

Old Man's Darling.

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CHAPTER XXXVIII—Continued.

It was all over now. Day after day the prisoner had sat with his flashing dark eye, and calm, pale brow, listening to the damning evidence against him. From first to last, despite the entreaties of his lawyer and friends, he had resolutely declined to attempt proving an *alibi*—the only thing that could have saved him. Now, the trial was over, the evidence had been summed up and given to the jury, and they had returned their verdict of wilful murder. Nothing now remained but the dreadful duty of the judge—to pronounce upon that young, handsome, gifted man the sentence of annihilation—of death!

And accordingly he had begun with the usual ceremonial formula:

"Have you anything to say why the sentence of death should not be pronounced against you?"

And the eager crowd surged forward for a nearer view of Leslie Dane's face.

Colonel Carlyle was there, sitting with Mrs. Arnold and Felise Herbert. There was an ill-concealed expression of relief and satisfaction upon the faces of the three. They had pursued an innocent man to the death, but no twinge of remorse stirred their hard hearts as he rose in his seat, pale, proud and handsome, towering above the crowd in his kingly height and stateliness, and confronted the judge.

"I have nothing to say, your honor, except that I am not guilty!"

A low murmur of approbation from some, and of dissent from others instantly arose, and was immediately hushed by the crier of the court.

At that moment, when the judge rose to the performance of his duty, a messenger brought a tiny slip of paper and placed it in the hands of Leslie Dane's lawyer. As he read it his gloomy face brightened marvelously. He rose in his seat flushed and radiant.

"May it please your honor to suspend the sentence of the court. There is a new and important witness."

The next moment a graceful, veiled figure, clad in heavy, soundless black silk, glided into the witness-box.

She was sworn, and lifted her veil to kiss the book. A perfectly beautiful face blanched to the pallor of marble, was revealed by the action. A murmur of admiration arose from the spectators, blent with subdued exclamations of horror from three who were nearly stricken lifeless by her unexpected advent.

"Silence in the court!" thundered the crier.

The examination of the witness began.

"What is your name?"

And clear and sweet as a silver bell the lady's voice arose in answer, penetrating every strained ear in the densely-packed court room.

"I have been known as Bonniel Carlyle, but I am Bonniel Dane, the wife of the prisoner at the bar!"

As the words left her lips she glanced beneath her long lashes at the face of Leslie Dane. In her swift look there was shame, abnegation, self-sacrifice, curiously blended with uncontrollable pity and almost tenderness. The face that looked back at her was so radiant that it almost dazzled her. Her eyes dropped swiftly, and she never looked at him again while she stood there.

Many eyes turned upon Colonel Carlyle to see how he bore the stroke of fate. He sat perfectly still, white as marble, staring like one frozen into a statue of horror at the beautiful witness in the box, whose blue eyes took no note of his presence.

The examination proceeded. Bonniel told her story calmly, clearly, bravely. When she concluded and left the witness-stand she was succeeded by the old minister and his wife, whom she had brought from Brandon.

They corroborated her testimony and left no flaw in the evidence. The clouds which had hung over Leslie Dane's fair name so long were dissipated by the sunlight of truth. His *alibi* was triumphantly established, his innocence perfectly vindicated. And then, to the surprise of all and the utter consternation of Felise Herbert, Wild Madge, the sibyl, hobbled weakly into the witness-box, pale, wrinkled, cadaverous, the image of hideous old age and approaching death. Breathless silence pervaded the multitude while the dying woman told her story, interspersing it with many expressions of remorse and horror. Briefly told, her confession amounted to this: Felise Herbert had sought her humble cabin the night that Mr. Arnold and Leslie Dane had quarreled, and bribed her to murder the millionaire. Tempted by the large reward, she had stolen upon Mr. Arnold as he slept in his arm-chair on the piazza and stabbed him to the heart with a large knife. Then, ere long, remorse had fastened upon her, and she had cast the golden price of her dreadful crime into the engulfing waves of the ocean. Finishing her

story with a last labored effort, and throwing up her arms wildly into the air, Wild Madge, the feared and dreaded sibyl of Cape May fell forward on the floor of the court-room—dead!

As soon as her body had been removed from the place the lawyer who had prosecuted Leslie Dane rose hastily in his seat. It might be out of order, he said, "but he should be glad to ask a few questions of the minister who had performed the marriage ceremony between Leslie Dane and Miss Bonniel Vere.

