

Old Man's Darling.

BY MRS. ALEX. McVEIGH MILLER,
AUTHOR OF "QUEENIE'S TERRIBLE SECRET," "JACQUELINE," ETC.

CHAPTER XII—Continued.

"It would if I had been suffered to have my way," answered the girl, marching angrily up and down the floor. "To be thwarted this way in my prospect of making the most brilliant match of the season is too bad! It is shameful! For her to step into my place this way makes me hate her worse than ever!"

"But, Felise, she cannot step into your place, my dear. Did you not tell me you had learned from Leslie Dane's intercepted letters that the girl was secretly married to him? Why did you meddle with their correspondence, anyway? Why not have let him come back in time to claim her? She would then have been out of your way!"

"Mother, you talk like a fool!" exclaimed the daughter, angrily. "You know I dare not let Leslie Dane return here! I am compelled to keep him out of the country for the sake of my own safety. I am compelled to separate the two because he must not hear of the charge of murder that we made against him. If she should hear it, as she is likely to do at any time, and should communicate it to him, what would be the consequence? He would return here and disprove the charge at once. Bonnibel was with him that night. They went to Brandon and were married while your husband was being murdered—put out of the way. He could prove an alibi at once. You talk of suspicion—where would suspicion fall then?"

"Surely not on us, Felise!" said Mrs. Arnold, fearfully.

"And why not?" sneered the girl. "If the now quiescent subject were agitated again what absurd theories might not be propounded by the suspicious world? Who can tell whether Wild Madge could keep the secret? I tell you I have only consulted our vital interests in separating Leslie Dane and Bonnibel Vere, though to do so I have had to destroy my every prospect of becoming the millionaire's wife. I am compelled to keep that beggarly artist out of the county at any cost."

"But, my dear, there is no chance of Bonnibel marrying Colonel Carlyle even though she should be separated forever from her artist-husband, for she is a married woman anyhow. One hint of this to Colonel Carlyle would make your affair all right with him again!"

"It would not," answered Felise, passionately. "He is madly in love with her. Have I not seen it in these few weeks since she has been well enough to come down-stairs? Has not the old fool hung over her as dotingly as any boy-lover could do? Suppose I told him the truth? Do you think he would return to me? No, he would only hate me because I had shattered his brilliant air-castle!"

"I am surprised that Bonnibel tolerates his attentions as she does," said Mrs. Arnold, stirring up the fire that was beginning to burn low in the grate.

"She does not suspect what the old fox is after; I will do her that much justice," said Felise, bitterly. "He is very cautious. He has a thousand tales of her father's prowess with which to pave his way and awaken her interest. She makes an idol of her wretched father who squandered every penny of her mother's fortune, and only redeemed himself by dying recklessly in some foolish charge on the battle-field!"

"She resumed her walk up and down the floor which she had temporarily ceased during the last outburst. She was furiously angry.

Her eyes blazed furiously, her lips were curled back from her glittering teeth, her step seemed to spurn the floor. Her mother watched her uneasily.

"Felise, do not fret yourself, my dear. I am persuaded that everything will come right soon. Suppose Colonel Carlyle is in love with Bonnibel. If he proposes to her she is compelled to refuse his offer. What more natural than that he should return to you then, and make you his wife. Hearts are often caught on the rebound, you know."

"Mother, hush! You talk like a simoniac! You are!" was the fierce retort.

Mrs. Arnold was stung to anger by the unprovoked insolence of her daughter. She rose and looked at her in dignified displeasure.

"Felise," she said, threateningly, "you are my daughter, but you must not suppose that I will tamely bear the continued disrespect and contumely I have lately been forced to receive at your hands. In your rage at losing Colonel Carlyle you seem to forget that it is in my power to make you almost as wealthy as he could do. Remember, I am a very rich woman, and I can leave my wealth to whom I please."

his big wax-doll. The balance of his money was for her, to make her a queen and win the homage of the world for her. Perhaps you will leave her the money I have risked so much to gain for you?"

"Felise, this is but idle recrimination. You know I would not leave Bonnibel Vere a penny to save her soul from perdition, and you know I have been scheming all my life to get that money for you, and that I will certainly give it to you. But I do not understand your mood tonight. What is it that you wish me to do?"

"Nothing, nothing! Months ago I begged you to send the girl away and you refused me. You knew I hated her, and you knew I spared nothing that came in my way. She has come between me and my dearest ambition. Now let her look to herself. I tell you, mother, I will take a terrible revenge on Bonnibel Vere for what I have lost. I have sworn it, and I will surely keep my vow!"

