

Old Man's Darling.

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

CHAPTER XV—Continued.

"Surely, Aunt Arnold," she said, questioningly, "you would not have had me accept Colonel Carlyle simply for his gold?"

"Yes, I would, though," answered Mrs. Arnold roughly, "and what is more, I intend that you shall accept him, Bonnibel Vere! Girl, you must have been mad to dream of refusing such a splendid offer. When Colonel Carlyle returns for his final answer you will tell him that your first refusal was only a girlish freak of coquetry, to try his love, and that you accept his offer gratefully."

Bonnibel's cheeks turned as white as her dress, a mist rose before her eyes, shutting out the sight of her aunt's angry face.

She staggered and put out her hand to steady herself by a chair. Mrs. Arnold regarded her with an air of cold insolence.

"I thought you would find it rather beyond your strength to stand before our conversation was over," she remarked, with slight sarcasm.

Bonnibel did not seem to hear the last shaft of malice. She answered the preceding words in a voice that she strove to render steady and controlled.

"I cannot recognize your right to dictate to me in a matter that concerns myself alone, madam."

Mrs. Arnold listened to the proud, calm tones in furious wrath.

"You defy my authority? You refuse to obey me?" she broke out, angrily.

"Your violence leaves me no other alternative, Aunt Arnold," said the young girl, trying hard to speak calmly. "I do not wish to marry yet, and the man whom you wish me to accept as a husband, could never be the choice of my heart. I cannot understand why you should wish to force me into a marriage so unsuitable."

The graceful, womanly dignity of the young girl's words and manner made no impression on the coarse woman's nature. She only saw before her the girl she had hated ever since her innocent babyhood, the girl whose peerless beauty had come between Felise and her brilliant prospects. She broke out in a passionate resentment:

"Because I want to be rid of you, girl! You have been a stumbling-block in my path your whole life, and I hate the very sight of your baby-face! But I took pity on you and cared for you when poverty came upon you. In return for my kindness you stole my daughter's lover! Now you shall marry him and get out of her way. It is the only reparation you can make her. Do you think I will allow you to refuse Colonel Carlyle, and remain here to cheat her out of the next eligible chance that offers? Never!"

It was hard work for the listener to be so fiercely assailed by this woman and not break out into the angry remonstrances that were swelling in her heart. But Bonnibel had learned the difficult art of self-control lately. She reflected to herself that it was but natural that Mrs. Arnold should feel sore over the disappointment and humiliation of her clever, handsome daughter.

"I am very sorry to hear that you hate me so much," she said, a little sadly. "I have had no one to love me since Uncle Francis died, and I hoped I might win a little place in his wife's heart. But you wrong me, indeed, in charging me with stealing Felise's lover. I never dreamed of winning him away from her; I was deceived by his interest in me, thinking it was simply because he had been a friend and comrade of my dear papa. I might have known better, you say. Perhaps I might, but I was blinded by private troubles of my own, and scarcely heeded what went on around me. I am very sorry I have been the innocent cause of pain to Felise."

"Spare her the additional mortification of your sympathy," was the ironical answer. "I think she can bear the old dotard's desertion. She does not desire your regrets, and I believe I have named the only reparation possible for you."

"And that?" said the girl, slowly.

"Is to marry Colonel Carlyle and get out of her way," was the harsh reply.

"I cannot do that," said Bonnibel, hurriedly. "It is impossible for me to marry Colonel Carlyle—there are many reasons why I should not. As to the other, I will—"

She was about to add, "I will go away from here," but a sickening thought flashed across her. Where could she go?

She had no relative to fly to in her trouble. She did not know how to work and take care of herself. She had never learned anything useful, and her education had been mostly limited to those showy, superficial accomplishments in vogue in the fashionable world. She had five hundred fashionable friends, but not one to whom she could turn for comfort in this her dark hour.

"You say you cannot marry Colonel Carlyle," said Mrs. Arnold, breaking in

on her, troubled silence. "Listen to the only alternative that is left you. I give you until he returns for his answer to decide in. If you do not then accept him you shall no longer have the shelter of my roof. Yes, in the very hour that you refuse Carlyle's millions, I will turn you out homeless into the streets!"

Into the streets! How the words grated on the girl's horrified hearing. She had seen them take up a dead girl from the street once, a girl as young and fair almost as herself.

They said she had poisoned herself because she had no home. They took her away to the Morgue, but Bonnibel had never forgotten that fair, still face as it lay cold in death.

She recalled it now with a shiver. Some one had turned the poor girl into the streets to die. Would that be her fate?

