

AN Old Man's Darling.

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CHAPTER II.—Continued.

At length they anchored their boat, and stepped upon the shore in full view of a large and handsome white villa that stood in the middle of beautiful and well-kept grounds. Toward this abode of wealth and pride they directed their footsteps.

"Uncle Francis is sitting out on the piazza," said Bonniel, as they went up the smooth, graveled walk. "You must go right in and ask him, Leslie, while I run away up-stairs to dress for dinner."

"Very well, dear. And—stay, darling, if I should not be here when you come back, run down to the shore after the moon is up, and I will tell you what answer your uncle gives me suit."

"Very well, I will do so," she answered. "But I am sure that Uncle Francis will keep you to dinner, so I shall see you directly I come down."

He pressed her hand and she tripped across the piazza into the hall, and then ran up the broad stair-way to her room with a lighter heart than ever beat in her breast again.

Leslie Dane walked down the piazza to where Bonniel's uncle and guardian, Francis Arnold, the millionaire, sat in his easy-chair puffing his evening cigar, and indolently watching the blue wreaths of smoke curling over his head.

Mr. Arnold was a spare, well-made man of sixty-five, with iron-gray hair and beard. His well-cut features were sharp and resolute in contour, and betokened more sternness than Bonniel Vere ever dreamed of in his unfeeling tenderness to herself. He was elegantly dressed, and wore a costly diamond ring on his little finger.

As the young man drew near, the stately millionaire arose and acknowledged his respectful greeting with considerable cordiality.

"Ah! Dane, good-evening. Have a seat and join me in a cigar."

"Thank you, I do not smoke," answered the young artist, politely, "but I am sorry to interrupt your enjoyment of that luxury."

"It does not matter," said the millionaire, tossing his own cigar away and resuming his seat. "Sit down, Dane. Well, how do you get on with your pictures?"

The dusky, handsome face lighted up with pleasure.

"Famously, than you. I have sold two little pictures in New York lately at quite a fair valuation, and the critics have praised them. They say I have genius and should study under the best masters."

"Indeed! I congratulate you," said Mr. Arnold, cordially. "Do you think of taking their advice?"

"I do. I shall sail for Rome very soon now, and study there a year or two," said Leslie, his features beaming with pleasure. "I believe I shall succeed in my ambition. I feel within myself the promptings of genius, and I know that my persistent labor will conquer fame and fortune."

The elder man regarded him with some surprise. He had never seen him so enthusiastic on any subject before, even that of his beloved art.

"You seem very sanguine and determined, he observed with a smile.

"I am determined," answered Leslie, gravely. "I mean to conquer success. You remember the hackneyed quotation:

"In the proud lexicon of youth which fate reserves to a bright manhood, There is no such word as Fail!"

"I did not know you had such a towering ambition, Dane," said the millionaire, with a smile.

"My ambition is no higher than my hopes, Mr. Arnold, for I have come here this evening to ask you for the hand of Miss Vere when I shall be in a position worthy of that high honor!"

"Sir!"

The word rolled out of the millionaire's mouth like a thunder-clap.

He straightened himself in his chair, seeming to grow several inches taller, and his iron gray hair seemed to stand erect on his head with indignant surprise. His keen gray eyes regarded Leslie Dane with a stony stare of surprise, bordering on contempt.

"I have the sanction of your niece, Miss Vere, to ask of you her hand in marriage," repeated Leslie Dane, calmly.

Mr. Arnold sprang to his feet, furious with rage, pale as death under the influence of this overwhelming emotion.

"Villain!" he cried out, in loud, excited tones. "Do you mean to tell me that you have abused the confidence I reposed in your honor as a gentleman, to win the heart of that innocent, trusting child? You, a poor, penniless, unknown artist!"

"I grant you I am poor, Mr. Arnold," answered Leslie Dane, rising and confronting his accuser with a mien as proud as his own. "But that I have abused your confidence, I deny! Bonniel loves me as I love her, but I have taken no undue advantage to gain her love. You in-

vited me here, and gave me every opportunity to cultivate her acquaintance. Can you wonder that I learned to love one so sweet and beautiful?"

"I wonder at your presumption in telling her so!" flashed the angry guardian. "If you loved her you should have worshipped her from afar as a star too far away to warm you with its beams. By Jove! sir, do you know that Bonniel Vere will be my heiress? Do you know that the best blood of the land flows in her veins? Do you know that her father was General Harry Vere, who fell bravely in battle, and left a record as proud as any in the land?"

"General Vere's fame is not unknown to me, sir," answered Leslie, calmly. "I give him due honor as a hero. But, sir, my blood is as blue as Bonniel's own! I belong to the noblest and best family of the South. True, we lost all our wealth by the late war, but we belong to the first rank yet in point of birth. I can give you perfect satisfaction on these points, sir. And for the rest, I do not propose to claim Bonniel until I have realized a fortune equal to her own, and added fresh laurels to the name that is already crowned with bays in the far South, from whence I come. My father was an officer in the army, too, sir, and not unknown to fame."