His request was granted, and the aged white-haired preacher was again placed on the witness-stand, while curiosity was on the *qui vive* for further developments. The lawyer cross-questioned the old man closely for a few minutes; then he turned to the judge.

"I am bound, your honor," he said, "to inform those most interested that, though the lady's evidence has completely vindicated Leslie Dane, she has utterly failed to establish the legality of her marriage with him. On the contrary, owing to the youth and inexperience of the young man, perhaps partly attributable to his haste and agitation that night, and to the culpable forgetfulness and carelessness of the aged minister here, there was no license procured for the authority of the marriage ceremony. Her former marriage, therefore, has no legality in the eyes of the law, and she still remains, as she has been known the last three years, the wife of Colonel Carlyle."

As the lawyer resumed his seat, amid a breathless hum of excitement, a loud shriek pierced the air of the court-room—a wild, horrible, blood-curdling, maniacal cry. Every eye turned on Felise Herbert, who had risen in her seat, and with distorted features, livid lips and burning eyes, was wildly beating the air with her hands. Her appearance was appalling to behold as she stood there with her hat falling off, her hair in disorder, and foam flecks on her livid, writhing lips.

"Foiled! foiled!" she exclaimed wildly. "I am baffled of my revenge at every point."

Everyone seemed horror-struck. None attempted to molest her as she moved forward and stood before Colonel Carlyle. The old man looked up at her vacantly. He had neither moved nor spoken since the entrance of his wife; he seemed to be fettered hand and foot by a trance of horror. He did not heed the threatening look in the eyes of Felise Herbert as they fell upon him, full of the wild glare of madness.

"You jilted me, fool!" she said, passionately, wildly gesticulating with her hands—"jilted me for the sake of Bonniel Vere's baby beauty. I swore revenge upon you both. I forged the notice of Leslie Dane's death, made her believe it was true, and drove her to desperation and forced her to marry you. I made you jealous by my anonymous letters, and turned your married life into a hell upon earth. But now, the sweetest drop in my cup—the illegality of your marriage—is turned into bitterness. But I will have my revenge yet. *Die, die, villain!*"

One movement, swift as the lightning flash, and a little dagger gleamed in her hand, and the next instant was buried to the hilt in Colonel Carlyle's heart.

With a groan he fell on the floor at her feet.

Strong hands bore the raving maniac away, attended by her frightened, horror-struck mother.

The poor victim of the madwoman's fatal revenge, as he lay weltering in his blood, lifted his dimming eyes, and gasped one imploring word:

"Bonniel!"

Trembling like a wind-blown leaf, she came at his call, and knelt down at his side with a great pity shining in her soft blue eyes.

The dying man's gaze dwelt on her for a moment, drinking in all the sweetness and fairness of the face he loved, and which he was losing forever.

"My wife," he murmured, in hollow, broken accents, "do you not—see—I was—not wholly—to blame? A—fiend's—work—goaded me—on! She has—had—her revenge. But—it—might have been—so different—if I had known. Bonniel, forgive!"

She took his hand in hers and bent her face lower over him, with all the divine pity and forgiveness of a tender woman shining in the eyes that were brimming over with tears.

"I am sorry it all fell out so," she said, very gently, "and I forgive all—as freely as I hope to be forgiven."

A beam of love and gratitude flashed over his features an instant; then it faded out in the grayness and pallor of death. Bonniel turned away, and hid her face on the shoulder of the faithful Lucy.

"It's all over, my poor darling. Shall we go away now?" Lucy whispered.

"We must go back to his home with

him, Lucy. We must show him the last tribute of respect. I have forgiven him. He was more sinned against than sinning," she murmured back.

So when the mournful funeral cortege moved from the gates of his stately home, Colonel Carlyle's darling, whom he had so passionately loved despite his jealous madness, went down to the portals of the grave with him, and saw all that was mortal of Clifford Carlyle laid away in the kindred dust.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Felise Herbert was pronounced by the most competent physicians a dangerous and incurable maniac. She was accordingly removed to an insane asylum for life.

Mrs. Arnold escaped all suspicion of complicity in her daughter's crimes, and was suffered to go free from the terrors of the law. But she had no object in life now. The destruction of her idol had torn down the fair citadel of hope and plunged her into incurable despair. Wealth and position were nothing to her now since the beautiful girl for whose sake she had schemed to secure them could never enjoy them. Among Felise's effects she found Mr. Arnold's stolen will. In a spasm of remorse she returned it to the owner, and Bonniel received her share of the large fortune her Uncle Francis had bequeathed her. Mrs. Arnold went into the insane asylum where her daughter was confined, and became a nurse there for the sake of being near the wretched and violent maniac.

