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Old Man's Darling.

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

CHAPTER XXXI—Continued.
"To pack my trunks!" exclaimed the mistress, in surprise. "Why should you wish to do that, Dolores?"
Dolores looked back at her in surprise also.
"For your journey, of course, Madam Carlyle," she said. "Monsieur, your husband tells me that Paris do not agree with your health, and that he removes you this day to his place in Italy on de Bay of Naples."

CHAPTER XXXII.

Alas for that one triumphant night of Felise Herbert. It was succeeded by a day of disappointment.
It was scarcely noon before she heard that Colonel Carlyle had caused the arrest of Leslie Dane upon the charge of murdering Mr. Arnold, and that he had been committed to prison to await a requisition from the governor of New Jersey, in which State the deed had been committed.
Mrs. Arnold entering her room in a tremor of nervous agitation, found her pacing the floor, wildly gesticulating, and muttering to herself, in terms of the fiercest denunciation, anathemas against Colonel Carlyle.
"The miserable old dotard!" she exclaimed, furiously. "To think that his madness should have carried him to such lengths! Just when I felt so sure of my revenge he has balked me of my satisfaction and imperiled my safety by his jealous madness!"
"Felise, you have heard all, then?" exclaimed Mrs. Arnold, anxiously.
Felise turned her blazing dark eyes toward her mother, and Mr. Arnold shuddered.
"All, all!" she echoed, passionately; "all news flies apace!"
"Felise, I feared this!" exclaimed Mrs. Arnold. "You were over-confident last night. Who could tell what form that old man's madness would take?"
"Who, indeed!" cried her daughter passionately. "And yet my theory seemed so plausible—who could have dreamed of its failure? But for him all would have gone as I planned it! But you cannot dream, mother, what that besotted old villain had the audacity to do!"
"It is not possible he suspected your complicity in the affair, Felise—he has taken no steps against us!" wildly questioned the mother as she sank into a chair half-fainting with terror.
"No, no, he has not done that, mother—his devilry took another form."
"What, then, my dear? Oh! Felise, do sit down and calm yourself, and let us talk this matter over quietly," implored Mrs. Arnold anxiously.
"Calm myself—ha, ha, ha, when the blood in my veins has turned to molten fire, and is burning me to ashes! You are an iceberg, mother, with your cold words and calm looks, but you cannot put out the fire that is raging within me! Surely I must be wholly my father's child! There is nothing of you about me—nothing!"
"Yes, she is like her father—the more pity! For there was madness in his blood," Mrs. Arnold muttered inaudibly; "and I, oh! God—all my life I have fostered her evil passions, in my greed of gold, until now, when her reason totters on the brink of insanity. Oh! that I might undo my part in this fearful tragedy, and save her from the gulf that yawns beneath her feet!"
Overcome by her late remorse and terrible forebodings, she hid her face in her hands while a nervous trembling seized upon her from head to foot. Felise paused in her frenzied walk and eyed her curiously.
"Mother, are you turning coward in the face of danger?" she asked, with a ring of contempt in her voice.
There was no reply. The bowed face still rested on the trembling hands, the form still shook with nervous terror. Something in the weakness and forlornness of that drooping attitude in the mother who had subordinated everything else to her daughter's welfare, struck like a chill upon Felise, and partially tamed the devil raging within her. She spoke in a gentler tone:
"Rouse yourself, mother. See! I have quite sobered down, and am ready to discuss the matter as calmly and dispassionately as you could wish. Ask what you please, and I will answer."
Mrs. Arnold looked up, taking new heart as she saw that Felise still retained the power to subdue her fiery passions.
"Then tell me, dear, what else Colonel Carlyle has done besides causing Leslie Dane's arrest, said her mother.
Felise grasped the arms of her chair and held herself within it by a frenzied effort of will. Her voice was low and intense as she answered:
"Mother—he found out that Bonnibel was about to fly from him last night—just

