

# FATHER AND SON:

A Tale of Country Life.

BY R. B. MOOR.

"I was not thinking of that, Mr. Gerard." He feels the rebuke in the grave tone, resolved though he is—or has been—to think the worst of all the Thirkelds. "I was not thinking of anything in particular," she goes on, "except that to part under a binding agreement never to meet again would be the worst way—the hardest way—of parting. I have already accustomed myself to the idea that there must be a parting."

"Humph!" He held her eyes for awhile with some expression besides a critical one in his keen contemplative gaze. After a prolonged pause he begins again. "And, suppose the money paid, and yourselves in the same position as before this affair—for I shouldn't relent, I shouldn't give Tolver a penny, or help him by a word—you'd find your parting real enough! Supposing all this, how are you all going on—what are you going to do with that boy? And, when your mother falls ill again, or—"

"Pray, Mr. Gerard, don't bring all this before me!" The girl is half sobbing again at the catalogue of troubles he thus coolly enumerates, not without that ill-concealed relish which has added to her distress more than once already. "Haven't I enough now, without thinking of the future? And yet I can't help thinking of it, though we are told to let the morrow provide for itself. But it is hard sometimes to trust and to believe, when things get worse instead of better day by day!" She is speaking to herself now, more than to him. "Heaven knows I struggle for faith, and try—and try—"

"All very well to say your prayers, my girl," interposes the farmer, with a cheerfulness that contrasts strongly with her broken, half-despairing tones, "and quite right, too; but, meanwhile, that boy of yours is going to ruin! You yourself acknowledge it."

"What can we do?"

"Your mother works too hard, and doesn't have the food and things she's always been used to. I don't see how you can expect to keep her long on those terms."

There is a sorrowful gesture of assent from the slight figure beside the horse.

"You yourself—you're pale and pinning and low-spirited, all from not having enough to eat. If you were to be laid up, it would be a nice thing for them, wouldn't it? How would they pay the doctor's bill, and get you all the things he would order, without even the usual money coming in, since you would be unable to do your share of the work?"

"Mr. Gerard, what is the use of all this—"

"It's for your good, my girl. I'm laying your position plainly before you, for this is what it must come to in the end, even if you do manage to go on for a few more years; and this, without speaking of the boy, who must be put out in the world soon, unless he is to be a tramp, or, at best, a farmer's laborer. A well-grown boy he is too, and could work, I should say; pity he shouldn't have a chance."

"I know it, Mr. Gerard—I know it all; but can I help it?"

"Yes, you can."

Then, while she is gazing at him in wonder at his reply, he leisurely gets off his horse—her astonishment increasing to positive fear as he does so—and, holding the bridle, advances toward her. "You can stop it all—you can provide for your mother and brother, and live at ease yourself, by saying one word."

"Mr. Gerard!"—drawing back in dismay.

"Be my wife. You're not what I thought you, and it isn't any woman I can fancy; but I like your spirit and your face, and your sticking by your own people; and I'll marry you before this month is out if you'll say the word."

"Mr. Gerard, pray stop! It is preposterous! I could not think of such a thing!"

"Hoity-toity! What's there for you to turn so white about? I'm not an ogre, am I? And you needn't run away from me; I shan't eat you—even if you don't have me! But, if you've got any common sense, you'll see, when you come to think about it, that it's about the best thing you can do. No—I won't have an answer now"—as she again attempts an indignant rejection of her suitor—"you go home and speak to your mother about it. Tell her my offer in full—you to be my wife and have the best of everything, and get some flesh on your bones and color into your cheeks, I hope; she, to live with us; no more work for either of you beyond keeping my house and overseeing it; the boy to have two years' schooling; I sent Tolver to—and, after that, to come home and be trained for a thorough farmer and be given a good start."

"Mr. Gerard—"

"Now, there's an answer to those prayers of yours. You want to save your brother—that will be the making of him. You are worrying about your mother's being overworked and half starved—in my house she'll live on the fat of the land. Plenty of cream and new-laid eggs and port wine would soon make another woman of her—not to speak of yourself!"

