



"Oh, there is no immediate hurry," was the reply. "I will be well to wait the turn of events for a few weeks. My only object in hastening at all is to advance you in old Bruyn's favor. As soon as you are the recognized heir of Rolff House, you need worry no more over your interests in that direction."

"I don't worry," replied Ralph.

"Well, I am glad of it," was the reply. "Nothing is so sure to win the favor of Fortune as a cool and brave front. You have but to be cautious and persistent, my boy, to win."

"I intend to be," asserted Ralph.

"No doubt, no doubt," responded the elder. "and the prize is worthy of the highest effort. You must win, Ralph."

"I intend to win," again asserted Ralph.

CHAPTER XIX.

Wearily passing the days to Rosa Bruyn. Daily the sun rose in the morning and as discreetly set behind the western mountains at eve. She performed her accustomed duties with her usual alacrity, and perhaps with more than her usual conscientious care; but the light of happy content had gone from her sweet face and the buoyancy from her step. For days and weeks she had wrestled with the doubts and surmises that had thronged continually upon her, and this mental anxiety and conflict could not but leave its impression. But, through it all, she had not given up her faith in Claude. She was resolved that she would not question his fidelity till she was afforded better evidence than anything that could come to her through the instrumentality of Anthony Saybrook. She was strongly impelled by the belief that the defamation of Claude and the persistent pressing of Ralph Saybrook's suit were parts of the same plot, and a thousand explanations thronged to her mind to excuse Claude's strange letter, which, as she recalled its words, seemed to her too ambiguous and too much like the high-flown expressions of one writing in a merry, mischievous mood, to be an actual confession of falsehood and guilt. She flattered her hopes with the thought that the letter had been drawn out by some subterfuge of the wily lawyer, and was evidence only of Claude's light and gay spirit, which she well understood to be prone to a certain recklessness of expression, easily misunderstood. Yet doubts would at times assail her, and the certainty that there was to be a long and perhaps total separation, and that all chance of explanation was removed from her, caused her troubles to weigh most heavily upon her mind.

Mrs. Bruyn's watchful eye had detected her daughter's quiet, unconfessed grief, and she was the object of her anxious solicitude. Yet even she was unaware of the real nature and depth of her sorrow. The good lady had in an unwilling and half-hearted way admitted what seemed to her the overwhelming evidence of Claude's falsity. The absolute convictions of her husband had gradually broken down her last defense of the young man, and she was fain to admit the guilt she could not explain. This belief created a barrier as it were between her and her daughter, and prevented her offering the consolation which would have been admissible had there been a more direct sympathy in their views of the matter. By her very position, Mrs. Bruyn was forced to stand midway between her husband and daughter; and she deemed it best, under the circumstances, to let Rosa's grief quietly wring itself out. She was little aware, indeed, of the real depth of the wound that had been inflicted, so calm and patient was she in the face of her daughter's depression, and her anxiety and sympathy were deeply excited.

Ralph Saybrook continued his calls at Mrs. Bruyn's, and his attentions were so delicate and circumspect in his conduct, however, that he had really made a quite favorable impression upon Mrs. Bruyn, and even Rosa was fain to be reconciled to the fact that she would gladly perhaps have accepted the opportunity to withhold. But the fact was, that so well had he ingratiated himself in the old farmer's good opinion, and so careful was he not to allow Rosa any opportunity to show offense with respect to her father's conduct, that he had gently insinuated the position of a suitor for her hand without her being really aware of it. At times she thought of the wrong that had been done to Claude and the opportunity she had no ground to suppose of a plot to induce her lover, to marry another girl, and she would sigh and sigh, and then she would be happy.

and the fact that there seemed no one in whom she could confide, and that everybody appeared drawn into the plot to thwart her wishes, caused her sorrows to weigh more heavily upon her heart than they otherwise would. It seemed to her continually that if there were only some one to whom she could talk about her sorrows, if she only knew some friend of Claude's who she could simply inquire his welfare, even though it were to ask in vain, it would be some relief to the intense strain of anxiety and grief.

So it was with a sudden emotion of joy that, one day, as she was watering her cherished flower-bed in the front yard, she saw the familiar form of old Carl Crum descending the road that led toward the house from the village. It seemed strange that she had not thought of him. She knew that Claude had always highly esteemed the faithful old man, and that he was devoted to the Rolff family, and she felt an irresistible desire to talk to him. There was no reason for hesitation, for her father was away from home, and she was familiarly acquainted with the kindly but eccentric old man, who had always petted her when he met her since she was a little girl, and was at all times as approachable by the young and innocent as well could be. So Rosa unhesitatingly set down her watering-pot, and hastened to the gate to intercept him.

