

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

BY MRS. ALEX. McVEIGH MILLER,

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

CHAPTER XIII—Continued.

"To marry me," said the colonel. "You have not understood me, Bonniel. I love you, my darling, as passionately as any young man could do. I ask you to give yourself to me for my cherished wife. It would be the sole aim of my life to make you happy. Will you be my wife, little darling?"

"Why, you—you are engaged to Miss Herbert," said Bonniel, in surprise and reproach.

"I beg your pardon, my dear. I am not. I admire and esteem Miss Herbert very much, but I have never addressed a word of love to her. It is you whom I love—you whom I wish to make my wife," exclaimed the ardent colonel.

"I certainly understood that you would marry Felise," answered Bonniel, gravely.

"It was a very serious error on your part, my dear little girl, for I have been trying all the winter to make you see that I loved no one but you."

"I never dreamed of such a thing," exclaimed the girl, in a tone of genuine distress.

"Then you are the only one who did not suspect it," said he, in a mortified tone. "The fact was very patent to all others."

Bonniel looked down at the shimmering opal on her finger, and a blush of shame rose over her delicate features. She thought to herself, impulsively:

"This is dreadful for me—a wedded wife—to sit here and listen to such words without the power of protesting against them."

"Perhaps you think I am too old for you, my angel," said the colonel, breaking the silence; "but my heart and my feelings are much younger than my years. I could not have loved you more ardently thirty years ago. But if age is a fault in your eyes, my darling, I will atone for it by every indulgence on earth, and by a deathless devotion."

"Oh, pray, do not say another word, Colonel Carlyle. It can never be, sir. I can never be your wife," exclaimed the girl, in deep agitation.

"But why not, my dearest girl?"

"I do not love you, sir," said the girl, cresting her graceful head half haughtily upon her slender throat.

"I will teach you to love me, darling. Come, say that you will let me take you away from this house, where I can see that they hate you, and make your life more happy. I will do anything to further your happiness, Bonniel," urged the colonel.

"What you wish is quite impossible, sir. I beg that you will dismiss the subject, my dear, kind friend, and forget it," repeated Bonniel, earnestly.

"I will not take no for an answer," replied the colonel, obstinately. "I have taken you by surprise, and you do not know your own mind, my dear little girl. I will give you a week to decide in. Think of all the advantages I can offer you, Bonniel, and of my devoted love, and say yes when I come back for your answer."

So saying he abruptly took his leave.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Mother, Bonniel has refused Colonel Carlyle."

Mrs. Arnold looked up from the sofa where she lay reading a novel by the gaslight with a start of surprise. Felise had come into the room as quietly as a spirit in her white dressing-gown.

"Mercy, Felise, how you startled me!" she exclaimed. "I had just got to such an exciting part when the heroine was just about to be murdered by her jealous rival when you came with your long hair and trailing white wrapper, like Lady Macbeth walking in her sleep. I almost expected to hear you exclaim:

"Here's the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand!"

"You are quite dramatic to-night, mother—your novel must be an exciting one," said Felise, with a slight sneer. She came forward and sat down in a large easy-chair opposite her mother. She looked pale, and her eyes burned with repressed excitement.

"It is," said Mrs. Arnold, "the most thrilling book I have read lately. But what were you saying when you came in and frightened me so?"

"I said that Bonniel had refused Colonel Carlyle," repeated Felise, distinctly.

Mrs. Arnold sat up with her fingers between the pages of her book, whose interesting perusal she felt loth to stop. She said, half stupidly:

"Oh, she has, has she? Well, it had to come to that, sooner or later, you know, my love."

"Indeed?" answered Felise, shortly.

"Well, you know we have been expecting it some time, Felise, ever since Col-

onel Carlyle lost his heart about her. I must say his conduct to you has not been that of a gentleman, my dear."

"I quite agree with you," said Felise, dryly.

She was very quiet, but her small hands were tightly clenched. She seemed "to hold passion in a leash" by a strong effort of will.

"But how did you find it out?" inquired her mother, thinking that Felise was taking it quite calmly, after all.

"As I find out most things—by keeping my eyes and ears open!" retorted her daughter, tartly.

"When did it happen?"

"This afternoon, while you were out calling on the Trevertons."

"Was the old fool much cut up about it?" inquired Mrs. Arnold, inelegantly.