as I told you she would, you remember—and he—he actually locked her into her rooms, turned Lucy Moore, her maid, into the street—and is keeping his wife a prisoner to prevent her escape."
Mrs. Arnold was too astonished to speak for a minute or two. At length she found voice to utter:
"How know you that, Felise?"
"I have a spy in the chateau, mother—nothing that transpires there remains long unknown to me," returned the daughter, calmly.
Again there was momentary silence and surprise. Mrs. Arnold's weaker nature was sometimes confounded by a new discovery of her daughter's powerful capabilities for evil.
"What must Bonnibel's feelings be under the circumstances?" she exclaimed at last.
"I cannot imagine," was the dry response.
"Will she confess the truth to him, do you think?"
"I cannot tell; I hope she will not," said Felise with strong emphasis.
"I thought you wished him to know the truth. Was not that a part of your cherished scheme of revenge?"
"Yes, it was, but there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip," you know. And now that he has prevented her escape with Leslie Dane, and caused the artist's arrest, the only chance of safety for you and me lies in his keeping her a close prisoner until the trial is over."
"What can that avail us, Felise?"
"Can you not see?" exclaimed Felise impatiently. "Leslie Dane must be sacrificed to save us. He must be convicted by circumstantial evidence, and punished. Bonnibel is the only person who could prove his innocence. Let her keep out of the way and all will go well with us. Should she appear at the trial then discovery and ruin stare us in the face."
"But you forget, my dear, that Leslie Dane can prove his own alibi by the minister who married him that night, even though we could procure Bonnibel's silence."
Felise laughed heartlessly.
"Yes, he could, certainly, but the question is, would he? I am quite sure he would not."
"But why should he be silent when his life would most probably pay the forfeit?" exclaimed Mrs. Arnold, with a slight shudder.
"Mother, there are men who would die for an over-strained point of honor. From all that I can gather from his intercepted letters, Leslie Dane is precisely that sort of a man. He is a Southerner, you know—a Floridian. You have been in the South, and you know that its natives are proud, chivalrous, honorable to the highest degree! Well, he can have no means of knowing that Bonnibel is imprisoned by her husband—of course the proud old colonel will keep that fact a dead secret, and invent some plausible excuse for her retirement from society. The artist can therefore attribute her absence from the trial to but one thing."
"And that?" queried Mrs. Arnold.
"He will think that Bonnibel is silent because she would sooner sacrifice him than lose her prestige in society, and her brilliant position as the wife of Colonel Carlyle. He will scorn to betray her secret, and will go to his death with the self-sacrifice of a martyr."
"But suppose Colonel Carlyle should let Bonnibel go free? What then?"
Felise laughed softly.
"He will not do so, mother. I have sent him an anonymous letter to-day that will fairly madden him with jealousy. He will never unlock her prison-door until the grass is growing over the handsome face of Leslie Dane."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Within the gloomy cell of a French prison Leslie Dane was seated on a low cot-bed, looking out through the narrow, grated window at the blue and sunny sky of France. The young artist looked haggard and wan in the clear light of the pleasant day, for though it was winter the rigors of that season had not yet set in. His dark eyes had a look of suffering and despair in their beautiful depths, and his lips were set in a weary line of pain. It was the day after his incarceration, and he had spent a wretched, sleepless night, almost maddened by the horror of his fearful situation. Suddenly the heavy key turned in the iron door; it swung open to admit a visitor, and then the jailer closed and relocked it, shutting into the gloomy cell the blonde face of Carl Muller.
"Bon jour," he said, with his debonaire smile that seemed to light the gloomy place like a beam of sunshine. "How goes it, mon ami?"
A gleam of pleasure shone faintly over his friend's haggard features.

"Is it you, Carl?" he said; "I thought you had deserted me!"
"Ingrate, could you think it?" responded Carl. "I was busy yesterday trying to find out some particulars of this mysterious affair, and they would not admit me last night. I came this morning as soon as they would let me in."
"Thanks, Carl; I might have known you were true as steel. And yet there is so much falsity and treachery on earth, how could I be sure of your loyalty? Have you learned anything?"
"Your accuser is the American, Colonel Carlyle," was the startling reply.
"My God!" exclaimed Leslie Dane, with a violent start; and then he added in a passionate tone, and half to himself. "Has he not already wronged me beyond all forgiveness?"
"He seems to have pushed it forward with the greatest malignity," continued Carl. "There are other countrymen of yours here in this city who declare they knew of the foul charge against you, yet they say that the verdict against you was given on purely circumstantial evidence, and that, such being the case, they did not intend to molest you, believing that you might after all be innocent of the crime. But Colonel Carlyle has pushed the affair in a way that seems to indicate a personal spite against you."
Leslie's broad, white brow clouded over gloomily.
"It is true, then, that there is such a charge against me. I fancied there must be some mistake. The whole affair seemed too monstrous for belief, yet you say it is a stern fact. It is so inexplicable to me, for I swear to you, Carl, that up to the very moment of my arrest yesterday I did not know that Francis Arnold was dead."

