her father, looking into his face with searching eyes and with an expression full of fear.

"Papa, what do you mean? You have sent him away?"

Mr. Wedmore answered in a loud and angry voice; but it was clear enough that the anger was not directed against his daughter.

"I did not send him away. He took himself off. I had hardly begun to speak to him—and I began quite quietly, mind—when he made the excuse of a letter which he found waiting for him, to go back to town. Without any ceremony, he rushed out of the study into the hall, and snatched up his hat and coat to go."

"And is he gone?" asked Doreen, in a low voice, as she staggered back a step.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so. And a good riddance, too. There was no letter at all for him, I suppose."

"Yes, there was a letter!" faltered Doreen.

She gave a glance round her; seemed to remember suddenly the presence of a third person, for she blushed deeply on meeting the doctor's eyes; then, without another word, she sprang across the room to the door.

"Where are you going?" cried her father, as he followed her into the hall.

But she did not answer. The hall-door was closing with a loud clang.

Doreen was not the girl to lose her lover for want of a little energy. She was fonder of Dudley than people imagined. There is always an inclination in the general mind to consider that a person of lively temperament is incapable of a deep feeling. And Mr. Wedmore had only shown a common tendency in believing that his beautiful and brilliant daughter would easily give up the lover whom he considered unworthy of her. But he was wrong. Much too

high-spirited and too happy in her temperament and surroundings to brood over her lover's late negligence, she was perhaps too vain to believe that she had lost her hold upon his heart. At any rate, she liked him too well to give him up in this off-hand fashion without making an effort to discover the reason of his present mysterious conduct.

That letter which he had used as an excuse for his sudden departure had arrived at The Beeches by the afternoon post. Doreen had seen it with her own eyes; had noted with some natural curiosity that the direction was ill-spelled, ill-written; that the chirography was that of an almost illiterate female correspondent; and that the post-mark showed that it came from the East End of London. Rather a strange letter for the smart young barrister to receive, perhaps. And the thought of it made Doreen pause when she had got outside the door on the broad drive between the lawns.

Only for the moment. The next she was flying across the rougher grass outside the garden among the oaks and the beeches of the park. She saw no one in front of her, and for a few seconds her heart beat very fast. She thought she had missed him.

There was no lodge at the park entrance; only a modest wooden gate in the middle of the fence. Doreen was hesitating whether to go through or to go back, when she saw the figure of Dudley Horne coming toward the gate from the stables.

So she waited.

As he came nearer, she, hidden from his sight by the trunk of an old oak-tree, grew uneasy and shy. Dark though it was, dimly as she could see him, Doreen felt convinced, from the rapid, steady pace at which he walked, that he was intent upon some set purpose, that he was not driven by pique at her father's words.

He came quite close to her, so that she saw his face. A dark-complexioned, strong face it was, clean-shaven, not handsome at all. But, on the other hand, it was just such a face as women admire; full of character, of ambition, of virility. Doreen had been debating with herself whether she dared speak to him; but the moment she got a full look at his face, her courage died away.

It was plain to her that, whatever might be the subject of the thoughts which were agitating his mind, she had no share in them.

So she let him pass out, and then crept back, downcast, shocked, ashamed, up the slope to the house.

She got in by the billiard-room, at the window of which she knocked. Max, her brother, who was playing a game with Queenie, his younger sister, let her in, and cried out at sight of her white face:

"Hello! Doreen, what's up? Had a row with Dudley? Or what?"

"I have had no 'row' with any one," answered the girl, very quietly. "But—you must all know all about it presently, so you may as well hear it at once—Dudley has gone away."

"What?"

Max stopped in the act of trying for a carom, and stared at his sister.

"Why, he only came when I did, ten minutes ago!"

"He's gone, I tell you!" repeated Doreen, stamping her foot. "And—and listen, Max, I'm frightened about him! He's got something on his mind. When he went away, I saw him; I was standing by the gate; he looked so—so *dreadful* that I didn't dare to speak to him. *!* Think of that!"

"Had papa been speaking to him?" put in the shrewd younger sister, who was chalking her cue at the other end of the room.

The younger sister always sees most of the game.

"Ye—es, but—I don't know—I hardly think it was that," answered Doreen quickly. "At any rate, Max, I want you to do this for me; I want you to go up to town to-morrow and see him. I shan't rest until I know he's—he's all right—after what I saw of his face and the look on it. Now, you will do this, won't you, won't you? Without saying anything to anybody, mind. Queenie, you can hold your tongue, too. Now, Max, there's a dear, you'll do it, won't you?"

Max told her that she was "off her head," that he could do no good, and so on. But he ended in giving way to the will of his handsome sister, whom he adored.

Max Wedmore was a good-looking fellow of five-and-twenty, with a reputation as a ne'er-do-weel, which, perhaps, he hardly deserved. His father had a great idea of bringing the young man up to some useful calling to keep him out of mischief. Not very terrible mischief, for the most part: only the result of too much leisure and too much money in inexperienced hands. The upshot of this difference of opinion between father and son was that while Mr. Wedmore was always finding mercantile situations for his son, Max was always taking care to be thrown out of them after a few weeks, and taking a rest which was by no means well earned.

This errand of his sister's was by no means unwelcome to him, since it took him back to town, where he could amuse himself better than he could in the country.

So, on the following morning, he found some sort of excuse to take him up, and started on his journey with the blessings of Doreen, and with very little opposition from his father, who was subdued and thankful to have got rid of Dudley with so little trouble.

It was soon after three when Max arrived at Dudley Horne's chambers in Lincoln's Inn. Of course, Dudley was out; so Max scribbled a note for his friend and left it on the table while he went to the Law Courts to look for him. Not finding him anywhere about, Max filled up the day in his own fashion, and returned to Dudley's room at about seven o'clock, when he supposed that his friend would either return to dinner or look in on his way to dine elsewhere.

He waited an hour, then went away and filled up his time at a music-hall, and returned once more at a quarter to eleven. Dudley, so he was told by the old woman who gave him the information, had not, as far as she knew, been in his rooms since the morning.

Max, who was a great friend of Dudley's, and could take any liberty he pleased in his precincts, lit the gas and the sitting-room fire, and installed himself in an arm-chair with a book. He could not read, however, for he was oppressed by some of Doreen's own fears. He was well acquainted with all his friend's ways, and he knew that for him to be away both from his chambers and from the neighborhood of the Courts for a whole day was most unusual with