"We waste words," said the millionaire, shortly. "No matter what your birth you were presumptuous in addressing my niece, knowing that your poverty must be an insuperable bar to your union. Perhaps it is her wealth you were after. The idea of making love to that child? She is but a child, after all, and does not know her own mind. A simple, trusting child, ready to fall a prey to the first good-looking fortune-hunter that comes along."

"Were it not for your grey hairs, Mr. Arnold, I should not permit you to apply such an insulting epithet to me!" flashed out Leslie Dane in a white heat of passion.

"You provoked it, sir," cried the old man, wrathfully; "you to try to win my little ewe-lamb from me. She, that her dying mother, my only sister, gave to my arms in her infancy as a precious trust. Do you think I would give her to you, or to any man who did not stand head and shoulders above his fellow-men in every point of excellence? Would I waste her sweet years waiting for you to grow worthy of her? No, no, Leslie Dane, you can never have my darling! She shall never give you another thought. Go, sir, and never darken my doors with your unworthy presence again!"

He pointed to the door, and the young artist had no choice but to obey. He was trembling with passion, and his dark eyes blazed with a light not pleasant to see.

"I obey you, sir," he said, proudly. "I go, but remember I do not give up my claim on Bonniel! Sooner or later she shall yet be my wife! And, mark me, sir, you have done a bitter work to-day that you shall one day repent with all your soul."

With the words he was gone, his tall, proud figure striding down the graveled walk, and disappearing in the twilight shadows.

CHAPTER III.

Mr. Arnold and his family, consisting only of his wife and step-daughter, Felise Herbert, were in their places at the table before Bonniel came floating in, a vision of rosy, innocent loveliness.

If she had been beautiful before in her plain blue walking-dress she was doubly so now in her soft white robe of India muslin, with fleecy trimmings of rich, Valenciennes lace. A pale blue sash was knotted about her slender waist, and clusters of fragrant blue violets looped back her long golden curls. A golden chain and a cross studded with pearls was clasped about her white neck, though she scarcely needed such adornment. Her beauty was a crown in itself.

She came in a little shyly, and blushing very much, for she expected to see her lover, and she glanced under her long lashes along the length of the table as she took her place, expecting to meet his adoring gaze.

He was not there. The young girl scarcely knew what to think. She glanced at her uncle as if to enlighten herself.

He was not looking at her; indeed, he seemed to avoid her glance purposely, and a moody frown was fixed upon his brow. Her aunt vouchsafed her a cold, unmeaning stare, and Felise Herbert's large black eyes dilated as she looked at Bonniel as if with gratified malice.

These two ladies, mother and daughter, deserve more than a passing mention at our hands. We will briefly describe them. Mrs. Arnold was a fine-looking brunette of about forty-five, and would have been rather handsome but for a settled expres-

sion of peevishness and discontent that rested upon her features. She was elaborately dressed in a soft summer silk of silver-gray trimmed in black lace, and wore very rich cameo jewelry.

Miss Herbert was a younger and handsomer copy of her mother. She was tall and well-formed, with quite regular features, large black eyes, and silky braids of black hair. She was about twenty-five years old, and was becomingly dressed in a thick black grenadine, richly trimmed with satin of the color of old gold. Her ornaments were necklace, earrings, and bracelets of gold. Mr. Arnold could not complain of the beauty of his household, though his tastes in that particular were extremely refined.

"Bonniel," he said, when the dinner which had been discussed in most unusual silence was over, "come with me into the library. I have something to say to you."

Bonniel linked her arm fondly in his and they passed out together. Miss Herbert looked at her mother, and a glance of great significance passed between them, the expression of discontent on the elder lady's features now deepening to positive anger and hatred.

"Yes," she said, as if answering her daughter's look; "go and hear what he has to say to the little witch!"

Miss Herbert arose and passed out of the room with soft, subdued footfalls.

Mrs. Arnold paced the floor restlessly, clenching her white hands angrily.

"My clever, beautiful Felise," she murmured. "How my husband slighted and ignored her to lavish his whole affection upon that little hateful, yellow-haired child! After all my scheming to get him to love Felise, and at least divide his fortune between them, he boldly declared this evening to that young artist-fool that he would make Bonniel his heiress. And Felise—she will have nothing but what I can give her out of my portion! which he will make as small as possible in order to enrich his idol. It is too bad—too bad! Something must be done to induce him to change his mind. I wish she would elope with Leslie Dane. That would alienate my husband from her forever."

The entrance of the servants to clear the table interrupted her. She left the room, with its glitter of lights and glass, silver and flowers, and hurried away to her own luxurious apartments to nurse her wrath and jealousy in solitude.

She hated Bonniel Vere, and she hated her husband. He had married her twenty years ago, when she had palmed herself off upon him as a widow of high family and small means, while in reality she was a vulgar and penniless adventuress, having but one pure affection in her heart, and that her blind, idolatrous love for her spoiled and wayward little daughter.