"He is awful—Eve knows it—in thus emphasizing the wants of her family and his own power to relieve them; but there is no exaggeration in what he says. She would probably save her mother's life; she would—humanly speaking—probably save her brother's soul by accepting his offer. But her suit and Tolver's! Their love and their planned-out life together! She puts on her hand blindly as if to ward off

his new aspirant for her favor. How horribly unnatural to marry the father of the man she loves! Could any one ask it of her save that cold, selfish, bluff-faced man who is thus using her need as his opportunity first in one way, then in another? Yes, she knows there is one other who would ask it of her—her mother, her childish little mother who, with that curious want of ballast

in her disposition, has ever been unable to understand the sacredness of an attachment. She has encouraged Eve's engagement to Tolver Gerard because it seemed a step forward on the road to good fortune, and has more than once spoken as a matter of course of her giving him up should any one more eligible or less trammelled by the wishes of a parent appear on the scene. Eve had given it up at last, contenting herself with the consciousness of the perfect trust between herself and Tolver. And now—

"Oh, I can't—I can't!" she cries out, unable to stand against the sudden rush of resolution and misery that assails her heart.

"To home, there's a good girl, the farmer exhorts her soothingly, and listen to what your mother says. She'll know best."

"Oh, don't ask me, Mr. Gerard, don't ask me!"

Very well, I'll take back what I've said, if you decide it so. There shall be an end of it—nobody need be the wiser—and things can take their course, if you choose it."

But that last clause contains a menace that Eve dares not disregard, ready though she may be to despise the power that constrains her.

Well, now is it to be? The deep voice breaks in upon her painful absorption of thought in tones of cheerful encouragement. "Come, you're a sensible girl. Shall I come up to your mother's this afternoon, and hear what you both think about it then?"

"Come, if you like," she answers slowly, after a long pause, "but you must not understand that to mean that I have consented."

"No, no! Bless your heart, don't look like that!"

"I can't think now, and I dare not refuse without thinking, and I don't feel as if I could ever consent. So—"

"You'll feel better when you've had it all out with your mother. There, run home, and I'll be up this afternoon. Shake hands, won't you? I can tell you, that pretty face of yours."

But Eve is gone before he can finish his compliment. He could hardly have taken more certain means of driving her away. He stands looking after her for awhile in half-amused perplexity, and at last gets on to his horse and trots comfortably home, while Eve flies up hill and down hill, never stopping or slackening until she reaches the rose-covered cottage, in the porch of which she parted with Tolver but yesterday, in that little lover's comb which was to have been delightfully made up to-day at their meeting in the cups.

## Chapter III

"I shall endeavor to do my duty toward you in every respect, Mr. Gerard, but I can say no more."

Thus spoke Eve, standing up pale but proud in the little cottage parlor before the sunburned yeoman, while in the background hovers her mother in mingled agitation and delight. The sacrifice has been made, the victim has been coated and caressed and kissed and harried into acquiescence, and the date of the execution has even been noted; but she winced so at the bare mention of it that the subject was left for the present. Perhaps they were afraid of driving her to desperation, the farmer, at any rate. Mrs. Thirkeld can see nothing but good fortune in the whole affair.

"Time enough yet, my lass," Mr. Gerard answers Eve now. "I shall never ask too much of you."

"No, that I'm sure you won't," puts in the widow, nodding her head sagaciously at him. "Eve is not of an ungrateful disposition, Mr. Gerard, only she's a little put about just now."

"No, indeed, Eve! And you need not feel humiliated; he did not seem to look at it in that light at all. I think he rather liked you the better for coming to him to plead for your poor mother and brother. And—oh, my dear, perhaps you'll think me greedy—I don't mean it so—but it will be nice to have cream in one's tea again, and—"

and other little things that we have had to do without lately!"

The little widow is not without a spark of heroism; she will not count up their privations before her daughter, who has struggled the hardest of all of them. Eve's heart grows warm again. It lay like a stone within her breast while her mother prattled of Tolver's probable feelings, and the farmer's good looks, and her own attractions, which brought this upon her head. But the last speech brings back to her bewildered mind the cause of her sacrifice—a mother's need and weakness—surely a most sacred obligation and incentive for any self-denial!

She turns round and puts her arms tenderly about the little figure, protector-wise.

"Mother, I do believe you often haven't had enough to eat. You've pretended, so that Sam and I might have more."

The tears begin to run down Mrs. Thirkeld's cheeks. Eve, with eyes opened wider than usual by the farmer's warning, remembers that her mother never used to cry so easily when first their troubles came, and sees in it a sign of growing weakness.

"Perhaps you think it hard of me—perhaps you wonder at me that I'll stand in my son's place, but old men have their feelings and fancies as well as young ones and I'm not an old man either."

"I scarcely know what I think about anything yet," she replies, after a pause. "But you do not stand in your son's place, Mr. Gerard. No one could ever do that."

She is angry with herself the next moment for her speech. It is of no use to vex and defy him, if she is going to accept his favors and save her dear ones through him. It is yes, it is even grateful, though she finds it hard to allow that. Since she has accepted him, she at least owes him civility. The farmer never has occasion to complain after that. He does not complain now, he takes the snub very good humoredly, though he is hardly the man to stand much of that kind of thing.