"He would not take no for an answer," said Felise. "He wanted her to take time to think of all the advantages he offered her, and he is coming in a week to hear her decision."

"The silly old dotard!" ejaculated her mother. "Well, all he can do by his persistence is a second refusal."

Felise Herbert straightened herself in her chair, and looked at her mother with a strange smile on her face.

"I do not intend that he shall get a second refusal!" she said, in a low voice that was very firm and incisive.

Mrs. Arnold stared at her daughter in blank surprise and incredulity.

"Why, Felise, what can you mean?" she inquired.

"I mean that Bonniel Vere shall marry Colonel Carlyle!" her daughter answered, in the same low, determined voice.

"Why, my dear, you know it cannot be when she already has a husband! Besides, I did not know that you wanted them to marry. I thought—I thought—" said Mrs. Arnold, stopping short because surprise had overpowered her.

She looked at the white figure sitting so quietly there in the arm-chair, with some apprehension. Had Felise's disappointment impaired her reason?

"You need not look at me so strangely, mother," said Felise. "I assure you I am not mad, as your eyes imply. I am as sane as you are; but I have said that Bonniel Vere shall marry my recreant lover, and I mean to keep my word. She has stolen him from me, and now she shall marry him and get out of my way! Or perhaps you would prefer to keep her here to spoil the next eligible chance I get," said Felise, looking at her mother with burning eyes.

"I don't see how you can bring her to consent to such a thing, even if you are in earnest, my dear."

"You have got to help me, mother. You shall tell her that you will not allow her to refuse Colonel Carlyle—that she shall become his wife, and that if she does not revoke her rejection, you will turn her instantly into the street!"

"Felise, will you tell me why you are so determined upon their marriage? I supposed you were unwilling to it—it would be only natural for you to oppose it—but you seem as anxious for it as Colonel Carlyle himself. Again, I ask you why?"

"Mother, I told you I would take a terrible revenge upon my rival. This is a part of my revenge. Their marriage will be the first act in the drama. Do not ask me how I am going to proceed. Let me work out my revenge in my own way. I owe them both a score. Never fear but I will pay it off with interest!"

"But, Felise, you must know that Bonniel would sooner declare her secret marriage than be forced into another one. I can turn her into the street if you are determined upon it; but I know I cannot make a girl as truthful and pure as Bonniel Vere knowingly become the wife of two husbands."

"I fully admit your inability to do that, mother. I do not intend to insist on your performance of impossibilities. As for Leslie Dane, look here!"

She straightened out a folded paper she had carried in her bosom, and leaning forward pointed out a small paragraph to her mother.

Mrs. Arnold read the brief paragraph with starting eyes, then turned and looked at her daughter. She no longer kept her finger between the pages of her novel. It had slipped down upon the floor. She was getting absorbed in this tragedy in real life.

"Is it possible?" she exclaimed. "Felise, can it be true?"

"Why not?" was the cool interrogatory.

"Such things happen often—don't they?"

"Every minute dies a man, Every minute one is born."

"Let me see the date," Mrs. Arnold said, bending forward. "Ah! it is very recent. Well, I am surprised. But yet it is a very fortunate occurrence, is it not? Of course it is genuine."

"Why, of course it is," said Felise, with

a short, dry laugh. "How else could it be in the paper? They don't put such things in for sport, I suppose."

"Of course not; but it came upon me so suddenly I felt quite incredulous at first. Well, this puts a new face upon the matter, does it not, my dear?"

"Certainly, mother. I will show her this paper, and she cannot have any pretext for repeating her refusal in the face of the alternative with which you shall threaten her. I suppose any girl in her senses would marry Colonel Carlyle and his millions rather than be turned out homeless into the street."

She sat still a moment staring before her into futurity with lurid eyes that saw her revenge already, and curling lips that began to taste its sweetness in anticipation.

"When must I tell her, Felise?" inquired Mrs. Arnold.

"To-morrow, mother. There is no use in delaying matters. Let us bring the marriage about as speedily as possible. You will tell her to-morrow what she has to do, and I will be on hand with the paper."

She rose slowly.

"Well, I will go, and leave you to finish your novel," she said; "but if you take my advice you will retire instead. It is growing late. Good-night."

"Good-night, my love, and pleasant dreams," her mother answered.

