

Old Man's ---:-- Darling.

BY MRS. ALEX. McVEIGH MILLER,

AUTHOR OF "QUEENIE'S TERRIBLE SECRET," "JACQUELINE," ETC.

CHAPTER X—Continued.

Whatever Felise might have replied to this was interrupted by the entrance of Lucy, Bonnibel's maid. A broad smile lighted her comely, good-natured features at the sight of the visitor.

"For you, miss," said she, going up to Bonnibel and putting in her hand a small volume of splendidly-bound poems and a rare hot-house bouquet, whose fragrance filled the room, and turning to Miss Hebert, she added: "Colonel Carlyle is waiting in the drawing-room, Miss Hebert."

Felise made no answer to the maid. She swept forward and looked at the flowers in Bonnibel's hand.

It was a lovely bouquet, composed almost entirely of white flowers. A lily filled the centre, surrounded by exquisite rosebuds and waxen tube-roses and azalias. The border of the lovely floral tribute was a delicate fringe of blue forget-me-nots. On a small white card depending from the bouquet was written these words:

"Miss Vere, with the compliments of the day from her father's friend."

"Her father's friend," said Felise, reading it aloud. "That must mean Colonel Carlyle."

"I suppose so," said Bonnibel, simply. "He is very kind to remember me to-day. You will thank him for me, Felise."

"Certainly," Felise answered.

She took up the book—a handsome copy of one of the modern poets—and glanced rapidly through it, but found no writing or underscoring within it, as her jealous fancy had expected.

"I must go," she said, putting it down and trailing her silken skirts hurriedly from the room.

Lucy looked after her with a smile. She, in common with all the domestics, hated the overbearing Felise, and it pleased her to see what her innocent young mistress never dreamed of—that Mrs. Arnold's daughter was furiously jealous and angry because of her suitor's tribute to Bonnibel.

The colonel's tribute to Miss Hebert was a much more pretentious one than that which had been the cause of arousing her jealousy up-stairs. He brought her a bracelet of gold, set with glowing rubies, and a bouquet that was a perfect triumph of the floral art. Its central flower was a white japonica, and sprigs of scarlet salvia blazed around it; but Felise remembered the modest white lily up-stairs, with its suggestive circle of forget-me-nots, and her eyes blazed with scarcely concealed anger as she thanked the colonel for his gifts.

Colonel Carlyle was in brilliant spirits to-day. Always a fine talker, he surpassed himself on this occasion, and the guests exchanged significant glances, thinking that surely he had proposed to Miss Hebert and had been accepted, for she, too, appeared more fascinating than usual and exerted herself to please her elderly suitor. She had laid aside the more cumbersome appendages of mourning, such as crape and bombazine, and appeared in a handsome black silk, with filmy white laces at throat and wrists. A single spray of the scarlet salvia, carelessly broken and fastened in her dark hair, brightened her whole appearance, and made her creamy, olive complexion beautiful by the contrast. She was looking her best, as she wanted to do, for she felt that she was about to lose her slight hold upon the millionaire's heart, and she meant to do her best to win back her lost ground.

Alas for Felise's prospects! A pair of tearful, violet eyes, a little, white face, a quivering baby mouth, drawn with pain, had totally obscured the image of her bright, dark beauty in the colonel's heart. He was as foolishly in love with Bonnibel's dainty loveliness as any boy of twenty, and through all his brilliant talk to-day his heart was bounding with the thought of her, and he was revolving plans in his mind to free himself from what had almost become an entanglement with Miss Hebert, that he might spread his net to catch the beautiful little white dove that had fluttered across his path.

"Miss Vere is better, I trust," he found courage to ask of Mrs. Arnold before he left that evening. His guilty conscience made him shrink from asking Felise even that simple question. He knew that he had paid her sufficient attention to warrant her in expecting a proposal, and now he began to feel just a little afraid of the flash of her great dark eyes.

"She is better," Mrs. Arnold answered, coldly; "but not able to leave her sofa. Doctor Graham thinks it will be several weeks before she is well."

"So," the enamored colonel thought to himself, "it will be several weeks before I can see her again. That seems like an eternity."

CHAPTER XI.

"Italia, oh, Italia, thou who hast

The fat's gift of beauty; which became a funeral dower of present woes and past."

repeated the voice of a young man leaning from an upper window, and looking down upon the antique streets of famous Rome.

"I think you have more taste for poetry than painting, Carl," said a second voice.