And Bonniel? Colonel Carlyle had bequeathed her the whole of his large fortune, which, added to her inheritance from her uncle, made her one of the wealthiest women in New York. But wealth cannot buy happiness. Mrs. Carlyle, young, beautiful and wealthy though she was, might yet have exclaimed with the gifted poet:

"If happiness have not her seat and center in the breast, We may be wise, or rich, or great; we never can be blest."

She shut up the splendid New York mansion, and taking Lucy with her, went back to Sea View, the home she had always loved best. There, lulled by the ocean waves, and nursed by the tender breezes, she hoped to find a measure of rest and contentment.

"Lucy, there can be no more talk of mistress and maid between you and me," she said then. "You have proved yourself a true and faithful friend. I shall settle ten thousand dollars upon you, and you shall stay, if you will, as my companion."

But Lucy Moore proved obstinate.

"I haven't got education enough to be your companion," she answered. "I would rather be your maid still. I love to be about you, and tend you, and care for you."

Bonniel settled the sum she had named upon her, but the devoted girl still remained with her in her old position. Summer came with birds and flowers, and gentle breezes, then waned and faded, as do all things beautiful, and autumn winds blew coldly over the sea.

One cool yet sunny afternoon the lovely widow went down to the shore for her accustomed row in her pretty namesake, the *Bonniel*, which had been newly repaired and trimmed.

To her surprise the little bark was not there, rocking idly about at its own sweet will.

"Who can have borrowed it?" she wondered, sitting down on the sands to watch for its return.

But after awhile her hands dropped into her lap and clasped each other loosely; she fell into a fit of musing, and forgot to watch the sea for the return of her truant bark. There was a vague doubt and trouble tugging at her heart-strings as she recalled some lines she had loved long ago:

"And yet I know past all doubting, truly, A knowledge greater than grief can dim— I know as he loved, he will love me duly, Yea, better, even better than I love him."

"And as I walk by the vast calm river, The awful river so dread to see, I say, 'Thy breadth and thy depth forever Are bridged by his thoughts that cross to me.'"

The keel of the *Bonniel* grated suddenly on the shore; the boatman sprang out by her side.

She looked up into the dark eyes of Leslie Dane.

"No, do not rise," he said, kneeling down beside her as she made a nervous movement, "I do not wish to startle you."

He held out his hand and she laid hers silently within it for a moment.

"I have been traveling all over my native land with my friend, Mr. Muller," he said, "and we talk of returning to Europe soon; but I could not go, Bonniel, till I came down here to thank you for—that day when you saved my life at such a sacrifice."

"It is a canceled debt," she answered, quietly. "Do not forget that you were about to give your life to save my secret."

There was silence for a moment. She was looking out at the ocean with troubled blue eyes, and a faint quiver on the tender lips. He was looking at her as he looked long ago with his heart in his eyes. Suddenly he caught both hands in his and held them tightly.

"It was a dreadful mistake I made that night when I thought I had bound you so

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truly my own," he said. "Bonniel, I wonder whether you are glad or sorry now that it happened so?"

"Perhaps it was for the best," she answered, gently, "the way things fell out."

A shade of disappointment crossed his handsome features.

"Then, Bonniel, my darling, loved through it all," he cried, "you would not be willing to give yourself to me now?"

She smiled and lifted her eyes to his. In their blue and tender depths he saw shining on him the unchangeable love of a lifetime.

"Make the bond a tighter one, next time, Leslie," she said, with a shy and radiant smile.

He stooped and clasped her fondly in his arms.

"Ah, darling," he answered, holding her tightly clasped to his wildly beating heart, "there shall be no blind, boyish mistake this time. There shall be a license that shall hold you mine as fast and tight forever as I hold you now in my arms!"

[THE END.]

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The dealer took a live lobster out of a heap on a marble slab.

"It's name is Joe," the dealer said, after he had inspected one of its legs. "Now, can you find it?"

The customer took the lobster gingerly by the back of the neck, where it could not reach his hand with its nippers. Turning it on its back so that the brown legs flopped backward, a smooth streak half an inch long and nearly as wide was seen on the inside of the thigh. In this streak like a mosaic, were short lines, as though some one had printed on it with indelible brown ink in back hand characters "J O E."

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