"Well, good night, my lass," he says, lightly enough, when they reach the door, and holds out his hand.

Eve sees that he has no intention of anything sentimental and is relieved. "Good night," she returns, resting her slender fingers to his powerful grasp. It is broad daylight with the song of birds and the buzz of insects and innumerable sounds of life all about them. She need not have feared.

He looks at her for a moment seemingly as if he were about to say something further, but perhaps the expression of her face discourages him or his own rough tact whispers to him to let well alone, for he slowly releases her hand, touches his hat, country fashion and takes his departure without another word.

On returning to the house is met on the threshold by her mother.

"Oh, Eve, my darling, how happy you have made us! You have saved us all! This is comfort indeed! Balm to the bleeding heart, but Mrs. Thirkeld goes on. And such a fine, handsome man as he is too. It isn't as if there would be anything unpleasant to put up with. He'll make a husband to be proud of!"

Eve puts away her caressing arms and walks into the little parlor, whose window looks away from the glowing west. It is a little dim in there already, and if her mother does follow her in, she will not see her face so well. Mrs. Thirkeld follows her as a matter of course.

"Just fancy you and me up at Fairfield! Eve and dear Sam at school, and everything just as we would have chosen it, if we could!"

"I hope you will be very happy, mother."

"Indeed I shall be, when I see you a looking a little brighter over it! I hope you're not fretting over Tolver, Eve. He'll be angry at first, no doubt; but young men soon get over things, and he will understand—"

"We won't talk about that, mother. Of course, I shall explain to him. I owe him so much."

"Couldn't you write?" suggests the widow, in some apparent anxiety to prevent a meeting.

"Perhaps, I shall see."

"It's a mercy you favored me and not your father, or this would never have happened," the widow goes on. "He was quite struck with your pretty face, Eve, and your way of speaking; he was telling me so while you were getting tea ready. He hardly knew you by sight before until you stood there on the road and begged him to wait for the money. Oh, weren't you frightened, Eve? What a brave girl you were to do it!"

"Mother, don't let us talk about it! I hate myself for doing it; but I was desperate—I could see no way out of it—and I little thought what it would lead to!"

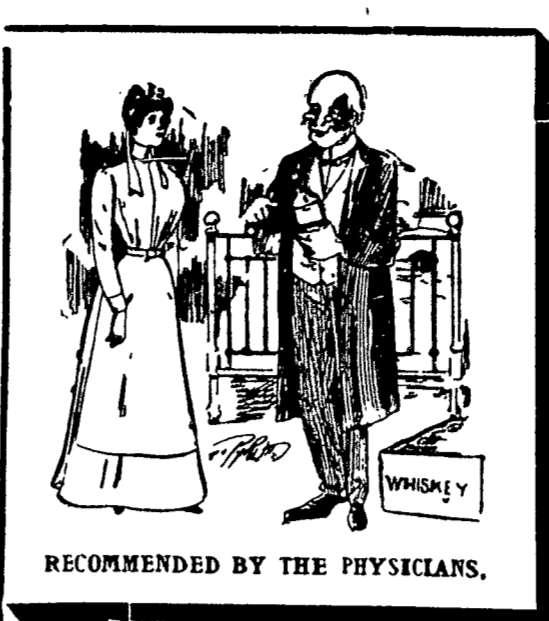
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saw it many a time—but what could I do?"

"Nothing, dear mother, of course, and it's all over now."

But will she ever rise from the bounteous table at Fairfield as she has done from their plain cottage fare, when, with hunger but half satisfied, she went out of the door and into the sunshine to meet her young lover and forget all want and sorrow in the clasp of his arms and the touch of his lips? It is over now. The widow's prattle, as delighted as that of a child telling a new tale, breaks in upon her sorrowful musings.

"You don't know it all yet, Eve, unless he found time to tell you as you went down to the gate; and I don't see how he could, I'm sure! Besides, he wouldn't speak to you about such things at all; he has very nice feelings."

"What do you mean, mother? What are you talking about?"

"Of course he hopes it won't be very long before we go there to live, only he wouldn't say any more about it to-day; and I wish you had not seemed so unwilling, my dear child, after he had shown himself so generous. Meanwhile there are preparations to make—your things to get ready and a few for me, too, for I haven't a dress (that the servants at Fairfield wouldn't turn up their noses at; and he says we are to take our capital—the \$2,500, you know—and use it for our expenses and draw on him if it isn't enough. He says Sam shall be no loser by it."

