

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

BY MRS. ALEX. McVEIGH MILLER,

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

### CHAPTER XXIX—Continued.

"I should like to know why you have made this sudden decision, Leslie—for it is sudden, is it not?" asked Carl, pointedly.

Leslie Dane flushed scarlet, then paled again.

"Yes, it is sudden," he answered, constrainedly, "but none the less decisive. Don't try to argue me out of it, Carl, for that would be useless. Believe me, it is much better that I should go. I want to get to work again."

"There is something more than work at the bottom of this sudden move," said Carl Muller, quietly. "I don't wish to intrude on your secrets, *mon ami*, but I could tell you just why you are going back to Rome in such a confounded hurry."

"You could?" asked Leslie Dane, incredulously.

"You know I told you long ago, Leslie, that there is a woman at the bottom of everything that happens. There is one at the bottom of this decision of yours. You are running away from a woman!"

"The deuce!" exclaimed Leslie, startled out of his self-control by Carl Muller's point-blank shot; "how know you that?"

"I can put two and two together," the German answered, coolly.

Leslie looked at him with a question in his eyes.

"Shall I explain?" inquired Carl.

Leslie bowed without speaking.

"Well, then, last night, when we laid aside our masks I happened to be quite near to our lovely hostess, and a friend who was beside me immediately presented me."

"Well?" said Leslie Dane, with white lips.

"I was immediately impressed with the idea," continued Carl, "that I had met Mrs. Carlyle before. The impression grew upon me steadily during the minute or two while I stood talking to her, although I could not for the life of me tell where I had met her. But after I had left her side I stood at a little distance and observed her presentation to you."

Leslie Dane walked away to a window and stood looking out with his back turned to his friend.

"I saw her look at you, Leslie," Carl went on, "and that minute she fell back and fainted. They said that she struck her head against the  *jardiniere* , which caused her to faint. But I know better. She may have struck her head—I do not dispute that—but the primal cause of her swoon was the simple sight of you!"

"I do not know why you should think so, Carl," said his friend, without turning round. "It is not plausible that the mere sight of a stranger should have thus overcome her. Am I so hideous as that?"

"You were not a stranger," said Carl, overlooking the latter query, "for in that moment when she bowed to you it flashed over me like lightning who she was. I was mistaken when I thought I had met her before. She was utterly a stranger to me. But I had seen her peerless beauty portrayed in a score of pictures from the hand of a master artist. It is no wonder the resemblance haunted me so persistently."

There was silence for a minute. Leslie did not move or speak.

"Leslie, you cannot deny it," Carl said, convincingly; "the beautiful Mrs. Carlyle is the original of the veiled portrait you used to keep in your studio, and which you allowed me to look at only on the occasion when you painted it out."

"I do not deny it," he said, in a voice of repressed pain. "What then, Carl?"

"This, *mon ami*—she was false to you! I do not know in what way, but possibly it was by selling herself for that old man's gold. You owe her no consideration. Why should you curtail your holiday and disappoint your friends and admirers merely because her guilty conscience feels a pang at meeting you? You two can keep apart. Paris is surely large enough for both to dwell in without jostling each other."

What Leslie Dane might have answered to this reasoning will never be a matter of history, for before he could open his lips to speak there was a thundering rap at the door.

In some suspense he advanced and threw it open.

Three or four officers of the French police, in their neat uniform, stood in the hallway without.

"Enter, gentlemen," he said, courteously, though there was a tone of surprise in his voice that they could not mistake.

Carl Muller, too, though he did not speak, rose from his seat and expressed his amazement by his manner.

The officers filed into the room gravely, closing the door after them. Then the foremost one advanced, with an open paper in his hand, and laid his hand firmly but respectfully on Leslie Dane's arm.

"Monsieur Dane," he said, in clear, incisive tones that fell like a thunder-clap

on the hearing of the two artists—"Monsieur Dane, I arrest you for the willful murder of Francis Arnold at his home in America three years ago!"

### CHAPTER XXX.

"Quelle horreur, Felise! that was a shocking denouement to-night. We tremble on the brink of a volcano."

Mrs. Arnold and her daughter were rolling homeward in their luxurious carriage from the masquerade ball at Colonel Carlyle's chateau, and the elder lady's remark was uttered in a tone of trepidation and terror.

But Felise, leaning back in her corner among the silken cushions in the picturesque costume of a fortune-teller, only laughed at her terror—a low and fiendish laugh that expressed unqualified satisfaction.

"*Ma mere*, was Leslie Dane's resurrection a great surprise to you?" she inquired with a covert sneer.