She went out as quietly as she had entered, her dark hair flying wildly over her shoulders and her white robes trailing, noiselessly after her. She was twisting her hands together, and again Mrs. Arnold thought of Lady Macbeth washing her hands and crying in her sleep, "Out, damned spot!"

Ah, Felise Herbert! There was a stain on your soul as red as that on Lady Macbeth's hand!

CHAPTER XV.

The morning after the rejection of Colonel Carlyle, Bonniel Vere sat alone in a pleasant little morning-room that was thrown out from the main residence as a wing. It was daintily furnished in blue plush and walnut, and had double glass doors that looked out upon a lovely little garden that in this pleasant May season was glowing with bloom and fragrance.

Bonniel had been trying to read, but in the perturbed state of her mind she could not fix her attention upon the book. It had fallen from her lap upon the floor, and as she sat in the luxurious arm-chair she leaned forward with her little chin buried in one pink palm and her blue eyes gazing into vacancy, as if lost in thought.

She looked very fair and sweet sitting there in a cool, white morning-dress, trimmed in lace, and dotted about with several bows of black ribbon. Her beautiful hair, which was growing long and thick again, fell upon her shoulders in loose curls, like glints of sunshine.

She had broken a spray of white hyacinth and pinned it on her bosom, and she looked as pure and sweet as the flower itself.

"I am very sorry," she was thinking to herself, "that I was so unfortunate as to win Colonel Carlyle's affection. I certainly never dreamed of such a thing, and a year ago I should have laughed in the face of any old man who dared propose to me, and have told him I did not wish to marry my grandfather. Heigh-ho! I have grown graver now, and do not turn everything into a jest as I did then. Still, I wish it had not happened. I liked him simply as my father's friend, and I thought he liked me just as papa's daughter."

She sighed heavily.

"I think I understand some things now that have puzzled me all the winter," she mused. "He was Felise's lover when I first came, and I have unconsciously rivaled her. She hates me for it, and Aunt Arnold hates me, too. Ah! if they knew all that I know they need not be afraid. Felise is welcome to him, and I will try to induce him to return to her. I never thought that Colonel Carlyle could have acted so basely toward her as it seems he has—"

Mrs. Arnold's sudden entrance into the room interrupted her meditations. She looked so angry and overbearing that Bonniel rose and was about leaving the room when she was recalled abruptly.

"Stay, Bonniel; I wish to speak with you. Resume your seat, if you please."

Flushing with resentment at the insolent authority of the tone, Bonniel turned and faced the lady with a gleam of pride shining in her blue eyes.

"Pardon me," she answered coldly. "I will hear what you have to say standing."

"As you please," said Mrs. Arnold, with a sneer. "Perhaps your strength may not stand the ordeal, however."

Bonniel stared at her in silent surprise.

"You have refused an offer of marriage from Colonel Carlyle," said Mrs. Arnold in a tone of deep displeasure.

Bonniel's fair cheeks deepened their color ever so slightly.

"Yes, madam, I have," she answered after a moment's thought. "But I am ignorant of the means by which you became cognizant of the fact."

"It does not matter," Mrs. Arnold replied, flushing to a dark red under the clear pure eyes bent upon her. "Perhaps he told me himself. One would think that even so elderly a lover would consult a young lady's guardian and protec-

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tor before addressing her! But no matter how I came by my information, you admit its truth."

"Certainly, madam," Bonniel answered quietly, but wondering within herself what all this fencing meant. She was growing slightly nervous. The fair hands trembled slightly as they hung lightly clasped before her, and the white and red rose triumphed alternately in her cheek.

Mrs. Arnold stood resting her folded arms on the back of a chair, regarding the lovely young creature as if she had been a culprit before the bar of justice.

"May I ask what were your reasons for declining the honor Colonel Carlyle offered you?" she inquired in measured tones.

Bonniel was half-tempted to deny Mrs. Arnold's right to ask such a question. With an effort she fought down the quick impulse, and answered in a voice as gentle as the other's was rude and self-assertive:

"I did not love him, Aunt Arnold!"

"Love! Love!" sneered the widow contemptuously. "What had love to do with the matter? You, a poor, penniless, dependent creature, to prate of love when such a man as Colonel Carlyle lays his millions at your feet! You should have jumped at the chance and thanked him for his condescension!"

The listener regarded her with horror and amazement. Her delicate lips quivered with feeling, and her eyes were misty with unshed tears.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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