



old Carl a full account of all that had passed during his absence, and in the afternoon had come to lawyer Saybrook's office and had the interview detailed in the last chapter. It appears that he had not received the letter dispatched to him by Rosa and old Carl by the hands of the privateer sailor but, becoming uneasy in regard to the plans of British invasions that were bruited in Europe, and resolved if possible to give his services to his country in her hour of need, he had taken passage for home in the manner and with the results before described.

Claude was exceedingly anxious to see Rosa, but very much perplexed how to gratify his wish without injury to his self-respect. He understood well enough that the old farmer would be decidedly opposed to his having any interview with her, and he felt scrupled as to his right to use any influence to induce her to do so. Her father's wishes in any way. But if "love laughs at lock smiths," it certainly has a way of overcoming lesser obstacles, and Claude soon resolved in his mind to read a note to Rosa by old Carl, asking her to meet him in the old wood, at the trysting place, at a certain hour, and to bring with her the letter which she had written to him. In this way, he felt that he had compromised with his conscience to a sufficient degree, and at the same time would secure his object, as he remembered that he had been a favor to Mrs. Bruyn. He did not doubt that she would read his consent to the interview.

In response to his note, he received a tender and brief epistle from Rosa telling him that her mother had consented to the interview, but only on condition that she accompanied her and was present. Claude could not well object to this arrangement, spite of his anxiety to meet Rosa alone and have full explanation and understanding in regard to the obstacles that had been thrown into the pathway of their love. A little before the hour he proceeded to the appointed place, and had long to wait ere Rosa and her mother appeared. Claude's bearing was so courteous and sincere, that it at once dispelled any prejudice against him that might have been excited in Mrs. Bruyn's mind. And, withal, he looked so handsome, and his evident suffering condition so appealed to the sympathies of the good lady's womanly heart, that it was well for him that she had chosen to present at the interview.

Claude first greeted Mrs. Bruyn, and then taking Rosa's hand pressed it to his lips. Not a word was said by either but their eyes told the tale of mutual distress and longing during the months of their separation.

Claude's story was soon told.

"My early return," he said, "is no doubt a surprise. The war had hardly broken out, however, before I resolved to take the first opportunity to reach home. Mr. Saybrook had constantly assured me in his letters that there could be no outbreak of war, so I had not been led to anticipate it. But when I found that I was really shut out from my native land in the hour of peril and when I came to think what changes might occur during the progress of the war all interest in my studies deserted me, and I could think of nothing but the ways and means of returning home. I left Sweden and went to Hamburg, and other Dutch ports, but could find no vessels going to America. I then went to France, as I had heard that occasionally an American privateer would avoid the British blockade, and run into port for repairs. I went to Calais, and after waiting there until I was almost discouraged, I was glad to see one day by learning that a schooner had been cleared for the harbor, and took a pilot and an American vessel, and found, to my joy, that it was an American privateer. It at once offered the captain to ship with him as a common sailor, and as I was an American, he took me at once. On our return I was hurt in an engagement with a British brig, which accounts for my weak condition. But I shall get well if—"

He hesitated, as if somewhat fearful to repeat the thought that had occurred to him, and Mrs. Bruyn quickly replied, "I trust you will get well, about any day, Claude. You are young and of full life should be yours."

"But, my dear Mrs. Bruyn, I would not care to live a moment if the dream of happiness I have cherished should be rudely destroyed. I think it needs no words to tell how truly I love and prize each other. No one else can ever fill her place in my heart. I am alone in the world, without kith or kin; my friends seem to turn to enemies; those whom I trusted with implicit faith have proven false and tried to rob me of my inheritance; and if, now, the one dream of happiness that I have cherished above all others is to be ruthlessly shattered, I shall regret that the wound I received on board the Harry did not strike me dead at once."

The young man spoke with much emotion, and his evident suffering and pale, emaciated features, added to the apparent sincerity of his declaration.

"You are sure you speak honestly," Claude asked Mrs. Bruyn.

"As I live, I do," replied the young man, fervently.

"I do not question the truth of your statement," continued the good lady; "but perhaps it is well to have an explanation of a matter that I confess has influenced my opinions to a certain extent. Not many months ago, Mr. Saybrook exhibited a letter from you that seemed to indicate that you had formed connections in Europe, that hardly rendered your present statement of your feelings toward Rosa sincere."