"A great surprise, and a terrible shock to me, too," the lady answered. "Of course, after believing him dead so long, it is very inconvenient to have him come to life again—as inconvenient for Colonel Carlyle and his wife as for us."

And again Felise laughed mockingly, as if she found only the sweetest pleasure in her mother's words.

"Felise, I cannot understand you," exclaimed Mrs. Arnold, anxiously. "Surely you forget the peril we are in from this man's resurrection from the grave where we thought him lying. I thought you would be as much surprised and frightened at this dreadful  *contretemps*  as I am."

"I have known that Leslie Dane was living all these three years," answered Miss Herbert, as coolly as before.

"Then the paper you showed to me and to Bonnibel must have been a forgery!"

"It was. I had the notice of Leslie Dane's death inserted myself."

The carriage paused at their hotel, and they were handed out.

Mrs. Arnold followed her daughter to her own apartments.

"Send your maid away, Felise. I must talk to you a little," she said.

Felise had a French maid now instead of Janet, who had resolutely declined to cross the ocean with her.

"Finette, you may go for awhile," she said. "I will ring when I need you."

The maid courtied and went away.

Felise motioned her mother to a chair, and sank into another herself. Mrs. Arnold seated herself and looked at her daughter searchingly.

Mrs. Arnold took up the conversation where it had been dropped when they left the carriage.

"You say you forged the notice of Leslie Dane's death in the newspaper," she said. "Of course you had some object in doing that, Felise."

"Yes, of course," with another wicked laugh. "It was to further the revenge of which I had so sweet a taste to-night."

"So what has happened to-night is only what you have intended and desired all along?"

Felise bowed with the grace of a duchess.

"Exactly," she answered, with a triumphant smile. "I have been planning and scheming over two years to bring about the consummation of to-night."

"It was cleverly planned and well executed," Mrs. Arnold said, admiringly; "but is it quite finished? Of course Colonel Carlyle does not know the truth yet."

"He knows that Leslie Dane was a former lover of his wife; he witnessed their meeting to-night. That of itself was enough to inflame his jealous passions to the highest degree, and make him wretched. I rely upon Bonnibel herself to finish my work."

"Upon Bonnibel! How will she do it?"

"You know her high and overstrained sense of honor, mother. Of course she will not remain with Colonel Carlyle, now that she knows she is not his wife. There is but one course open to her. She will fly with Leslie Dane, and leave a note behind her revealing the whole truth to him."

"Are you sure she will, Felise?"

"I am quite certain, mother. That is the only orthodox mode for such a heroine of romance as your husband's niece. To-morrow Leslie Dane and his silly young wife will have flown beyond pursuit and discovery, yet neither one can be happy. The years in which she has belonged to Colonel Carlyle will be a blight and a blot upon her fair fame that she can never forget, while Leslie Dane, with the passions of manhood burning in his veins, cannot forget and will scarcely forgive it. They cannot be happy. My revenge has struck too deep at the root of that evanescent flower that the world calls happiness. And Colonel Carlyle is the proudest man on earth. Think you that he can

ever hold up his head again after the shame and disgrace of that dreadful blow?"

"Scarcely," said Mrs. Arnold, echoing her daughter's laugh with one as cold and cruel. "You have taken a brave revenge, Felise, for Colonel Carlyle's wrongs against you, and if all goes as you have planned, I shall be proud of your talents and rejoice in your success. But my mind misgives me. Suppose some officious American here—and you know there are plenty, such now sojourning in Paris—should remember Leslie Dane and arrest him for my husband's murder?"

For a moment Felise Herbert grew pale, and an icy hand seemed tugging at her heart-strings.

"I do not have the least apprehension of such a calamity," she answered, throwing off the chill presentiment with an effort. "I feel sure that Leslie Dane and his Bonnibel will be far beyond pursuit and detection before to-morrow night. And you will infinitely oblige me by keeping your doleful croaking to yourself, mother."

Mrs. Arnold looked at her watch and rose wearily.

"It is almost morning," she said; "I think I will retire. Good-night, my dear, and pleasant dreams."

"They cannot fail to be pleasant!" answered Felise, with her mocking, triumphant laugh.

But her dreams were all waking ones.

She was too triumphant and excited to sleep.

"This is a happy, happy night for me!" she exclaimed again and again.

### CHAPTER XXXI.

Bonnibel was completely crushed by the knowledge that Colonel Carlyle had put into execution his threat of making her a prisoner.

For a moment she ran wildly about the room, passionately seeking some mode of egress, filled with the impulse of seeking and following her poor, maltreated Lucy.

But no loophole of escape presented itself.