A pleasant smile lit up the old man's rough, bearded face as he drew near.

"Good day, Mr. Crum," said Rosa, with courtesy.

"Ah, good day, my rosebud," replied old Carl as he took her hand and pressed it in his horny paw. "Let me look at you," he added, as he adjusted his spectacles. "Yes, yes, I see—your face has grown older and thinner; and there is a trace of trouble in it, I fancy. It's the way of the world, and a sad world it is for the good and the pure. It ought to be some years yet before your face should show care, my pretty one."

"The old man stroked his head a moment as if in troubled thought."

"I hear from him?" he answered.

"Yes, yes, rosebud, to my sorrow. You know I am in disgrace at Rolff House. He wrote me dismissing me from the house—that is all. But you surely have heard from the young master, and I would fain enquire news of him of you."

"Not a word have I heard from him since he left here," replied Rosa, with just a hint in her tone of the anxiety at her heart.

"Indeed, indeed," muttered the old man. "This is strange—strange. But why do I say strange, when the graceless villain, Anthony Saybrook, has had the influencing of master Claude's mind? There seems no evil influence that he is incapable of exerting, and no scheme of villainy so desperate but that he succeeds in it. Ah, I fear that my young master has been caught wholly in his fatal snares, and that there are evil days ahead for Rolff House. They tell me that he has papers that will give him control of the whole property. There's villainy—damnable villainy in it."

"I suspected it—I knew it all along!"

"Why did you not warn Claude?" asked Rosa.

"The old man gravely shook his head.

"It was useless then," he made answer. "But I might have written him when I saw the villainy unmasking; and I did not. I thought what right had I to be interfering in the affairs of my betters, and which perhaps I did not understand. And it is now too late. This war cuts off all chance of warning him. The thieves can plunder at their will."

"And there is no way to send him a letter?"

"Think, Mr. Crum. You are wise and shrewd, I know. There must be some way to warn him."

Old Carl stroked his beard thoughtfully for some time, and at intervals muttered indistinctly to himself. At last Rosa could catch his words:

"It might be," he was muttering; "there is just a chance—hardly a chance, indeed; but the Lord might direct it. There is one powerful to strike down the wicked, and circumvent their plans, and it might be—it might be. He would aid us." He raised his tones.

"I was thinking," he continued, "that there was just one chance opened to us; it's a desperate one—a vain one, perhaps; and yet it may be the opportunity the Lord opens to us to foil a scheme of villainy. An old sailor friend of mine has come here to see me, and say good-bye, before he sails in a privateer now fitting out. He is a trusty fellow, and there is just a chance that if a letter were put in his hands he might some day run into some Dur-

oan port where he could mail it, and cite his captivity by frequent reference to the old woods and the adjoining meadow lands which he knew in the eyes of the old man were one of the most tempting of prizes.

"These efforts had that effect on former Bruyn. He became more and more interested in the project of the match between Ralph and his daughter, and his interest was not the less because he could see that Rosa was secretly growing over her separation from Claude. This latter fact especially worried the old gentleman. To be sure, their seeming probability of Claude ever returning to make trouble, but it angered him to think that his daughter's affections should be wasted at all on such a graceless scamp. So he took frequent occasion to commend and praise Ralph Saybrook in her hearing, and to let her know by what he no doubt considered delicate hints that it would be pleasing to him to see her encourage the young man's suit.

Rosa received all these indications of her father's wishes in silence. This encouraged him to believe that she would speedily yield.

Still, the days passed on, and Rosa grew more quiet and sad, and Ralph's fault began to make progress. The old farmer began to say, "What a little girl, that girl, that girl," he said to her one day as he entered the house and found her sitting sad and with tears stealing down her face by a window—so absorbed in her mood as not to have noticed his entrance. "Dunder and dounds, you're no longer my merry little girl. Crying for that scamp of a Claude Rolff, eh? For shame! He's no fellow for a girl to cry her eyes out about—the rascal. Be a brave little frow now. Cast him off as he has cast you off, and let there be an end of this. There's another lover waiting your favor, girl, a better one, or I'm no judge. I can say for you, too, which is more than I can say for your other lover. I've held you for a wise—ah, little girl! You now show your spirit, cheer up and we'll have a wedding and in-fair one of these days that will do my old heart good."

"No, no, father," replied the unhappy girl, gazing up with a pleading look in her soft grey eyes. "I do not wish to marry. I do not care ever to leave you. I will be content and happy here. Let me always stay with you."