The young man colored, but it was with indignation more than embarrassment.

"Carl Crum has told me," he replied, "of the base use made of a mere phrase in a letter of mine, written in humorous reply to some of Mr. Saybrook's suggestions that I might have become involved in love affairs in Europe. I now see through his double-eyed duplicity and villainy. It was his purpose not only to rob me of my property and of the only girl I have ever cared for, but to incite me to conduct that would destroy in my heart the pure love I cherished. Oh, weak as I am, if I had him here I would make him own his duplicity or take the consequences."

"Do nothing rash, Claude," pleaded Mrs. Bruyn. "Public opinion will come to your aid if you have been wronged. Rely first on the law for justice, and do nothing to prejudice your cause."

"And did you believe that I had so soon proved false and villainous, Rosa?"

he asked, turning impetuously to the fair girl.

"No, indeed, Claude," replied Rosa, with a frank and kindly tone that indicated her perfect confidence in him. "I did not doubt you for a moment, or believe there was anything in the letter that you could not readily explain. Mother can bear me witness in this. Yet where all was so dark and everything seemed conspiring against us, I could not explain your silence of your strange words even to my own mind, so I attempted no defence of you, but kept my belief in your good faith in my own heart."

Claude folded her impetuously to his heart.

"I knew it—I knew it," he exclaimed. "God bless you! The devotion of a lifetime will be no little reward for your faith in me, Rosa."

"Say no more, Claude," answered Mrs. Bruyn, quietly separating the lovers. "I believe in your fidelity and goodness, and see through Mr. Saybrook's evil plans. But much wrong has been done, and it may be hard to right it. It is not advisable to prolong this interview. If you will receive a little advice from me, I will suggest a course that may lead to the evil that has been done being corrected."

"Oh, most gladly," replied the young man.

"Mr. Bruyn is deeply incensed at what he regards as your treachery and wickedness," continued the lady, "and it will be difficult to reverse his opinion. Indeed he looks upon you as hopelessly fallen from good. But although I fear for the result, I am compelled to suggest that you go to him and endeavor to explain all that seems wrong to him in your conduct. He will approve of your resuming your friendship with Rosa unless you disagree with his mind of the impression he has formed no doubt chiefly through Mr. Saybrook's influence. It would be wrong for Rosa to disobey him and for communication with you clandestinely in any way. I could not approve of such a course, and I cannot believe that she would so forget her duty. I have accordingly necessary there should be an explanation of the whole, to prevent future trouble. So far as you are concerned, my dear Claude, I would willingly admit you to our home as the most welcome of guests and friends, but it is not my province to decide in this matter, and you will have to secure Mr. Bruyn's consent before again attempting to see or communicate with Rosa."

"The young man's head dropped.

"His decision seems hard," he said, "but I am strong in my own sense of duty. I may have been foolish, but I shall never think all can be repaired, and I will trust in Mr. Bruyn's justice and charity."

At this understanding the interview terminated. Claude was allowed to kiss Rosa a farewell kiss and to whisper to her a pledge of his unalterable affection which was returned by a promise that assured him that she could be trusted to the utmost and then hurried away his soul filled anew with indignation toward the author of his unhappiness.

It was early on a day to have an interview with Mr. Bruyn. The old farmer received him curtly, and only after the most earnest pleadings gave his consent to even hear his explanations, but this concession was of no benefit to the young man. The old fellow shut his eyes and his heart to his pleading, and remained obdurate and unyielding in spite of all the earnest pleading and eloquence with which Claude endeavored to conduct.

"No, no," he said at last, "I tell you young fellow that I've made up my mind on this matter. You're none of my kind, and for my Rosa, she must marry a sensible, plain fellow with a rattling brain notions about him. You don't care for her, and she's made up her mind to some one else. It will do me trouble for you to go to spark her again. I was a fool to allow it in the first place. Now, don't say anything more. I've had enough of it. You can never have her—let that end. It is as good as a clubbing with me. If you can't take the first and stay away from her, you may get the second to help you understand."

Thus insultingly rebuffed, Claude turned away, and returned to his temporary home at old Carl Crum's utterly disappointed and miserable, and meditating a dozen expedients in his mind to restore his relations with Rosa.

