

Old Man's Darling.

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

CHAPTER XXIV—Continued.

He took up his brush and went to work at his picture without another word. Carl was silent also; he was recalling that episode of three years ago when Leslie in his wild outbreak had painted on the portrait of his fair, false hearted love.

"So he has not forgotten her," he thought; "and yet he has never breathed another word of her until to-day. Ah! she will never know what a true and noble heart she cast away."

He sat still awhile thinking profoundly, and referring to his letter now and then with ever increasing pride in the lucrative sale of his picture, for Carl was a lazy fellow, and though he commenced numbers of things seldom had patience to finish them. Consequently a completed work and its ready sale had all the charm of novelty to him.

"I say," he said, breaking the silence that had brooded as long as he could bear it, and returning to the charge upon his friend, "old fellow, it's a shame you should refuse such a profitable commission for a scruple I must say is not worthy of you. Do accept it, Leslie. This old fellow—let me see"—referring again to his letter—"Carlisle his name is—Colonel Carlisle—need not trouble you much with the sight of his obnoxious face, and the old lady—Favart says he is an old man, so of course she is an old lady—need only give you a few sittings. They would not trouble you long, and you need not think of them as Americans at all. Simply regard the sitter as your model, and think no more about it."

Leslie Dane did not answer, but the slight smile that played around his lips lips showed that he had been an attentive listener to Carl's admonition.

"You know," resumed Carl, seeing that Leslie would not answer, "we have been promising ourselves a trip to Paris for ever so long. I see no chance so suitable as the present when I have this pot of money to spend, and when you might so agreeably combine business with pleasure in the execution of this portrait and the enjoyment of all the pleasures of Paris. Recollect, you would be fairly lionized there."

"I do not fancy being lionized," said Leslie Dane, grimly.

"Do you not? Now, I should enjoy it above all things. But since I am not apt to have that honor I should enjoy following in your wake and taking all the glories second-hand. I should be sure to get a little of the honor reflected on me, for though I am not the rose, you know I have lived near it."

Leslie Dane looked up with a quizzical smile.

"Confess now, Carl," he said, "that nothing will content you but to get away and spend the gold you have earned. All your flattery and sophistry leads to this—that you are wild for a companion to aid abet you in spending the money that is burning a hole in your pocket this minute."

"Somehow the gold does seem to burn through my pockets," said Carl, reflectively. "But, tra, la, what is it good for but to buy pleasure?"

He began to hum a few bars of a German song with a gay refrain.

"Come, come, get to your work," exclaimed the other. "Your signal success with your last work should stimulate you to renewed efforts."

"So it will," affirmed Carl; "but not to-day. I feel so giddy over my good news that I could not work to-day. I should hardly know how to mix my colors. I feel as lazy, shiftless and good-natured as the Italian lazzaroni out in the sunshine."

Leslie Dane gave a little sigh as he looked at his happy companion. Nothing ever seemed to ruffle the gay current of his good nature. His temperament was an enviable one.

"Carl, did you ever have a sweetheart?" Leslie asked curiously.

"Sweethearts—yes, a score of them," laughed Carl. "More Gretchens, Madchens, and Anitas than you could count on your fingers. Why do you ask?"

"Only for curiosity. I thought you could not be so care-free and joyous if love had ever come into your life."

"That is according to how we look at love," said the German; "with you it is all a solemn epic or tragedy. With me it would be a pretty little poem or a happy song."

Leslie sighed but did not answer.

"Come, now," said the German, "we have wandered from our subject. Give up your selfishness this once, Leslie, and take a holiday. Come with me to Paris next week."

Leslie stood silently meditating, and Carl saw that the battle was almost won.

"Don't hesitate," said he, pushing his advantage. "Indeed you work too hard, my boy. There is no need of it since you have foreworn marriage. Take a breathing spell and come with me to Paris and paint old Mrs. Carlisle's portrait."

Leslie frowned slightly at the words. "Pray do not mention those people again," he said, in an irritated tone. "Perhaps I will accompany you to Paris; but I have no fancy to paint the portrait of a wrinkled old woman."

CHAPTER XXV.

"Confound the impudence of such fellows!" said Colonel Carlisle, fretfully, as he entered his wife's morning room.

It was a charming apartment with hangings of pale blue satin that made a perfect foil to the pearl-fair beauty of Bonniel. The chairs and sofas were upholstered in the same rich material; the carpet was white velvet, sprinkled over with blue forget-me-nots; the costly white lace curtains were draped over blue satin, and the bright fire burning in the silver grate shone upon expensive gilding and delicate bric-a-brac scattered profusely about the room.

A marble Flora, half buried in flowers, stood in a niche, and vases of delicate white lilies were on the marble mantel.

