

(CONTINUED FROM TENTH PAGE.)

'bald's tall form entered the drawing room. 'I was afraid you would not accept our invitation. We know that you are not partial to pleasure.'

'You are quite right, my lady,' replied Sir Archibald. 'All my desire for pleasure died out when my wife departed this life. But I accepted your kind invitation because I require a change of air. And how do you find your companion?'

'Everything that can be desired!' cried Lady Radstock.

'Hem! Glad to hear it, I'm sure. Is she hereabouts?'

'Yes, that is, she—she is in the grounds.'

'Dancing, I presume; I hear the band. Well, a little amusement never hurts a young girl; indeed, it does them a great deal of good. Dancing is fine exercise, especially for young limbs.'

'Yes, it is indeed—er—'

Here Lady Radstock paused. She wanted to break the news of the engagement between Ronald and Violet, but Sir Archibald's grave face deterred her.

'Would he be angry?' she thought. 'Would he consider he had been tricked? She determined to risk it.'

'Sir Archibald, she said, 'Violet is indeed a pretty and affectionate girl. I love her like my own daughter. And there is another who—'

'Eh?' sharply.

'There is another who loves her dearly, Sir Archibald. And is it any wonder? He loves her with all his heart and soul!'

'Who does?'

'My son.'

'Ronald?'

'Yes.'

'Hem! Oh, indeed. And she—what does she say? Does she love him?'

'Oh yes!'

'But they have not known each other long enough to form a proper opinion.'

'Oh, yes, they have, Sir Archibald. But you will let me plead for forgiveness for both of them, will you not?'

'Forgiveness for what?'

'They have loved each other for many—many months.'

Sir Archibald looked hard into Lady Radstock's face before he replied.

Then he said slowly:

'I cannot understand that.'

'Ronald met her at the school where she was receiving her education.'

'Oh! Hem!'

'It—as a case of love at first sight.'

'Hem! How do you know?'

'Ronald told me so.'

'How does he know? Hem! Well, I see it all now. Yes—yes, all. It has been very ingeniously done. I must admit.'

And Sir Archibald left his seat and commenced to pace the floor.

He was evidently much agitated.

'What a fool I have been,' he muttered. 'My foolish pride has let that precious prize slip through my grasp. And I came here with the intention of bringing her away with me! And only last night I resolved to ask her forgiveness—to let me treat her as a daughter in future. To ask her to love me a little, and to try and forget how I treated her poor mother. To ask her to call me grandpa! Oh, God! how bitterly I am disappointed.'

Pausing by the fireplace, he leaned his head upon his hands, and fairly sobbed aloud.

Lady Radstock rushed forward and placed her hand upon his shoulder, crying:

'Sir Archibald, what is it? Speak, what is it? I know you must love her as your adopted child, as one you have brought up from the time she was not more than a baby. But, oh, believe me when I say that they love each other dearly, and that they would be happy together.'

'You do not know her history.'

'I only know she is an orphan without a friend in the world except you. I know that she is fortuneless, that—'

'Stay, my lady. Where is she—in the grounds? Come, come,' giving her his arm, 'let us find her! Oh, Violet, Violet! my sweet, pretty Violet! They say you are friendless—penniless! Where are you, my Violet?'

Lady Radstock accompanied him, but she was perfectly at a loss to account for his intense excitement.

Ronald handed Violet to a rustic seat, and seated himself beside her.

'Now, Violet,' he said, 'let me know the cause of your excitement this morning.'

'Ronald, did you ever love anyone before me?'

'My darling, I have often told you that you are my first and only love. Why ask the question?'

'Did you never have any love for—for Miss Howland?'

'No, my love, never! I esteemed her very highly, and I visited her frequently, but I never loved her. Why do you ask?'

'Because I happened to overhear a conversation this morning, a conversation in which Miss Howland denounced me as a street wail—'

'A what?' cried Ronald fiercely.

'A street wail, a nameless orphan, a—'

'Yes, and I can prove you are!' interrupted a voice by their side, and Miss Howland came into view. 'You are a street wail!'

'How dare you insult Miss Howland in this disgraceful fashion!' cried Ronald, starting to his feet, Violet also rising and clinging to him.

'How dare I? I have every right to do so. You led me to believe—'

'I led you to believe nothing! I—'

'Listen. You do not know the history of that girl by your side. She is the daughter of a woman found dead in the streets—the daughter of a common woman! and Miss Howland's voice rose into a shriek. 'That is what she is—a common girl upon whom Sir Archibald Blackmore took compassion; and you, a noble lord, bestow your love upon her! Bah! the daughter of no one knows who—a penniless wanderer—a girl with a pretty name—a

name which seems to attract you like a loadstone—Violet! Ha! ha!'

'Miss Howland,' said Ronald quietly, as he pressed the trembling form of his beloved Violet to his breast. 'Your excitement will avail for nothing. I say again that I never led you to believe that I loved you.'

'You did! How dare you stand there and tell such a deliberate falsehood!'

'I tell no falsehood. I visited you as a friend, yet I must admit I admired you, but that is all—'

'As a friend!' cried Miss Howland bitterly.

'I repeat as a friend.'