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"But what are we to do?" demanded Ralph.

"I don't know yet, Ralph. I must think. I must think. We can run away, I suppose."

"What, and give up everything, without a single manly blow? I would rather do anything than that. How do we know but that, by making a good fight, there is hope for us yet?"

"No, no, Ralph, my spirit is hopeful—the hopeful generally, but it is impatient to do anything but to prison. They can send me to prison. It's a criminal offence. Halstead's too sharp not to see the point he has set against me. He'll institute a criminal suit—see if he don't."

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"So would I, Ralph. But we won't have to. You are not really concerned in this, and the responsibility cannot be made to lie against you. Matters may be arranged so that you will be all right. In fact, if I was to abscond and allow the suit already begun to go against me by default, I think that would be the end of the matter. All my property would be put in your hands and disposed of at your leisure, and we could make a new start in some other section. It's a hard choice, but I am not disposed to stand the chances of ending up my days in a penitentiary."

Disgusted and disappointed as Ralph was at the total collapse of the plans that had promised such brilliant fortune, he was unable to combat his father's fears successfully. At times the lawyer would show a temporary return of spirit, but it would be quickly succeeded by a new fit of depression. In fact, Anthony Saybrook was like many a keen rogue, bold to plot and execute so long as success smiled on him, but easily worried and frightened under misfortune. Convinced that the lawyer Claude had secured to press his suit was skillful and determined, and held hold of very dangerous testimony against him, he had no heart to await the issue, which he felt sure Claude was in a mood to push to the utmost extremity.

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Finally the day arrived when the great suit of Rolff vs. Saybrook was to be opened. There was much public excitement over it, and the courtroom was thronged. But, when the case was called there was no response from the defence. Inquiry was made, and it was found that Ralph Saybrook was at home; but he stated that his father had saddled his horse and ridden from town the previous night and had not returned. He did not know where he had gone or how soon he would return. For himself, he could only say that the management of the estate was entirely in his father's hands; he knew little or nothing of the matter; and he was not prepared to put in any answer till his father's return.

The case was postponed, but, as days passed by, and Anthony Saybrook did not reappear, it became evident that he had run away to escape the consequences of his crooked acts, and so judgment went against him by default.

Ralph Saybrook had not been sued jointly with his father, as suggested by Claude's lawyers, for the reason that the young man considered the father the instigator and manager of the

whole scheme of fraud, and possessed too fine a sense of honor to allow it to be said of him that he desired to injure anybody out of mere spirit of jealousy. Having asserted his right to his patrimony, and secured a reversal of all the wrong attempted against him, he was not disposed to be revengeful. His hat was washed, and in its place, came a dull spatin and melancholy. He had succeeded—but to what purpose? He abused himself to make another appeal to farmer Bruyn; but only to be rudely rebuffed. The old man was of too obstinate a nature to yield easily in a matter where he had committed him self so strongly and Claude made the mistake of showing too great eagerness, and going to him before the disgust and disappointment at the failure of the schemes he had set such great store by had worn off. Farmer Bruyn did not lack in a certain course kind of conscientiousness. He had really trusted and flattered himself that his efforts to control Rosa's future had been actuated by a fatherly regard for her welfare. Though surprised and astounded by the absconding of Anthony Saybrook, the flight of that individual and the consequent derangement of the plans he had cherished, he was too honest not to see that these events did not the least affect the opinion he had held of Claude. To change his attitude now was to convict himself of hasty and unreasonable judgment, and to lay himself open to the suspicion of being wrong-headed old fellow was not in the least disposed to make such admissions, and, as has been stated, rebuffed Claude's approaches with even more than his former coarseness.

[To be continued.]

CHAPTER XXVIII.

An embarrassing silence followed Claude Rolff's abrupt and unexpected appearance in lawyer Saybrook's office. Claude was the first to break the spell that his presence seemed to have produced.

"With your permission, I will take a chair," he said. "I have travelled far, and am not well."

"Oh, certainly, certainly," replied the lawyer, rousing himself with an effort.

Claude sat down in a chair near the door.

Ralph meanwhile was beating a tattoo with his fingers on the desk near which he had taken his seat, while he eyed Claude with a scowling and rather rueful countenance.