She stood still a moment with upraised hands, looking fixedly at her mother, then she turned and went swiftly from the room.

Mrs. Arnold stared after her blankly. She was a cruel and wicked woman, but she would not have dared to go to such lengths as her daughter. She was afraid of her daughter, and frightened at the terrible intent expressed in her tone and manner.

"My God!" she murmured, with a shiver, "what rash act is she about to commit!"

CHAPTER XIII.

Colonel Carlyle was as deeply infatuated with Bonnibel Vere as the jealous Felise had declared him to be; but, as she had always asserted, he was very wily and cautious in his advances. He was afraid of frightening the pretty bird he wished to ensnare. He, therefore, adopted a deportment of almost fatherly tenderness toward her that was very pleasant to the lonely girl, who missed her uncle's protecting care so much, and who also began to perceive in Mrs. Arnold and her daughter a changed manner, which, while it could scarcely be colder than usual, was tinged with an indefinable shade of insolence.

Poor, pretty Bonnibel! she had fallen upon dark days. She had been deceived by Mrs. Arnold's protestations at first, but by degrees a new light began to break upon her. Mrs. Arnold began to practice a degree of parsimony toward her that was bewildering to the girl. She withdrew Bonnibel's allowance of money, and at last the girl found her dainty little purse quite empty, and likely to remain so—a thing that had never happened to her before in the course of her life, for her uncle had been lavishly generous to her in respect to pin-money. Her supply of mourning was extremely limited, and but for her quiet mode of life would have been quite inadequate to her needs.

But if Mrs. Arnold had wished to diminish Bonnibel's beauty by giving it so meager a setting she failed in the endeavor. The jewel was too bright to miss extraneous adornment.

The somber black dresses could not dim the gleam of her golden hair, the sparkle of her sea-blue eyes. Her white brow and throat were like the petals of a lily, and with returning health a lovely rosette began to flush her cheeks.

Her beauty was a royal dower of which no spite or malignity could deprive her. Clothed upon with sackcloth she would still have remained,

"A daughter of the gods, divinely tall, And most divinely fair."

Bonnibel knew that she was beautiful. She had heard it remarked so often that she could not be ignorant of the fact.

In those past happy days that now seemed so far away she had taken a childish, innocent pride in the knowledge. But now in her trouble and loneliness she had forgotten it, or cared for it no more. So it never occurred to her to ascribe the painful change in her aunt and Felise to the fact that was quite obvious to others—the very plain fact that she had unconsciously rivaled Felise with Colonel Carlyle and that he only waited a proper season to declare himself.

There was none of the dawdling and hesitation now that had marked his courtship of Felise and prevented him from making the important declaration she had schemed and toiled for. He had virtually jilted Felise, for he had done everything but speak the important words, but the proud girl bore his desertion in ominous silence that boded no good to the man who had thus wronged her.

Lucy and Janet, the respective maids of the two young ladies, held many a whispered colloquy over Colonel Carlyle's defection. Janet indeed was an object of sympathy in those days, for she had to bear the brunt of Felise's anger, which

was no slight thing to endure. Indeed, it is probable that the much-enduring maid would have given warning on the spot had it not been for an *affaire du coeur* which she was carrying on with the footman.

Rather than be separated from this object of her fond affections Janet remained in Felise's service and endured her caprices and ill-treatment with that heroic fortitude with which women from time immemorial have borne slight and wrong for love's sake.

"Will Miss Bonnibel marry him, do you think, Lucy?" asked Janet at one of their solemn conclaves.

"I don't know," Lucy answered. "Seems to me the child don't have the least idea of what is going on right afore her eyes. I don't believe she knows that the colonel is a courtin' her! She thinks he is a friend, like, and because he knew her father in the army and talks a good deal about his bravery, she listens to him and never dreams that she has cut Miss Felise out right afore her face."

"And serves her right, too," said Janet, heartily, taking a malicious pleasure in the defeat of her over-bearing mistress; "I, for one, am downright glad that she has cut my lady out of her rich beau! It would be a fine match for Miss Bonnibel since her uncle has left her without a cent."

"I hope she will marry him," said Lucy. "Things isn't going at all to my notion in this house, Janet. Sour looks and impudent words is flung around altogether too free in my young lady's hearing. And she getting that shabby that she have got but one decent mourning gown to her back, and I hear nothing said of a new one! As for money I don't believe Mrs. Arnold has given her a single penny since her uncle died; I've seen her little purse and it's quite empty. I'd have put a few of my own savings into it, only I was afraid she might be angry."