'Absurd! Did you visit us day after day—did you present me with many costly presents, as a friend?'

'Beware, Miss Howland, or you will force me to say as many things of you as you have said of this young lady.'

'I care not!' cried Miss Howland wildly. 'I care not, I defy you. You know no harm of me. If you do, say so!'

'I say nothing, only that you are a bold and, as you now show yourself to be, an unprincipled woman.'

'Unprincipled! Because I advise you against a designing creature like that.'

'I did not ask you for your advice. You should have waited until I did so.'

'You intend to marry that penniless girl?'

'I do, and I now hope you are perfectly satisfied.'

'So far I am, but let me warn you you will regret your choice.'

'And why—what makes you think so? Have you had any experience of this young lady?'

'Thank Heaven, no. I would not, like you, lower myself to make her acquaintance.'

Lord Ronald laughed, but this only served to exasperate the disappointed young woman more than ever.

Her eyes glared upon them after the manner of a tiger before it springs upon its prey.

But Ronald was by no means afraid. It was not so with Violet, however. It was the first time in her life that she had seen a woman in such a towering rage, and she was actually trembling with fear.

Still, with her lover's arm tightly clasped about her, she felt safe.

Miss Howland's loud tones had aroused the curiosity of the guests, and one by one and two by two they gathered round the actors in this novel drama.

Most of them knew Miss Howland, and they wondered what on earth it was that caused her to stand as she did and glare so fiercely upon Lord Ronald and pretty little Violet.

Miss Howland saw them gathering about her, and thinking that this would be a fine revenge could she expose the secret of Violet's parentage before them all, she again fired up.

'Take me away, Ronald,' murmured Violet.

'Nay, nay, my love,' replied Ronald, 'did I do so, Miss Howland would have the whole field to herself. No, no, stay; face it out, she cannot do either of us any harm.'

Miss Howland caught the last words, and she again forced a laugh.

'Harm,' she cried, 'I cannot do you harm, no doubt. But still, what would these ladies and gentlemen say, did they know all?'

'I say again, Miss Howland, that you are excited and it will avail you nothing. Nay, I should imagine that your strange conduct will do yourself harm.'

But Miss Howland was now utterly reckless. She saw about her several young ladies to whom, on more than one occasion, she had confided her secret that Lord Ronald Radstock loved her, and that ere long he would ask her to become his wife.

And as she looked she fancied—and it was only fancy—that there was a sneer upon every face.

This only made her more fierce and reckless.

'Well, my lord,' she said, 'I wish you joy of your bargain. Ha, ha!'

'I am exceedingly grateful to you,' replied Ronald, making a mock bow.

'It will not be long ere you regret it.'

'That will be my business, Miss Howland. But I beg you will not further prolong this scene which, to say the least, is disgraceful.'

'You have brought it upon yourself!'

'By no means. I came to this part thinking to be molested, and having not the slightest thought that we should be followed, and that this young lady would be subjected to such gross insults as you have been pleased to hurl at her head.'

'My lord—' commenced Miss Howland. But at this moment her mother, who had been seeking for her high and low, came hurriedly up.

'Florence she whispered, 'your voice can be heard all over the place.'

'Did you not tell me to denounce her?'

'I did, but not exactly in this fashion. Guests are actually coming away and talking about you.'

'I care not.'

'But listen; I have just seen Lady Radstock coming through the trees, and she is leaning on the arm of—Whom do you think?'

'I know not.'

'Sir Archibald Blackmore.'

'What does that matter to me? What Sir Archibald may hear me say he will not be able to deny.'

'Probably not, but if I were you I should now come away—and see, there are several young fellows near us actually enjoying all this. Florence—come!'

'I will in a few moments.'

Turning to the assembled guests she said:

'No doubt you all are wondering at this strange scene. But it is easily accounted for. Lord Ronald led me to believe he loved me, but suddenly he gave up all thoughts of me, and instead bestowed his affections upon that girl. You know her as Lady Radstock's companion, but none of you know her history. Behold in her, then, a girl, who years ago, was discovered with

her mother in the London streets. Her mother, when found, had perished with the cold. And this is the girl he loves. That common girl upon whom Sir Archibald Blackmore took compassion. See how she cowers in his arms. See her—she knows that all I have said is true; ask my Lord Radstock to deny it.'

Before Ronald could reply to this outburst a deep voice broke in: 'Who is it that dares to utter such words?'

And Sir Archibald, with Lady Radstock on his arm, came through the trees.

'Is it you who dare to utter such words, Miss Howland?' asked Sir Archibald sternly.

'Yes, and I have good cause too. This girl—this—'

'Be careful what you say, Miss Howland. Do you know who that girl actually is? What romantic rubbish about her being a 'common girl' have you heard? You are mistaken. Come, Violet,' he added, as he opened his arms. 'Come here, my child!'

Violet, with a great cry of gladness, rushed into his arms and nestled her head upon his breast.

'Miss Howland,' said Sir Archibald, 'you see here not a 'common girl'—not a 'penniless wanderer'—but my grandchild! Aye, my grandchild, and the heiress to half a million of money! This is my grandchild, Lady Radstock; my Lord Ronald, this is my grandchild! My own sweet Violet!'