The young mistress of all this beauty and wealth so tastefully combined, as she sat near the fire with an open book, looked like a gem set in an appropriate shrine, so fair, and pure and dainty, was her person and her apparel.

She looked up with a slight smile as her liege lord's fretful ejaculation fell upon her ears.

"What person has been so unfortunate as to incur your displeasure?" she inquired.

"The artist of whom I purchased that splendid picture for the drawing-room—the last one, you know."

"Yes," she said, languidly; "and what has he done now?"

"I wanted him to paint your portrait, you know."

"Excuse me, I did not know," she returned.

"Oh no; I believe you did not. I think I failed to mention the matter to you. Well, he is the greatest artist in Rome—people are raving over his pictures. They say he has the most brilliant genius of his time."

"Is that why you are angry with him?" she asked, with a slight smile.

"No; oh, no. But I wrote to him and asked him to paint your portrait. I even offered to take you to Rome if he would not come to Paris."

"Well?"

"He had the impertinence to send me a cool refusal," said the colonel, irately.

"He did—and why?" asked Bonniel just a little piqued at the unknown artist.

"He did not like to paint portraits, he said—he preferred the ideal world of art. Did you ever hear of such a cool excuse?"

"We have no right to feel angry with him. He is, of course, the master of his own actions, and has undoubted right to his preferences," said Bonniel, calmly.

But though she spoke so quietly, her womanly vanity was piqued by the unknown artist's cold refusal "to hand her sweetness down to fame."

"Who is he? What is his name?" she asked.

The colonel considered a moment.

"I have a wonderful faculty for forgetting names," he said. "Favart has told me his name several times—let me see—I think—yes, I am sure—it is *Deane!*"

"I should like to see him," she said, "I have always taken a great deal of interest in artists."

"You will be very apt to see him," said the colonel; "he is in Paris now—taking a holiday, Favart says. People are making quite a fuss over him and his friend—the artist from whom I bought the other fine picture, you know. You will be sure to meet them in society."

"Do you think so?" she asked, twirling the leaves of her book nervously. The mention of artists and pictures always agitated her strangely. She could not forget the young artist who had gone to Rome to earn fame and fortune and died so soon. Her cheek paled with emotion and her eyes darkened with sadness under their drooping lashes of golden-brown.

"Yes, there is not a doubt of it," he said. "In fact, I suppose we shall have to invite them, too, though I do not relish it after the fellow's incivility. But it is the privilege of greatness to be crusty, I believe. Anyway, the fashionable are all *feting* and lionizing him, so we cannot well slight him. I shall have Monsieur Favart bring him and his friend to our ball next week. What do you say, my dear?"

"Send him a card by all means," she answered, "I am quite curious to see him."

"Perhaps he may repent his refusal when he sees how beautiful you are, my darling," said the colonel, with a fond, proud glance into her face. "His ideal world of art, as he calls it, cannot contain anything more lovely than yourself."

"You flatter me, Colonel Carlisle," she said lightly, but in her heart she knew

that he had spoken truly. She had been afloat on the whirling tide of fashionable life now for several months, and praises and adulation had followed her everywhere. The gay Parisians went mad over her pure blonde loveliness. They said she was the most beautiful and refined woman in Paris, as well as the most cold and pure. She had begun to take a certain pleasure in the gaudies of the world and in the homage that followed her wherever she moved. These were the empty husks on which she had to feed her heart's hunger, and she was trying to find them sweet.

Colonel Carlisle's baleful jealousy had lain dormant or concealed ever since he had taken his wife from school.

True, his arch-enemy, Felise Herbert, was in Paris, but for some reason of her own she had not as yet laid any serious pitfall for his unwary feet.

Perhaps she was only playing with him as the cat does with the little mouse before she ruthlessly murders it; perhaps Bonniel's icy-cold manner and studied reserve to all made it harder to excite the old soldier's ever ready suspicion.

Be that as it may, life flowed on calmly if not happily to the colonel and his young wife.

They met Mrs. Arnold and her daughter frequently in their fashionable rounds, they invited them to their house, and received invitations in return, but though the colonel was cordial, his wife was cold and proud to the two women who had been so cruel to her and driven her into this unhappy marriage with a man old enough to be her grandfather. She could not forgive them for that cruel deed.

"I bide my time," Felise said to her mother one day when they were discussing the Carlises. "I am giving her a little taste of the world's pleasures. I want her to fall in love with this life she is leading here. She will be tempted by its enticements and forget her coldness and prudishness. Then I shall strike."

"She is very circumspect," said Mrs. Arnold. "They say she is a model of virtue and beautiful wifely obedience."