The scene is an artist's studio, up four flights of stairs, and very near the sky. A large skylight gives admission to the clear and radiant light, and the windows are open for the soft breeze to enter the room, though it is the month of December in that fair Italian clime, where it is always summer. Pictures and palettes, statuettes and bronzes adorn the walls, and somewhat litter the room, and its only two occupants wear artists' blouses, though one of the wearers sits idly at the window gazing down into the street. He is blonde and stout, with gay blue eyes, and is unmistakably German, while his darker companion, who is busily painting away at a picture, is just as certainly an American. They both bear their nationalities plainly in their faces.

"Poetry and painting are sister arts, I think," said Carl Muller, laughing. "The poets paint with words as we do with colors. They have the advantage of us poor devils, for their word-paintings remain beautiful forever, while our ochres crack and our crimson fade."

"You should turn poet, then, Carl."

"I had some thought of it once," said the mercurial Carl, laughing, "but upon making trial of my powers, I found that I lacked the divine afflatus."

"Say rather that you lacked the more prosaic attribute that you lack in painting—industry," said the American.

"Whatever failing I may have in this respect is fully atoned for by you, Leslie. Never saw I a poor dauber so deeply wedded to his art. Your perseverance is simply marvelous."

"It is the only way to conquer fame, Carl. There is no royal road to success," said the artist, painting busily away as he talked.

Carl yawned lazily and repeated Beatrice's well-known lines.

"Ah! who can tell how hard it is to climb, The steep where Fame's proud temple shines afar; Ah! who can tell how many a soul sublime,

Has felt the influence of malignant star, And waged with fortune an eternal war!"

"The 'malignant star' in your case means idleness, Carl. You have talent enough if you would but apply yourself. Up, up, man, and get to your work."

"It is impossible to conquer my constitutional inertia this evening, Leslie. Tomorrow I will vie with you in perseverance and labor like a galley-slave," laughed the German, stretching his lazy length out of the window.

There was silence a few moments. Carl was absorbed in something going on in the street below—perhaps a street fight between two fiery Italians, or perhaps the more interesting sight of some pretty woman going to mass or confession—while Leslie Dane's brush moved on unweariedly over his task. Evidently it was a labor of love.

"I should like to know where you get your models, Leslie," said Carl Muller, looking back into the room. "You do not have the Italian type of women in your faces. What do you copy from?"

"Memory," said the artist, laconically.

"Do you mean to say that you know a woman anywhere half as beautiful as the women you put on your canvases?"

"I know one so transcendently lovely that the half of her beauty can never be transferred to canvases," said Leslie Dane, while a flush of pride rose over his features.

"In America?" asked Carl.

"In America," answered Leslie.

"Whew!" said the German, comprehensively. "I thought you did not care for women, Mr. Dane."

"I never said so, Carl," said Leslie Dane, smiling.

"I know—but actions speak louder than words. You avoid them, you decline invitations where you are likely to meet them, and the handsome models vote you a perfect bear."

"Because there is but one woman in the whole world to me," answered Leslie Dane, and he paused a moment in his painting, and looked away with a world of tenderness in his large, dark eyes.

Carl Muller began to look interested.

"Ah! now I see why you work so hard," he said. "There is a woman at the bottom of it. There is always a woman at the bottom of everything that goes on in this world whether it be good or evil."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Leslie, resuming his work with a sigh to the memory of the absent girl he loved.

"Love rules the court, the camp, the grove,

For love is heaven, and heaven is love," hummed Carl in his rich tenor voice.

"Leslie, you will accompany me to the fete to-night?" said he, presently.

"Heavens, what a selfish fellow!" said Carl, turning back to the window.

Silence fell between them again. The soft breeze came sighing in at the window ruffling Carl's sunny curls and caressing Leslie Dane's cheek with viewless fingers.

A pot of violets on the window ledge filled the air with delicate perfume. After that evening the scent of violets always came to Leslie Dane wedded to a painful memory.

There was a heavy step at the door. Their portly landlady pushed her head into the room.

"Letters, gentlemen," she said.

Carl Muller sprang up with alacrity.

"All for me, of course," he said. "Nobody ever writes to Dane."

He took the packet and went back to his seat, while his companion, with a smothered sigh, went on with his work. It was quite true that no one ever wrote to him, yet he still kept waiting and hoping for one dear letter that never—never came.

"Ah, by Jove! but I was mistaken," Carl broke out suddenly. "Hurrah, Leslie, here's a love letter from the girl you left behind you."

He held up a little creamy-hued envelope, smooth and thick as satin, addressed in a lady's elegant hand, and Leslie Dane caught it almost rudely from him. Carl gave a significant whistle and returned to his own correspondence.