And Sir Archibald bowed his grey head upon Violet's golden locks, and once more relieved himself with a burst of tears.

Only for one moment did Miss Howland look upon this affecting picture. The next day she gathered up her skirts, and casting a fierce look upon the group, ran off to the Castle, accompanied by her mother; and all that we may add in reference to them is, that within an hour they were both at the railway-station waiting for the train to convey them to London.

Long after the guests had retired, Sir Archibald and Violet, Lady Radstock and her son, sat in the drawing-room.

There Sir Archibald spoke of his poor unfortunate daughter, of his foolish pride; how time after time he felt inclined to take Violet in his arms and acknowledge her before the world; and how pride had deterred him.

And after he had explained this he left his chair, took Violet's hand placed it within that of Ronald's, and blessed them both.

'Oh, it was indeed a happy time. And now what more have we to add? Well, within three months Lord Ronald and Violet were married; and oh, what a magnificent gathering there under that roof!'

And did anyone look happier than Sir Archibald? No.

By the treatment of Violet he endeavored to atone for his unworthy conduct in the past.

He sold his house in Chester-square, and went to live at the Castle. There he remained for many years, and lived to nurse numerous great grandchildren. Lord Ronald proved to be a most affectionate husband, and he always said that if he had searched the wide world through he could not have found such a loving and devoted wife as his own 'Sweet Violet.'

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they shouted to their four sleeping children

'Wake up! Run to the window and jump out!' they cried

But there was no answer. Soon the flames shut off escape even from the windows. Then the frenzied parents heard the cries of the little ones whom they could not save. In the meantime the two younger children were taken from the lower story safe. Helplessly the father and mother stood watching the destruction of their home and the death of their little ones. That afternoon four charred little bodies were taken from the ruins. Then was recalled the tragic incident of the four handles pulled from their fastenings in the casket and of the casket falling to the floor

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stranger went to bed in his boots. On such occasions time doesn't count. It is just one long stretch of suspense without beginning or end. Therefore the stranger had no way of knowing how long he had been in his bunk when he heard the sound of cowhide boots. Then the door, a home made affair without fastening opened. It was the landlord

'Sleep?' the landlord asked.

The stranger said, 'No.'

'Recon you won't get much,' the landlord continued. Lots of the boys just come in with the gals. Want to have a shake down in the eatin' room. Guess you'd better skin out and jine 'em. Fact is stranger I'm a committee of one from the gang to ax you to jine. It'll save a lot of trouble if you come right away.'

The stranger accepted. He had only to readjust collar and tie and his toilet was complete.

'Better belt the gun on you,' said the landlord, pointing out the weapon he had lent. 'Reckon you wouldn't know what to do with it if that was any occasion. But it'll make the boys think more of you if they see you wear a gun.'

Then the landlord led the way to the dining room. Fifty cowboys, several greasers and some women were there. The landlord stood in the doorway with the stranger and raised his right hand. The signal stopped the music and the dance. Then the room filled quickly with powder smoke. The cowboys had saluted the stranger.

When the smoke had blown out, several of the cow gentry surrounded the stranger and took him to the centre of the room. The women circled about him in a peculiar sort of dance, in which the arms were in motion as much as the feet. One of the women took off the stranger's hat and whirled it toward the ceiling. When it came down it wouldn't hold water. It had been a target for the cow-gentry while it was in the air.

After this incident there was a lull. The stranger was bland.

'Boys, line up the ladies for refreshments,' he said.

The entire round-up went to the bar meekly. The treat was accepted in silence. Then the dance was resumed and the stranger found himself an honored guest. The landlord bowed to him when it was all over.

'You've done me proud,' he said. 'I allow I owe you a week's board, or more if you like.'

The stranger waved for the landlord to stop, and went to bed. He remained several days, and was the recipient of every attention as long as he stayed.

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A Tragic Coincidence.

That fate through coincidence tragic and unreal gives man its warning seems credible enough from this strange story. Last Sunday at Ashau, a settlement twenty miles northeast of Elkhart, Ind., the five year old son of Mr. and Mrs. Benjamin Miller was buried. As the little casket was being carried from the house, the four handles pulled from their fastenings and allowed it to drop to the floor.

Miller is a member of the Amish sect. 'This is a sign of approaching disaster,' he said, as with tears in his eyes he picked up the casket containing the body of his loved one.

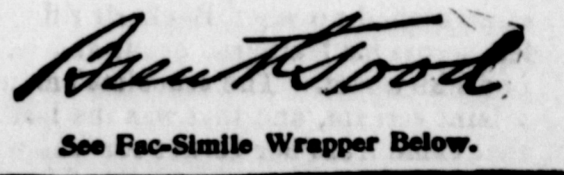
Mark now the verity of the omen. Four days later Mr. and Mrs. Miller started to the barn to milk the cows. Their six children they left asleep in the house. The four oldest were in the second story, the two youngest in the lower story. When the parents had nearly reached the barn they looked back and were horrified to see their house on fire. They rushed back. The flames had already destroyed the staircase. There was no ladder. They could not reach the second story. Frantically

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