A deadly weakness stole over her. She dropped into a chair like one shot, and Mrs. Arnold as she stood near her, could hear the loud, wild beating of her heart. Her little white hands trembled, and her cheeks and lips turned white as marble.

"Aunt Arnold," she said, looking up at the cruel, relentless woman, "you would not do that, surely? I should have nowhere to go, and I am so terribly afraid of the night and the darkness in the dreadful streets of the city!"

"No matter," sneered the listener. "You can go to one of the finest houses in the city if you like, and have every luxury that wealth can command—but if the refuse that, out you go from under the shelter of this roof?"

There was the sound of some one singing in the flower-garden outside.

It was Felise. She came in with one handful of roses, while the other held a newspaper which she was studying with a thoughtful brow.

"Bonnibel," she said, abruptly, "do you recollect that young artist, Leslie Dane, who used to visit at Sea View last summer?"

A wave of color drifted into the girl's white cheek. She looked up quickly into the thoughtful face of Felise.

"Yes," she answered. "What of him, Felise?"

"Did he not go to Rome to study painting?" inquired the artful girl.

"That was his intention, I believe," said Bonnibel, wondering what was coming now.

"I thought so. There can be no mistake, then—poor fellow! Look here, Bonnibel."

She put the paper she carried into the young girl's hand, and touched her taper finger to a marked paragraph.

Bonnibel's eyes followed the jeweled finger and read the few lines with staring gaze, mutely conscious of the overpowering scent of the roses that Felise carried in her hand.

Ever afterward Bonnibel associated roses with the thought of death.

"Died on the 10th of April, at Rome, Italy, of malarial fever, Leslie Dane, in the 24th year of his age. Mr. Dane was an artist and a native of the United States of America. *Requiescat in pace.*"

CHAPTER XVI.

Felise was prepared to see her rival fall fainting at her feet.

She expected nothing less from the shock to the girl's already overwrought feelings, and in anticipation she already gloated over the sight of her sufferings.

But she was mistaken. Bonnibel neither screamed nor fainted. She sat like one dazed for a moment, her blue eyes riveted to the paper, and her face growing white as death, while the two women who hated her watched her with looks of triumph.

The next instant, with a bound like that of a wounded fawn seeking some leafy covert in which to die, she sprang from her seat and rushed from the room, clenching the fatal paper in her hand.

They could hear her light feet flying along the hall and up the stairs to her own especial apartments.

The two wicked women looked at each other blankly.

"I did not expect her to take it that way," said Mrs. Arnold.

"Nor I," returned Felise. "I looked for a fainting spell, or some kind of a tragic scene at least."

"Perhaps she does not care much after all," suggested Mrs. Arnold. "She is young, and the young are proverbially fickle. She may have ceased to love him."

"No, she has not. I am confident of that, mother. Her face looked dreadful when she went out. She is too proud to let us see how she is wounded—that is all. She turned as white as a dead woman while she was reading, and there was a hunted, desperate look in her eyes. Depend upon it she is terribly stricken."

"Do you think she will consent to marry Colonel Carlyle now, Felise?"

"I rather think she will after the awful alternative you placed before her."

"Did you hear our conversation, my dear?"

"Every word of it, mother. I must say you sustained your part splendidly. I feared you would not display sufficient firmness, but you came off with flying colors."

Mrs. Arnold smiled. She was well-pleased at her daughter's praise, for though her life was devoted to the service of Felise, the scheming girl seldom gave her a word or smile of commendation. She answered quickly:

"I am glad you were pleased, my love. I tried to be as positive as you wished me to be. I fancied I heard you under the window once."

"I was there," said Felise with a laugh. "She was very much shocked when I threatened to turn her out of doors," said Mrs. Arnold. "She looked at me quite wildly."

"She will be more shocked when she finds you meant every word, for, mother, if she dares not accept Colonel Carlyle, you shall certainly drive her away!" exclaimed Felise, and a wild and lurid gleam of hatred fired her eyes as she spoke, that boded evil to the fair and innocent girl upon whom she had sworn to take a terrible revenge.

Bonnibel flew up the stairs to her own room, still clenching the fatal paper tightly in her hand, and locking her door, threw herself downward upon the carpet and lay there like one dead.

She had not fainted. Every nerve was keenly alive and quivering with pain. Her heart was beating in great, suffocating throbs, her throat felt stiff and choked as if compressed by an iron hand, and her head ached terribly as if someone had hurled a heavy stone upon it.

Her whole being seemed to be but one great pulse of intense agony, yet she lay still and motionless, save that now and then a convulsive clutch of the small hand pressed to her throat showed that life still inhabited that beautiful frame.