The lawyer had apparently sank back into the stupor of surprise which Claude's first entrance had caused him; but, in fact, all his wits were at work in considering how to meet this unexpected emergency.

Claude saw that it was necessary for him to open the conversation.

"An opportunity being offered me to return home on a privateer," he said, "I thought it well to embrace it as I felt keenly the pang of being separated from my native land in the hour of her peril. I was hurt in an engagement with an enemy's vessel on our return voyage, and am probably in no condition to transact much business—still, there are some matters which I deem it important to seek the earliest possible explanation of."

"Oh, of course," replied the lawyer, smiling from habit, but still speaking in rather an embarrassed way. "M-m-m—yes—happy to explain anything. Very agreeable surprise my dear sir, wasn't expecting your return. I—m-m—m—I—in fact, I'm very agreeably surprised. I—I—by the way, won't you allow me, my dear young sir, under the happy circumstances, to set out a little wine, and drink to your safe return before proceeding to any business."

The lawyer arose, and bustled with a hospitable air that enabled him to conceal his embarrassment.

"No, no, I thank you," responded Claude, to his invitation. "I shall be obliged to decline, as I am disposed to be a little feverish, and I am afraid any stimulant would be bad for me. Pray don't trouble yourself, Mr. Saybrook."

But the lawyer, nevertheless, brought out bottle and glasses, and poured out three bumpers, offering Claude one, which he again declined. The father and son tossed their glasses off, however, and the former resumed his seat, having recovered in a measure his usual collected and was determined.

Claude, after waiting a moment, said, "I will state at once, frankly, Mr. Saybrook, that I do not come in in a very friendly mood. Some very strange rumors have come to my ears, which hardly seem credible, it is true, but which certainly justify me in demanding an explanation. If true, they brand you with treachery and fraud in the conduct of my business. Of course, I have held my own judgment on the matter in suspense until giving you an opportunity to explain. I trust you will be able to clear up all my doubts satisfactorily."

"To what do you refer?" inquired the lawyer, in bland tones that indicated that he had entirely regained his self-possession.

"I refer," responded Claude, "to the statements current here in this village that you have taken possession of Rolff House and a portion of the adjoining property under authority of deeds purporting to be given by me. I need not remind you that I gave no such deeds, and that there is no possible chance for there to be any misunderstanding on the point that it was my wish, most distinctly expressed, to place no incumbrance whatever on Rolff House, or any of the homestead property, or to impair my possession of it in any way. You probably can inform me whether the rumors I have heard are true."

"Well, really, my dear sir," replied the lawyer, rubbing his hands and smiling as pleasantly as possible, "I do not exactly comprehend your meaning. You are aware, of course, that a number of papers were drawn and signed by you, intended to secure me for money loaned you; some of which moneys I was forced to borrow. Among these securities were certainly two deeds which received your signature in due form, and are properly witnessed, and which I have doubtless treated somewhat differently from what you expect, owing to the fact that I supposed circumstances had rendered your return home for a series of years exceedingly problematical. These deeds were intended, of course, to give collateral security, and I have had any idea of them, until the outbreak of war forced your return uncertain and the possibility of securing anybody to receive a loan rendered it necessary for some

disposition of the property. Under the circumstances, I placed the deed on record, and am originally the owner of the property in question, but of course I consider myself bound as a man of honor to keep the matter open for a satisfactory adjustment if we can come to amicable terms."

"I confess I do not understand you," replied Claude. "I wish to state, with the utmost distinctness, that I signed no deeds by way of collateral security or for any other purpose, and that if any such deed are in existence they are fraudulent. My instructions were explicit, and our understanding complete, that there was to be no mortgage, incumbrance or obligation whatever relating to Rolff House."

"Ah, my dear young friend," replied the lawyer, still maintaining his smiling and insinuating mien, "I was more than half suspicious at the time of our business arrangements that you did not fully understand all the details we entered into. You left all the arrangements pretty much in my hands, and expressed your willingness to be governed by my judgment—in fact, I thought you were far too careless of your interests. Of course, left to act almost entirely on my own judgment, I drew up such papers as I considered wise and necessary in the premises, and you signed them. I am quite confident you did not critically examine all the papers you signed. It is well, perhaps, for you to remember this fact, before proclaiming any papers that may be in existence fraudulent. It might be difficult for you to disprove your own signature."