"Stay of course you shall stay," replied old man. "Dunder and dounds, did you think I'd ever let any fellow carry you away? No, no—the man that marries you must stay here. There's room enough and to spare. I'll never give up my little Rosa, and that's why I want no rake-hell, that can't stay at home, to have you."

"But it's the duty of a wife to follow her husband," replied Rosa, argumentatively. "and if I marry I must needs follow my husband if he should wish to go to the ends of the world."

"I'll care for that," said the hearty old man laughing. "I've chosen you a fellow whose lands will join mine, and I'll make my own terms with him, and never shall you go from this house while I live."

"But I do not wish ever to marry," father, replied Rosa, somewhat vexed at her father's cool disposal of her in his match-making plans.

"Pooh, pooh," was the response. "Don't nature. All women wish to marry. You're old enough now, and by my dunder, I'd rather give up half my farm than see you grow up into a sour old maid. No, no. Think you you'll cheat me of having half-a-dozen grandchildren to clamour round my knees before I die? 'Twouldn't be honoring your old father, girl. There's Ralph—a fine young fellow, but a smile will make him yours, and will you turn him away for a scapegrace that leaves you as soon as he gets a little money to scatter, and who, a thousand to one, will never show his face here again?"

Rosa did not answer; but the tears, stealing down her cheeks, told of the distress her father's words caused her.

"There, there," continued the old man, "they are foolish tears; but cry it out; you will feel better for it, and be my merry little girl again one of these days. If I was a girl, it's few tears I would waste on the scamp that desert me, father," interposed Rosa, pleadingly.

The old man's brow darkened.

"Believe it or not, girl," he said, "he's but a scamp, and I'd sooner see you but a scamp married to him. He's made a fool of you, and must leave it to work off. When your wits come back you'll be ashamed of every tear shed for such a scapegrace."

Rosa saw that to attempt to controvert her father's opinion of Claude would only be to arouse his anger, and she wisely chose to be silent.

The old man did not attempt to press his wishes on her any further, but turned away with the bluff counsel to cheer up and forget her troubles.

Clear up! The words sounded like mockery to poor Rosa. In the conflict which she saw ahead between her duty and her plighted troth, there appeared nothing to cheer and encourage her. The future loomed on her vision dark and threatening, and portentous of the wreck of all her hopes of happiness.

CHAPTER XXI.

Lawyer Saybrook had very little of the sentimental in his disposition. But who is proof against the rosy Archer at all times and under all circumstances? The time comes when the most wary must be taken in a snare.

The elder Saybrook entered his domicile one day, with thoughts intent upon business. He wished to have a talk with Ralph, who, however, was not in the office. He made his way to the domestic department where Mrs. Grey was presiding. That excellent housekeeper had been engaged in moulding bread, and three shapely loaves stood on the moulding board as he entered. Mrs. Grey, blushed slightly, and then smiled sweetly, as she saw the lawyer.

Somewhat, it had never before struck Mr. Saybrook that Mrs. Grey was an attractive female, but just at this particular moment it flashed on him that the widow, as she stood with her sleeves rolled up above her elbows showing a white and shapely arm, and with a jaunty cap on her head, presented rather a handsome figure. This thought entered the lawyer's mind, but his immediate object was to enquire for Ralph, so he said:

"Has Ralph been in, Mrs. Grey?"

"He went out about half an hour ago," replied Mrs. Grey, and again a rose suffused her face. Now, there was really no reason for the widow

to blush. Mr. Saybrook's object was plainly very prosaic, and there was certainly nothing unusual in his inquiring for his son. Still, his sudden advent had evidently so acceded with some fancy of the widow's as to produce the tell-tale signal in question.

"Did he say when he would be back?" continued the lawyer.

"Oh, bless you, no," replied the widow; "he never does, you know, and I shouldn't presume to say."

"Or didn't say when he was going?"

"Oh, dear, no, Mr. Saybrook, but then if you are anxious to know, I might make a pretty good guess. He dressed himself with unusual care, and I suspect that he was going up to Mr. Bruyn's."

And having said this, the widow thought it proper to look down archly, and again let a rosy tinge suffuse her face.

Now the lawyer had been fully answered, and there was no occasion for him to remain longer in the kitchen. But he hesitated a moment, and then advanced toward the table where the widow had been at work.

"Making bread, eh?" he said. "Really, Mrs. Grey, I must compliment you on your effort."

The effect of these words on the widow was truly remarkable. They not only caused her to blush again in a very charming manner, but the lawyer could have sworn that in the space of about three seconds she grew twenty years younger, so pleased and animated did she become under the effect of his compliment.