Leslie Dane tore open the letter so long waited and hoped for, and devoured its contents with passionate impatience. It was very brief. Let us glance over his shoulder and read what was written there:

"LESLIE," she wrote, "your letters have kept coming and coming, and everyone has been like a stab to my heart. I pray you never to write to me again, for I have repented in bitterness of spirit the blind folly into which you led me that night. Oh, how could you do it? I was but a child. I did not know what love meant, and I was bewildered and carried away by your handsome face, and the romance of that moonlight flitting. It was wicked, it was cruel, Leslie, to bind me so, for, oh, God, I love another now, and I never can be his! But at least I will never be yours. I have burned your letters, and I shall hate your memory as long as I live for the cruel wrong you did me. God forgive you, for I never can!"

"BONNIBEL."

Leslie Dane threw that dreadful letter down and ground it beneath his heel as though it had been a deadly serpent. It was, for it had stung him to the heart.

Carl Muller looked up at the strange sound of that grinding boot-heel, and saw his friend standing fixedly staring into vacancy, his dark eyes blazing like coals of fire, his handsome face pallid as death, and set in a tense look of awful despair and bitterness terrible to behold.

Carl Muller sprang up and shook him violently by the arm.

"My God! Leslie," he cried, "what is it? What has happened to move you so? Is there anyone dead?"

The handsome artist did not seem to hear him. He stood immovable save for the horrid crunching of his boot-heel as it ground that fatal letter into fragments.

"Leslie," exclaimed Carl, "speak, for mercy's sake! You cannot imagine how horrible you look!"

Thus adjured Leslie Dane shook off his friend's clasp roughly, and strode across the room to a recess where a veiled picture hung against the wall.

He had always refused to show it to his brother artist, but now he pushed the covering aside, disclosing a female head surrounded by silvery clouds like that of an angel. The face, framed in waving masses of golden hair, was lighted by eyes of tender violet, and radiantly beautiful.

"Look, Carl," said the artist, in a changed and hollow voice, "is not that the face of an angel?"

Carl Muller looked at the lovely face in wonder and delight.

"Beautiful, beautiful!" he exclaimed, "it is the face of a seraph!"

"Yes, it is the face of a seraph," repeated Leslie Dane. "The face of a seraph, but oh, God, she is fickle, faithless, false!" He stood still a moment looking at the fair young face smiling on him in its radiant beauty, then caught up his brush and swept it across the canvass.

One touch, and the tender blue eyes were obliterated, another, and the curved red lips were gone with their loving smile, another and another, and the whole angelic vision was blotted from the canvass forever.

CHAPTER XII.

"No, don't attempt to excuse yourself, mother! If you had taken my advice, and turned your wax doll out upon the world to look out for herself, this would never have happened! But no, you must saddle yourself with the charge of her, and pamper her as foolishly as her uncle did! And now you see the result of your blind folly. It needed but one sight of her baby-face by that old dotard to ruin my prospects for life. I hope you are satisfied with your work!"

It was ten o'clock at night, and Felise Hebert had come into her mother's room in her dressing-gown, with her dark hair hanging over her shoulders, and her eyes

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flashing angrily, to upbraid her mother for her weakness in the matter of Bonnibel Vere.

"You should have turned her adrift upon the world," she repeated, stamping her slippers angrily. "She might have starved to death for all I cared! After all I did for you, I think you could have done that much to please me!"

"But, Felise, you know it was quite impossible to take such extreme measures without incurring the censure of the world, and perhaps its suspicion!" said Mrs. Arnold, deprecatingly.

"Who cares for suspicion—they could not prove anything!" said Felise, snapping her fingers.

"No, perhaps not," Mrs. Arnold answered, "but all the same, I should not like to run the risk. You are blinded by anger, Felise, or you would reason more clearly. You know I did not want to keep the girl here. I hate her as much as you do. I have hated her ever since she was born, but you know I dare not turn her off. Society would taboo us if we dared hint such a thing. Turn a girl of her aristocratic antecedents out upon the world to earn her living, while I am rolling in wealth! A girl who knows no more of the world than a baby! The daughter of General Vere, the niece of my dead husband! Felise, you must see that it would never do!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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The cabinet council at Winnipeg decided to hold the Manitoba provincial elections December 7. Nominations will take place November 30. Premier Greenway will be opposed in Mountain by J. T. Gordon, Conservative, and S. Percival, Independent. Messrs. Cameron, McMillan and McIntyre will run for Winnipeg in the Liberal interests.

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