"What I mean," replied Claude, "is that I expressly informed you that Rolff House was not to be included in any of the transactions, and you could not have mistaken me in the matter. If you took advantage of my confidence in you to disobey my instructions and deceive me in the nature of the papers drawn up, it places your conduct in an equally bad light. The fraud is not less for being a cunning instead of a bold one. Now, sir, I wish only to be informed if you claim to have deeds covering Rolff House and the adjoining estate."

"I do, most certainly," replied the lawyer. "And I will add that they are regularly drawn, and duly signed and witnessed. Still, as said—"

"That is enough," replied Claude, flushing with indignation. "I do not feel able to-day to discuss this matter further. You will next hear from me, most probably, through my counsel."

"You mean war?" asked the lawyer.

"I do—if it is necessary to assert my rights."

"Before proceeding to extreme measures, it might be well to more fully understand your position," said the lawyer.

Claude did not reply. Making a low bow, he withdrew.

Lawyer Saybrook rubbed his hands in a self-satisfied manner as he turned to Ralph, and said:

"I fancy I bluffed him pretty neatly, Ralph."

"Yes, very nicely," drawled the son.

"We have got to fight this out, Ralph," continued the lawyer, "that is, unless we can intimidate the young fool and come to a satisfactory arrangement."

"Exactly," responded Ralph.

"He can't bother us much. I am satisfied of it," continued the lawyer; "still, his coming now is very awkward for us. I am particularly concerned on account of your relations with Rosa. I am afraid it will have a bad influence on the girl. Still, we must not give up the battle yet. Our case, I maintain, is not desperate."

"I should hope not," responded Ralph.

"I am too much interested in the young lady to be willing to give her up. I would prefer to resort to the most extreme measures rather than give her up."

"So we will, Ralph, so we will," replied the father. "Leave that to me. The longest head is bound to win. We will see who has got it."

CHAPTER XXIX.

It was the third day after his arrival home before Claude made any effort to see Rosa. He well understood the nature of old farmer Bruyn's feelings toward him, as he had been fully informed of the situation in Rosa's letter and from old Carl's statements since his return.

Claude had arrived home in the evening, having come by stage to a neighboring town, and then, in his anxiety to reach home, taken to the saddle from there. He went at once to the humble domicile occupied by Carl Crum, and was heartily greeted by that worthy old fellow. After a good night's rest, he had spent the morning in hearing from

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CHAPTER XXX.

Recognizing that he had a hard battle before him, Claude devoted himself heart and soul to the contest he had in hand. The thought of regaining his property, and taking revenge on the knavish lawyer, was some relief to his wounded feelings. There was balm in action, at least, and day and night he gave his time and thoughts to consultation with his lawyer and to details of those on such legal talent as the little village afforded. He retained the services of an experienced and prominent lawyer from a neighboring town, who undertook to unravel the thread of villainy, which he was convinced from Claude's statements had been perpetrated by Anthony Saybrook.

The name of this lawyer was Halstead. He was a short, keen, cool man whose sharp gray eyes and broad brow indicated unusual mental acuteness. After a careful study of the situation, Mr. Halstead decided on his plan of campaign.

He determined that it was necessary to undermine the enemy's defences by counter-plots, and, if possible, to create a defection in his camp that would lead to a revelation of the methods by which the forgery of the deeds had been accomplished. Choosing his agents with keen judgment, he sounded every person who had in any way been employed by lawyer Saybrook, and was not long in getting a hint that the widow Grey would become a valuable witness if she was won over to their service. And this was no difficult matter. Lawyer Halstead, it happened, was a bachelor of considerable wealth. Though verging close on to sixty, he was still well preserved, and of a gallant and vivacious disposition not unlikely to impress the fancy of a susceptible and lonely widow like Mrs. Grey.

Interviews were arranged, in which, little by little, the confidence of Mrs. Grey was gained, and step by step she was won from her every detail of the plot for the possession of Rolff House, which her sharp ears and eyes had enabled her to obtain, in spite of

the secrecy with which the lawyer and his confederates had conducted.

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