Francis Arnold had discovered the cheat practiced on him long ago, and though too proud to proclaim the secret to the world, the love he had felt for his handsome wife had changed into quiet contempt that stung her more than the loudest upbraiding.

Her daughter, who was treacherous as a cat and vindictive as a snake, he simply hated, and no blandishments or persuasions could induce him to settle anything upon her, though the one object of the mother's heart was to secure his whole fortune for herself and Felise.

We will pause in our contemplation of the ambitious woman's rage and follow Bonniel and her uncle to the large, well-lighted, and elegant library.

"Uncle," said the girl, going up to him as he sank into his easy-chair, and laying her hand caressingly on his cheek, "are you not well? You seem so strange, you do not smile on your little girl as usual."

He was silent a moment as if struggling for words in which to express his grievance, then he broke out impetuously:

"I am sick, little one, sick at heart. I have received a dreadful blow this evening—one that fairly stunned me!"

"Dear uncle," said she, with innocent unconsciousness, "who was it that dared to wound you so?"

"Bonniel, it was Leslie Dane, the poor young artist whom I have patronized this summer because I pitied him! Darling, he had the audacious impertinence to ask me for this little hand!" he lifted it from his shoulder, where it rested fondly, and pressed it to his lips.

But Bonniel caught it away and started back from his side, her cheeks growing white and her blue eyes dilating.

"What did you say to him?" she inquired, breathlessly.

"I told him he was a worthless fortune-hunter, and I drove him forth with scorn and contempt," said the millionaire hotly.

"You did—you did!" she cried, horror and incredulity struggling in her voice and face. "You insulted him thus? Why, Uncle Francis, I love him!"

In those concluding words there was at once a protest and a defiance. It was as if she had felt and said that her love should have been a sufficient shield and protection for him it clung around so fondly.

"Pooh! nonsense!" said Arnold, trying a light tone of raillery; "you are but a child, Bonniel, you do not know what love means. Do you think I would suffer you to throw yourself away on that worthless fellow?"

"He is not worthless," she cried out warmly. "He is noble, good and true, and I love him dearly. But, Uncle Francis," she said, suddenly changing her in-

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dignant tone to one of gentle entreaty, "surely you are only jesting and teasing your little girl, and I beg you not to use such dreadful language again, for you insult the man whom I love with my whole heart, and whom I shall one day marry."

"Never! never!" he shouted madly. "Girl, you have been spoiled and indulged until you are silly enough to cry for the moon and expect me to pluck it from heaven for you! But I will save you from your folly this time. I will never permit you to marry Leslie Dane!"

It was the first time he had ever denied her anything in the course of her happy care-free life. And now his cruel and resolute refusal of this new toy she wanted so much, absolutely stunned her and, deprived her of speech.

She sank into a chair helplessly, and looked at him with parted, tremulous lips, and with wild, astonished blue eyes. He saw how shocked and incredulous she was, and altering his tone, began to explain and argue with her:

"My darling, Leslie Dane is no match for my little girl. He is poor and has nothing to recommend him but a handsome face, and a little talent for daubing with paints and pencils, while you are a beauty and an heiress, and can boast a proud descent. I have made my will, and it is there in my desk this moment. In it I have left you everything except one-third of my property, which my widow will legally inherit. Surely my generosity merits the one little return I ask of you. Simply that you will give up Leslie Dane."

She looked up at him as he offered his costly bribe, and shook her head gravely.

"You have been very kind to me always, uncle, I never knew you could be cruel until now. I thank you for your kind intention, but I will not give up Leslie for such a sordid bribe. Keep your money, and I will keep my love!"

"I am not giving you the choice, girl," he answered, angrily. "I intend you to have the money whether you want it or not, and I have already said that you shall never marry Leslie Dane."

"And I say that I will marry him!" she cried, springing up in a rage as passionate and unreasoning as his own, her blue eyes blazing with defiance. "You shall not prevent me! I love him better than any one else on earth, and I will marry him if I repeat it every hour of my after life."

So saying she rushed from the room, and pausing only to catch up a dark shawl and wrap it about her, she sped down the graveled walk on her way to seek her lover.

She paused outside the gate, and crouching down, peered anxiously back to see if she was followed. The moon was up, shining brilliantly over everything. She saw her uncle come out on the piazza and drop into his favorite seat. Then the fragrance of a cigar floated out on the warm August air. Bonniel hurried on down to the shore.

Leslie Dane was waiting for her, pacing the sands impatiently in the soft moonlight.

CHAPTER IV.

Bonniel ran forward and threw herself on her lover's breast in a passion of tears.

"You know all then, my darling!" hold her fast against his wildly-throbbing heart. She could not speak for the sobs that came heaving from her aching little heart.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

An Indian mother sacrificed her child to appease the wrath of evil spirits in one of the incidents of the recent earthquakes in Alaska.

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