Now the truth was that the widow had long worshipped in silence the stately lawyer, and had in fancy cherished the idea that he would make a more than acceptable substitute for the late Mr. Grey, who in truth had been but a plain and illiterate, though good-natured blacksmith. Mr. Saybrook, however, had hitherto never manifested the slightest interest in the widow's efforts to please him, and this sudden unbending quite took her by surprise. The lawyer, though had long been aware of the not very carefully concealed worship of his housekeeper, but while it had not been displeasing to his vanity, to reciprocate her sentimental attitude was about the last thing he would have thought of under ordinary circumstances.

But this digression is delaying the widow's answer.

"Really, Mr. Saybrook," she replied, "you're very kind to speak so, and, if I do say it myself, I do not think there are many women who can surpass me in baking of any kind, but then I always put my whole soul in my work, which is a good deal, but very natural, as it is my highest ambition to please you."

"I'm-m-yes—of course," replied the lawyer. "And so Ralph has gone up to old Bruyn's?"

"Yes—that is, I think he has," said the widow. "And I must say, Mr. Saybrook, that I think the young lady is very fortunate who succeeds in getting him. Of course, I admit I am somewhat prejudiced—but how can I help it? I think he is really the most elegant young man I ever knew."

"Ah," interposed the lawyer. "Yes, indeed," continued the widow, gazing archly up. "And he resembles you so much; it is really quite remarkable."

"Well," said the lawyer, "I agree with you about Ralph. The girl will be fortunate who gets him. And yet I am particularly anxious about this present affair of his. I think he is getting along, Mrs. Grey. I do not think it would be any mistake to have it understood that he is to marry Rosa, but of course I would not wish to have it known as coming from me, you know."

"Oh, certainly not," replied the widow. "Really, I am quite surprised—and pleased too, although one may be sure that Ralph cannot get anybody too good for him."

"Well, if Ralph comes in this way, tell him I want to see him," said the lawyer. "I am going up in the office."

"But won't you have just a bite of something before you go, Mr. Saybrook," inquired the widow, with a sudden display of tender anxiety for his carnal comfort. "Let me show you some cake I have just been baking."

"No, no, Mrs. Grey; not at present; do not disturb yourself. I must go at once."

And so the lawyer left, having succeeded in raising the most ardent hopes in the bosom of the widow that she would yet be the rich and distinguished Mrs. Saybrook, while he had at the same time taken the best measure possible to have it publicly understood that Ralph and Rosa were not only engaged but very shortly to be married. He took his accustomed seat in his office, and hour after hour flew by while he was deeply absorbed in writing.

At last Ralph came in.

"Eh, Ralph," said the elder man, "take a seat. Just home, eh? Well, what lucky to-day? Any more favorable report?"

"Well, slightly, perhaps," replied the young man, drawing out his tones with easy indifference. "It isn't my tactics you know, to hurry matters. I undertook to press my claims a little to-day, however, and succeeded in extracting the answer that, while I was held in the deepest respect, it was not possible that I could become the recipient of anything more than friendship while any doubt remained as to the actual sentiments of a certain young gentleman now in Europe. Not a very encouraging answer, perhaps; but inferentially I see therein a sign of hope."

"Ralph, I am rather out of patience with you," exclaimed the father. "And yet I admire your imperturbable coolness. But I never can bear to delay in such matters as this. There is no telling what new difficulty will spring up. That girl's obstinacy annoys me exceedingly. Everything is straight now if it wasn't for her infatuation for that young fool of a Rolff. I have the old man completely in my power, I think, and I believe I could speedily bring him to exert his authority. But you have been so opposed to it, I have hesitated."

"Well," interposed Ralph, "I don't know but that I am getting a little tired of the way matters are going myself. I don't like to own up to it in such a contest—in fact, I don't; but if time is a question of moment, I don't know that I should object to a little pressure being used."

"Well," responded the elder, "I have a plan in my mind to stir up the old gentleman that I think will work satisfactorily, and I must put it in operation."

"What is it?" asked Ralph.

"Well, never mind at present," replied his father. "All you need concern yourself about is to note the result. Old Bruyn will doubtless be in

this evening, and I shall see what I do with him. My idea is, that if I can only induce him to bring a moderate amount of pressure to bear on Rosa, she will periodically give up her sentimental period of her existence, and young Rolff having secured the first place in her affections, she naturally clings to him. It is very natural, and in fact, she is to be commended for it; only it is cursed inconvenient for us. But she will not be a whit less devoted to you, my boy, after she once makes up her mind to accept you as her lover. She is rather more constant than her sex generally, and I like her the better for it."