"And I believe you, Leslee, as firmly as I believe in the purity of my mother away off in my beloved Germany. I know you never have been guilty of such a foul crime."
"A thousand thanks for your noble confidence, Carl. Now I know that I have at least one true friend on earth. I was rather cynical in such matters before. A sad experience had taught me to distrust everyone," exclaimed Leslie, as he warmly grasped the young German's hand.
"But what reason do they assign for my alleged commission of the crime?"
"They told me," said Carl, hesitatingly, "that you were poor and unknown, and aspired to the hand of the millionaire's, beautiful and high-born niece. Mr. Arnold, they said, declined your suit for the young lady's hand, and you became enraged and left him, uttering very abusive language coupled with threats of violence. He was murdered while sleeping in his arm-chair that night on his piazza, and it was supposed that you had stealthily returned and wreaked your vengeance upon him."
"My God!" said Leslie Dane, "they have made out a black case against me, indeed. But upon whose circumstantial evidence was my conviction based?"
"Mrs. Arnold, the wife of the murdered man, and his step-daughter, Miss Herbert, heard and witnessed the altercation from their drawing-room windows. Their evidence convicted you, it is said."
"My soul!" exclaimed the unhappy prisoner to himself. "Bonnibel was there; she at least knew my innocence, yet she spoke no word to clear me from that most foul aspersion! And yet I could have sworn that she loved me as her own life. Oh, God! she was false than I could have dreamed. But, oh, that angel face; those beguiling lips—how can they cover a heart so black?"
"Come, come, mon ami, don't give up like this," said Carl, distressed by the sight of his friend's uncontrollable emotion. "It is a monstrous thing, I know, and will involve no end of time and worry before you get clear, of course, but, then, there is no doubt of your getting off—you have only to prove your innocence, and you can easily do that, you know. So let's take it as a joke, and bear it bravely. Do you know I mean to cross the ocean with you, and see the farce played out to the end? Then you shall take me around, and do the honors of your native land."

Leslie looked at the bright, buoyant face of the German artist as he spoke so cheerily, and a suspicious moisture crept into his dark eyes. He dashed his hand across them, deeming it unmanly weakness.
"Oh! Carl," he exclaimed, remorsefully, "how little I have valued your friendship, yet how firm and noble it has proved itself in this dark and trying hour! Forgive me, my friend, and believe me when I say that I give you the sole affection and trust of a heart that heretofore has trusted nothing of human kind, so basely had it been deceived. I think, I bless you for that promise to stand by me in my trial! And now I will do what I should have done long ago if I had known the value of your noble heart. I will tell you my story, and you shall be my judge."
Word for word, though it gave him inexpressible pain to recall it, he went over the story of his love for Bonnibel Vere, and her uncle's rejection of his suit, and the high words that passed between them. He passed lightly over their farewell, omitting but one thing. It was the story of their moonlight sail and secret marriage. That story was sealed within his breast. He would have died before he

would have revealed Bonnibel's fatal secret to any living soul.
"I left Cape May, where they were summing, on the midnight train," he concluded, "and the next day I sailed from New York for Europe. I never heard from Francis Arnold or his niece again. She had promised to be faithful to our love, but though I wrote to her many times I never received one line in return until that fatal note which you remember. In it she wrote me that she loved another."
"Perfidious creature!" muttered Carl.
"I never heard of her again," continued Leslie, "until, to my unutterable surprise, I met her as the wife of Colonel Carlyle."
"And it is for one so false and cruel that you rest under this dreadful charge," exclaimed the German. "But, please God, you will soon be cleared from it. Of course you will have no difficulty in proving an alibi. That is all you need to clear you."
But Leslie did not answer, and his friend saw that he was pale as death.
"Of course you can prove an alibi—cannot you, Leslie?" he asked, with a shade of anxiety in his tone.
But Leslie looked at him with a gleam of horror in his dark eyes, and his voice shook with emotion as he answered:
"No, Carl, I cannot!"
Carl Muller started as though a bullet had struck him.
"Leslie, you jest," he exclaimed, hoarsely. "Of course you can prove where you were at that exact time when the murder took place. Your safety all hinges upon that. Do you not remember where you were at that time?"
"Ah, Heaven, do I not remember? Every moment of that time is indelibly stamped upon my memory," groaned the unhappy prisoner.
"Then why do you talk so wildly, my dear fellow? All you have to do is to tell where you were at that time, and produce even one competent witness to prove it."
"I cannot do it!" Leslie answered, gravely.
"But, good Heavens, man, your life may have to pay the forfeit if you fail to establish an alibi at the trial."
"I must pay the forfeit, then. Carl, I choose death rather than the only available alternative," was the inscrutable and final reply.

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

"Words fail me, Colonel Carlyle, when I try to express my burning sense of your injustice in this high-handed outrage! What, in this enlightened age, in this nineteenth century, do men turn palaces into prisons, and debar weak women of their liberties? Am I a slave that you have turned your keys upon me, and set hirelings and slaves to watch me? Am I a criminal? If so, where is my crime?"
(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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