Life! The thought came to her suddenly and painfully. She raised herself slowly and heavily, as if the weight of her sorrow crushed her down to earth, and the full realization of the terrible change broke over her. Leslie Dane was dead. That graceful form, that handsome face was hidden beneath the damp earth mould. The dark eyes of her artist husband would never shine down upon her again with the love-light beaming in them, those lips whose smiles she had loved so well would never press hers again as they had done that night when he had blessed her and called her his wife. But she—she was a living, agonized creature, the plaything of fate—oh, God! she thought, clasping her hands together wildly, oh, God! that she were dead and lying in the grave with the loved one she would never see again. She felt in all its passionate intensity the force of another's heart-wringing utterance.

"Dead, dead!" she moaned. "Oh, God! since he could die, The world's a grave, and hope lies buried there."

Ah! Bonnibel, sweet Bonnibel! It is a dark world indeed on which your tearful gaze looks forth! It has been the grave of hope to many, yet destiny pushes us forward blindly, and we cannot stay her juggernaut wheels as they roll over our hearts.

"I am eighteen years old, and I am a widow," she moans at last, and staggers blindly to her feet, pushing back the fair locks from her brow with shaking hands. "I am a widow!"

Oh! the pathos of the words! As she speaks them she draws the blinds, drops the curtains, and the room is shrouded in darkness. She has shut out the world from the sight of suffering. You and I, my reader, will turn aside, too, from the contemplation of that cruelly tried young heart as it fights the battle in the gloom and silence.

"Who breathes must suffer; and who thinks must mourn; And he alone is blessed who ne'er was born."

Six days later Colonel Carlyle was ushered into Mrs. Arnold's drawing-room and sent up his card to Miss Vere.

After a slight delay she came gliding in, pale and pure as a snow-drop, and demure as a little nun. Colonel Carlyle both felt and saw that some subtle and indefinable change had come over her as he bowed over the cold, white hand she placed in his.

It was a very warm day, even for May; but she was clothed from head to foot in heavy mourning draped with erape. Her golden hair was brushed straight back from her temples and gathered into a simple coil fastened with a comb of jet. From that somber setting, her fair face and bright hair shone like a star.

"You are pale, Bonnibel; I trust you have not been ill," exclaimed the ancient suitor anxiously.

"I am as well as usual," she answered, with a slight, cold smile.

They sat down, and the ardent lover at once plunged into the subject nearest his heart.

"Bonnibel, I have come for my answer, you know," he said. "I hope and trust it may be a favorable one."

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The girl's sweeping lashes lifted a moment from her pale cheeks, and her blue eyes regarded him sadly; but she did not speak. He bent down and lifted her white, listless hand in his and held it fondly.

"My dear, shall it be yes?" he inquired. "Will you give me this precious little treasure?"

Bonnibel looked down at the hand that lay in the colonel's—it was the one which wore the opal ring—that beautiful, changeable gem. Its colors were dim and pale to-day. She shivered slightly, as if with cold.

"Colonel Carlyle, I told you when we spoke of this before that I did not love you, she said, faintly.

The colonel did not appear to be disheartened by this plaintive plea.

"At least you do not hate me, Bonnibel," he said, half questioningly.

"Oh, no," she answered quickly; "I like you very much, Colonel Carlyle. You have been so very kind to me, you know—but it is only the liking one has for a friend—it is in no way akin to love."

"I will try to be contented with just your friendly liking, my dear one, if you will give yourself to me," he answered, eagerly.

"I believe I could give you a daughter's affection, but never that of a wife," she murmured.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A Gift to Give.

It is often difficult to decide what to get your friends for holiday gifts. Here is a suggestion:

"Good-morning, Jennie, I have brought you a nice present," said Gertrude, as she handed her friend a neatly wrapped package.

The pale, weary looking girl, who was slowly recovering from severe illness, opened the bundle and held up a large bottle of clear, rich medicine.

"Hood's Sarsaparilla!" she exclaimed.

"I have been reading about it to-day and wished I had a bottle."

On New Year's Day Jennie was able to be out on the street, and to her friends who remarked how well she was looking she simply said, "Hood's Sarsaparilla," and every one of them knew it was this great medicine that had given back her health.

INJURED BY A BLAST.

At Sherbrooke, Guysboro, N. S., Tuesday, an explosion took place in one of the pits worked by the Guysboro Gold Manufacturing Company. Three men were injured, two seriously. Tom Petriquin was badly cut about the face and his hands were terribly mangled. He may possibly lose a hand. McDonald was cut about the face and head and had his back hurt. One other man was badly shaken up.

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