"But a tenth part of it will be more than enough for all such wants," Eve breaks in in some intolerance of the farmer's magnanimity.

"Of course, dear, of course; you need not look so scornful. Of course, I shouldn't think of drawing on him. But he meant no harm; he was thinking of the household expenses as well. For he says we must not go on like this; he wants to see us looking better before the wedding"—with another glance into the now half-averted face. "He wants us to have everything comfortable and I should like to, dear Eve, now we are no longer compelled to deprive ourselves of everything. The money will last any reasonable time, and I suppose you won't keep him waiting very long."

"Very well, mother, dear; we will be 'comfortable' as you say," Eve assents, after a long pause full of painful thought. "It won't cost—I shall not want many things; I am not fond of dress."

"But I am, then," declares the widow, with a pretty little show of girlish vanity; "and I shall see that you have some pretty things. Of course, I shan't leave off my mourning"—daring a glance of inquiry at the unresponsive face above her own. "I shall want a new black dress or two"—her manner

suddenly subdued after that glance—"but you must have a good many things. We mustn't seem to slight a rich man like Farmer Gerard."

"Oh, he won't know whether I have two dresses or twenty!" Eve assures her mother with small consideration for him.

"Men know when their wives look nice, my dear, and when they don't, though they may not be able to tell what they have on. Your poor father used to say to me, 'Lulu—'"

But the entry of Sam diverts Mrs. Thirkeld's thoughts and flow of conversation. Eve escapes to her own room, leaving her to soo her boy and his suddenly-brightened prospects.

## Chapter IV

"Why didn't you meet me yesterday, Eve, as you promised? I waited an hour and a half at Crab-Tree Corner."

Another long glorious June day has flown by; the sun has sunk behind the hills, and twilight is darkening the hollows as young Tolver Gerard meets Eve Thirkeld in the summer lane between banks of odorous hawthorn and pink-tipped wild apple-blossom.

"I could not," Eve tells him; "I was prevented. I—I thought perhaps you would come up later on. I looked out of my window for a long time."

"I did think of it; but—well, I suppose I was a little surly since saying 'Good-bye' that morning, so I found a good excuse in the hay; and really, we've been hard at it—there's such a heavy crop, and every sign that the weather will change soon. But I suppose I could have come up after nine o'clock, as I have done to-night, in reply to your note. You are a darling, Eve, to give way first and send to me; but I couldn't have held out; I must have come up to night, with your note or without it. I can't live without you, Eve!"

"Oh, hush, Tolver; don't say that!"

"Not say it? Why, I should think it is that you would have me say and feel too if you love me as you have told me you do!"

His arm steals about her waist. She does not put it away; it will drop soon enough of its own accord. She looks up into his face, quite distinct in the June twilight.

"Dear Tolver!" The words escaped her, yearningly, despairingly, before she bethinks herself to restrain them.

"Dear Tolver, no! I mustn't let you: Oh, I love you, I am so sorry to make you miserable to night! You can't be more miserable than I am, though!"

"You don't mean it seriously, Eve?"

He takes slight alarm, looking anxiously into her face. "What is the matter?"

"Your father has said nothing to you?"

"No—nothing. Then it's about that affair? Oh, now you're not going to be silly about that, darling! Directly I got your note, of course I concluded you were going to be sensible—that your mother had brought you round, and that there was to be no more bother about that wretched money."

"Oh, Tolver, it's far worse than that!" She has succeeded in rousing his apprehension at last; he even pales a little at her emphatic words.

"Eve, you don't mean it! But his manner is changed, cheerfully incredulous though he strives to appear. 'You're brooding over that wretched idea of yours that it's your duty to give me up, when I tell you I can't live at all without you!'"

"Dear Tolver, I can't bear to tell you!" she falters. "You must learn to live without me, and I—I must live without you! Oh, it is hard to tell you! I wish—I wish your father had—and yet—no—I could not bear that!"

"Eve, what on earth is the matter? Don't keep me in this suspense if you care anything about me; I could stand anything better than that!"

"I can't marry you, Tolver, now or ever! I have got to marry some one else!" Now that she has reached the point she is suddenly calm.

"Who is that? Why, I evidently seem to credit such a tale, for he only clasps her more tightly."

"Your father?"

"My father?"

His arm drops, as she foretold to herself, not quickly, in anger or disgust, but slowly, as though those two words had taken away all his strength. He gazes at her helplessly for a while. She turns away her face and clenches her hands. Oh, how desolate she feels already!

"My father!" he says again.

(To be continued.)

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