"She's a tip-top girl," replied Ralph, "and I'm hanged if I don't grow to like her better every time I see her. She's the soul of sweetness and sincerity, and I'm almost sorry for her, she grieves so over that fellow Claude. But of course I'll make her a better husband, and I fancy I'll cure her yet of admiration for anybody beside myself."

"Well, Ralph, we'll hope for the best, and work for it as well. And now just look over these papers in Saybrook's valet's, and see if they are all right."

Evening came, and shortly after supper hour was over, Farmer Bruyn dropped into the office of the lawyer. Anthony Saybrook received him with especial warmth, and speedily ordered in glasses and bottles, and pressed his hospitality on the free-hearted old fellow with all his arts of persuasion.

After they had both tossed off a couple of glasses of wine, and exhausted the ordinary topics of interest, the lawyer thought it time to introduce the subject of his plan to influence the old gentleman to so exercise his parental authority over his daughter as to induce her to look more favorably on Ralph's suit.

"By the way, Mr. Bruyn—but come, let me fill your glass up again. There, there—don't say no, it is a very light wine and wouldn't hurt you if you drank a gallon of it. What was I going to say? Ah, I recollect—I have a bit of news that may interest you. I have an offer to sell the Rolff property."

The old farmer gazed up in evident surprise.

"Who to?" he asked.

"Well, I am not at liberty to state yet. He is a very wealthy city merchant, who wishes to retire, and seek a healthy and quiet locality, and spend the remainder of his days. The offer came to me through a legal friend of mine, and is really a very good one, as the old gentleman is willing to pay liberally."

"If you are going to sell," interposed Farmer Bruyn, "first sell me the wood lot, and the meadows next to the road. I'll pay more than he will."

"Ah, but, my dear sir, that would cripple the balance of the estate, and spoil my bargain."

"But you promised me," said the farmer doggedly, flushing up in a way that showed how deeply he was interested.

"I said I would consider your claims, but the fact is, my dear Mr. Bruyn, I do not wish to sell the place at all. My ambition has been to put it in repair, and deed the place to Ralph as a wedding present, of course calculating also to make it my own home for the balance of my days. If there were any immediate prospect of Ralph getting married, I might suitably adhere to my plans in fact. I undoubtedly would, but it is an expensive project, and one I would not care to undertake without the boy was to make a good match with a young lady who would have something to add to his own fortune and enable them to support the place in the style it would require. As matters are, however, there seems no immediate prospect of Ralph succeeding with the only matrimonial suit he has yet undertaken—of course, my dear sir, you know to what I refer—and the old man is rather a weight on my hands, and I don't know as I am justified in refusing such an excellent offer. Of course, my dear Mr. Bruyn, I would like to oblige you, if my interests rendered it in any way admissible. The truth is, I have indulged the fond hope that Ralph would succeed in his suit with your daughter, and that thus our two properties, which seem destined naturally to be united, would come together as the joint property of our children. But, of course, you know, Mr. Bruyn—"

"No, I don't know," interrupted the old man. "I thought we understood each other pretty well on that subject, and as far as I'm concerned, I don't see why there is any trouble about it."

"Ah, but Ralph informs me that your daughter positively refuses to give up her belief in the good faith of her former lover, Claude Rolff, and makes every prospect of his winning her hand dependent upon her being fully assured that young Rolff will not return to fulfill his pledges. Of course, that creates an obstacle whose removal is so uncertain and indefinite that it seems absolutely foolish, from a business point of view, to refuse a good offer to sell in order to take such improbable chances."

Farmer Bruyn sat down the glass he had been holding in his hand, and leaned forward in his chair.

"And so Rosa tells Ralph she intends to marry Claude Rolff," she asked.

"That's about it," replied the lawyer. "She seems to have full faith that he will come back, and is resolved at least to wait and give him the chance to claim her."

The farmer leaned back in his chair, and laughed heartily.

"Ah, sir, she's a rare girl, and, by my dunder, I believe she's got some of my own grit in her. But don't you fear sir; she'll never throw herself away on that young scamp. I'll take care of that. She's always been a good girl, and she'll do as I say, I'll warrant. I've taken a liking to Ralph myself, and Rosa will like him too, yet. But he's a dunder head. Why don't he spart her, so as to cut out that young scamp? Ain't got the courage of a mouse, eh, sir—ha, ha, ha! 'Twasn't so when I was a young man. I never gave my wife any peace till she said she'd have me. But she was bound to have her, and I got her. No, no; Rosa's all right. It's Ralph that don't know how to manage. Well, she'll see to it—I must see to it. It won't do to have our plans broken up."

[To be continued.]

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