"The higher she soars now the lower her fall shall be!" exclaimed the relentless girl, with her low, reckless laugh; "mother I shall not fail of my revenge!"

Ah! Felise Herbert! The coils of fate are tightening around you like a deadly serpent while you exult in your wickedness.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The gay, pleasure-loving Parisians were on the *qui vive* for Mrs. Carlisle's masquerade ball; for it was everywhere conceded that her entertainments were the most *recherche* and delightful in the whole city. Colonel Carlisle spared neither pains nor expense to render them so.

In his laudable desire to further Bonniel's happiness, the colonel lavished gold like water. He knew no other path to success than this. He wanted to win her regard, if possible, and his experience in society had disposed him to believe that the most potent "open sesame" to a woman's heart was wealth and power.

How far the colonel's convictions were true, or how ably he might have succeeded in the darling wish of his heart, had things gone well, we shall never know, for the frail superstructure of his happiness, builded on the sand, was destined to be thrown down and shattered into fragments by the wild winds of fate, that should converge into storms on that fatal night to which so many looked forward with pleasure.

And yet not the faintest presentiment of evil came to him that day to whisper of the gathering clouds of destiny. He knew not that his "house of cards" tottered on its foundation, that the wreck and ruin of his dearest hope was about to be consummated. He knew not, or he might have exclaimed with the poet:

"Of all that life can teach us,
There's naught so true as this;
The winds of fate blow ever,
But ever blow amiss!"

The brief winter day came at length, gloomy and overcast, with clouded sky that overflowed with a wild, tempestuous rain, as though

"The heart of Heaven was breaking
In tears o'er the fallen earth."

At night the storm passed over, the bright stars shone through the misty veil of darkness, a lovely silver moon hung its crescent in the sky. All things seemed propitious for the hour that was "big with fate" to the lovely girl whose changing fortunes we have followed to the turning point of her life.

Cold and dark, and gloomy though it seemed outside, all was light and warmth, and summer in the splendid *chateaux*.

Hot-house flowers bloomed everywhere in the most lavish profusion. The air was heavy with their fragrance.

Entrancing strains of music echoed through the splendid halls, tempting light feet to the gay whirl of the dance. The splendid drawing-rooms, opening into each other, looked like long vistas of fairy-land, in the glow of light, and the beauty shed around by countless flowers overflowing great marble vases everywhere. The gay masquers moved through the entrancing scene, chatting, laughing, dancing, as though life itself were but one long revel. In the banqueting hall the long tables were loaded with every luxury under the sun, temptingly spread on gold and silver plates. Nothing that taste

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could devise, or wealth could procure, was lacking for the enjoyment of the guests; and pleasure reigned supreme.

It was almost the hour for unmasking, and Colonel Carlisle stood alone, half hidden by a crimson-satin curtain, looking on idly at the gay dancers before him.

He felt weary and dull, though he would not have owned it for the world. He hated to feel the weakness and feebleness of old age creeping over him, as it was too surely doing, and affected to enter into all the gaudies of the season with the zest and ardor of a younger and stronger man.

He had for a few moments felt dull, sad and discontented. The reason was because he had lost sight of his beautiful idol whom no mask could hide from his loving eyes.

She had disappeared in the moving through a little while ago, and now he impatiently waited until some happy chance should restore her to his sight again.

"I am very foolish over my darling," he said to himself, half proudly, half seriously. "I do not believe that any young man could worship her as passionately as I do. I watch over her as closely and jealously as if some dread mischance might remove her from my sight at any moment. Ah, those dreadful two years in which I so cruelly put her out of my life and starved my eyes and my heart—would that I might recall them and undo their work! Those years of separation and repentance have sadly aged me!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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A RAT STORY.

"One day not long ago," said a brick manufacturer, "one of my workmen saw three rats carrying a straw across the brickyard. It seemed such an unusual sort of proceeding that he stopped his work to watch them. Two of the rats held the straw at opposite ends while the third supported the centre. They were making straight for the river which flowed by one side of the yard. When they arrived at the bank they laid down the straw and took a long drink. Then they proceeded to take up the straw again in the same manner as before and returned by the same way they had come."

"This so interested the workman that he determined to watch if they would come again. And sure enough, at about the same time the next day, they appeared carrying the straw exactly as before. Having provided himself with a gun he shot all three to see if possibly he might solve the mystery. He discovered that the rat in the centre was blind and therefore concluded that this was the animal's kind method of leading their afflicted comrade to the water to drink.—Philadelphia Inquirer.

The Charlottetown Guardian reports that Mr. James Percival Crapaud is building a nice new steamer, one hundred and forty feet in length, to run between Pugwash and Victoria.

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