"I hope she'll marry Carlyle and queen it over them both," said Janet. "I tell you, Lucy, it was very strange that Mr. Arnold's will wasn't found. I am quite sure he made one—he wouldn't have slighted your young lady intentionally. He loved that pretty little blue-eyed girl as the apple of his eyes, and there was small love lost between him and t'other one. 'Twas mysterious the way things turned out at his death, Lucy."

"Aye, it were," assented Lucy; "I heard Miss Bonnibel, myself, tell Mrs. Arnold down at Sea View when she were sick, that her uncle told her he had made a will and provided liberally for her. And Mrs. Arnold laughed at her and pretended that the fever hadn't got out of her head yet. She didn't want to believe there was a will, Janet, she didn't! Now I ask you, Janet, what has become of that there will?"

Janet laughed scornfully and significantly.

"Ah! it's gone where Miss Bonnibel's blue eyes will never shine on it," said she. "It'll never see the light of day again. All that she can do is to marry Colonel Carlyle and get even with them all."

"I wish she would," sighed Lucy; "but I don't believe she will. They said she was in love with a young artist last summer, and that her uncle drove him away—the same young man they laid the murder on, you know."

"Do you believe he did it, Lucy?"

"Not I," said Lucy, with a scornful sniff. "I'd sooner believe they did it between themselves! I've seen the young man when he used to come visiting the master at Sea View. A handsome young man he was, and that soft-spoken he would not hurt a fly, I know. But he was poor and made his living by drawing pictures, and since Miss Bonnibel is poor, too, now, I'd rather she'd marry that rich old man, for, poor dear, what good could she do as a poor man's wife!"

"Has she forgotten the young feller, do you think?" inquired Janet, thinking of her own "young feller" below stairs with a thrill of romantic sympathy for Miss Vere's love affair.

"Oh, dear, no, and never will," said Lucy, confidently. "She never names him; but I know she's been grieved and unhappy over and above what natural grief for Mr. Arnold could amount to. But I doubt it's all over between them. He's been in hiding, of course, somewhere, ever since they accused him of the murder, and I doubt if Miss Bonnibel ever sees her sweet blue eyes on his handsome face again."

"If he's not guilty why don't he come out and prove his innocence?" exclaimed the romantic Janet. "What a fine scene there would be—Miss Bonnibel all in smiles and tears of joy, and t'other ones scowling and angry at them two lovers."

"Ah! I can't tell you why he doesn't do so," answered Lucy, sighing; "but there must be some good reason for't. No one could get me to believe that Mr. Dane did that wicked and cruel murder! My young mistress, so innocent as she is herself, could never have loved a man that was mean enough to do that deed!"

The loud peal of Miss Herbert's dressing-room bell resounding through the house broke up the conference between the maids, and Janet went away to answer it, muttering, angrily:

"Lucy, I do wish we could change mistresses for awhile. I'm that tired with tramping up and down to wait on that ill-natured upstart that all my bones are sore."

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So Bonnibel's circumstances and prospects were discussed in high life up-stairs and in servantdom down-stairs, while she herself, the most interested party, was ignorant of it all.

How could she, whose torn heart was filled with one single aching memory, take note of all that went on about her?

She was still living in the past, and took small heed of the present. She thought Colonel Carlyle was still fond of Felise, and that his little kindnesses and attention to her were offered to her for her father's sake. She felt grateful to him, but that was all. She was not pleased when he came, nor sorry when he went. So, when the long, cold days of winter wore away and nature began to smile with the coming of a genial spring, and Colonel Carlyle could restrain his impatient ardor no longer, his proposal of marriage, worded with all the passion of a younger lover, came upon her with the suddenness of a thunderbolt from a clear sky.

"Surely, Mr. Carlyle, I have misunderstood your meaning," she said, looking up at him when he ceased to speak, with terror and fright in her large eyes. "You asked me to—"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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(Signed), A. N. WIDEMAN, DUNTRON, Ont."

It is considered extremely improbable in view of the demand of the members of the Board of Control for the appointment of a Fire Brigade Chief in Toronto, that Mayor Shaw will be able to hold the office open until the return of Col. Otter from South Africa, as his original intention was. Col. Otter may, therefore be regarded as out of the running.

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