Her suite of rooms, boudoir, dressing-room, and sleeping-apartments, all communicated with each other, but only one opened into the hall, or presented any mode of egress from her imprisonment. Of this room, the boudoir which she then occupied, Colonel Carlyle had taken the key. She was in an upper story, many feet from the ground, or she would have jumped from the window in her desperation. As it was she could do nothing. She threw herself down upon the floor, crushing her beautiful ball-dress with its grasses and lilies, and wept unrestrainedly.

The slight form heaved and shook with emotion, the tears rained from her eyes in a torrent. At length, worn out with passionate weeping, and overcome by the "dumb narcotic influence of pain," she fell asleep where she lay on the floor, her wet cheek pillowed on her little hand, her golden hair floating about her in "sad beauty."

Thus Colonel Carlyle found her when he entered late that morning. He was honestly shocked at the sight, for he had supposed that she would yield gracefully to the inevitable, and retire to her sleeping-apartment without more ado when she found how inflexible a will he was possessed of. Instead, here she lay prostrate on the rich velvet carpet of the boudoir, still attired in her ball-dress, the traces of tears on her pale cheeks, and her restless slumber broken by sobs and moans that shook her slight form like a wind-shaken-willow.

He stood still looking down at her, while pity vainly struggled against the fierce anger and resentment burning hotly in his heart.

"She can grieve for him like this," he muttered bitterly, and lifted her, not rudely, but yet unlovingly, and laid her down upon a silken sofa.

The movement disturbed her, and for a moment she seemed about to wake; but the heavy lethargy of her troubled sleep overpowered her.

Colonel Carlyle stood silently watching her for a little while, marveling at her beauty even while he felt angry with her for the uncontrollable emotion that had touched her fairness with the penciling of grief. Then, with a deep yet unconscious sigh, he kissed her several times and went softly away. It was noon when she started up from her restless slumbers, pushing off the silken coverlet that had been carefully spread over her.

She sat up, pressing her hand upon her aching temples, and looked about the room with dazed, half-open eyes. For the moment she had forgotten her trouble of the previous night, and fully expected to see her faithful Lucy Moore keeping her patient vigil by the couch of her weary mistress. But memory returned all too swiftly. The kind, loving face of Lucy did not beam its welcome upon her as of old. Instead, the cold, hard face of a smartly-dressed, elderly Frenchwoman looked curiously at her as the owner rose and courtesied.

"I am the new maid, madam," she explained. "I hope madam feels better."

Bonnibel stared at her in bewilderment. "Where is Lucy? I want Lucy," she said, almost appealingly.

The new French maid looked at her blankly.

"Madam, I know nothing of Lucy" she answered. "Monsieur le colonel, the hus-

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band of madam, engage me to attend upon madam. I will remove your ball dress, *s'il vous plait*."

With those words the whole bitter truth rushed over Bonnibel's mind. A low, repressed cry, and she fell back on the sofa, again hiding her convulsed face in her hands.

"Madam, you make yourself more sick by dis emotion," said the new maid in her broken English. "Allow me to bring you something to break your fast—some chocolate, a roll, a bit of broiled bird."

"I want nothing," Bonnibel answered, bitterly at first, but the next moment she sat up and struggled to regain her composure.

"What is your name, my good woman?" she inquired.

"Dolores, madam, at your service," said the maid, with one of her low courtesies, "Dolores Dupont."

Bonnibel rose and moved slowly toward her dressing-room.

"Dolores," she said, "you may come and remove this robe. I was very tired last night, and my maid having left me, I fell asleep in my ball costume."

Dolores deftly removed the crushed and ruined robe, and substituted a dressing-gown, while she brushed and arranged the beautiful golden hair that was straying on her shoulders in wild disorder.

"It is the most beautiful hair in de world," she said. "Dere are many ladies would give a fortune to have it on their own heads."

But Bonnibel did not heed the praise. She had no thought or care for her beauty now. She only said, listlessly:

"Never mind removing the dressing-gown, Dolores, I will lie down again. I am very tired."

"I shall bathe your head with the  *eau de cologne* —shall I?" the maid inquired.

"No, no, only let me rest."

"You will breakfast, at least, madam?" the woman persisted.

"Not now, Dolores. I wish for nothing but rest," she said, as she passed into her boudoir and lay down again upon the sofa.

The maid followed after her.

"I should wish your keys, madam, to pack your trunks," she said, solicitously.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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Mrs. Forsyth was walking through one of the rooms with a lighted lamp in her hand when she either tripped or fell, and the lamp striking the floor it exploded. She died shortly after.

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