

OLD MAN GILBERT.

By ELIZABETH W. BELLAMY, ("LAMBIA THORPE," author of "Four Oaks," "Little Joanna," etc.)

CHAPTER XXX.



Pushed back his chair and rose.

It was the middle of January when John Fletcher came down stairs again, to find the house wearing a strangely silent and deserted aspect.

The colonel, with profuse apologies, had asked his guest's permission the evening before to be absent for several days, on account of the wedding of Miss Elvira and the not-unlikely prospect of matrimony."

She was standing near one of the front windows, her face partly turned away, and John Fletcher might easily have retired unseen; but he had no thought of retiring.

"No, said Winifred; 'I did not wish to go. This is my home, and I have been ill,' she added, hastily, in evident embarrassment.

"Oh, not very ill." Then, seeing that she was taking notice of her dress, she said, with deepening confusion, "I am dressed to please my father."

Just and badinage were not possible between these two; but John Fletcher could not resist replying, with intent to be provoking:

"I should never have suspected you of dressing to please me; though perhaps I might not have thought that it was to please your father."

She gave him a look of cold reproof, and sat down in an arm chair beside the marble-topped table that stood stiffly in the precise center of the room.

It should prove that my brother has died of his wounds," she faltered, as the color ebbed away from her face.

She covered her face with her hands, and John Fletcher pushed back his chair, and rose.

"Oh, forgive me," she cried, with still averted face. "I do not mean to forget—forget!"

"Thanks," he answered, coldly. "It is not worth the effort of your remembering me. I was glad to serve a friend of my friend—Mrs. Lorrimer. You must believe that I most sincerely regret the chance that has compelled me to be so long a trespasser upon Col. Thorne's hospitality."

He paused abruptly, and passed so long that Winifred, under the spell of a will stronger than her own, turned round and fixed her eyes upon him.

"Not another day! Not another day!" he repeated to himself aloud. He felt weak and ill; he was vaguely lifted, and he was trembling so violently that he was forced to throw himself upon the lounge.

But not long did he remain there. He rose and began gathering his belongings together with feverish haste.

"Ah, that's right!" he exclaimed, with bitter gaiety, as he heaved the cap that neither cheered nor insolated.

"You look like a man," said Glory-Ann, secretly pleased to hear him call her "Mam Bee." (But he had done so unwittingly.)

"Who is that young sprig I saw just now dancing attendance upon your young lady?" he asked, with assumed carelessness, as he set down the cup.

"Dat's Mawse Paul Henry," Glory-Ann made answer. "Ho's got a beyer's shop in Savannah; but he's come home to see his kin, long of Miss Letitia's wedding."

"But times are changed, Winifred. It is not you no longer find it a happy home."

She turned quickly and looked at her father, and it was as if the scales had fallen from her eyes.

"My dear child!" the colonel faltered, with outstretched arms. "You must let me love you. Since we cannot marry, my brother there is no one else for me to love."

But caresses and endearments were not in the colonel's way; how deeply he was moved he found no words to tell; he could only put his arms around his child, and Missy felt some burning tears drop upon her hair.

"It is because I am so little," she whispered, with a pathetic attempt at playfulness. "And I haven't been a very good daughter, my father."

"But I shall be a good daughter from this time. Only let us stay on at this dear old hill. I don't want ever to go anywhere else. This is home, and I am so happy, now that I am no longer shut out from your heart, my father."

"You know what I mean," she never shut up old, Winifred, he said.

"No, it is that I have so long shut myself out! Winifred declared, with the generosity of an affectionate nature.

"But that is over, and life is lovely still. Her voice shook a little, and she brushed away the tears that would rise.

The blessedness of love is rather in loving than in being loved; and from this day Winifred was happy beyond words in lavishing upon her father all those fond attentions she had been wont, as a child, to bestow upon her brother.

Miss Elvira was greatly puzzled at this new order of things. "I don't know what the colonel has come to," said Winifred, she complained. "Your father isn't used to all that fussing. Aren't you afraid you will annoy him?"

our whole heart; and out of our hearts, not of a book! For my brother that was not a book!"

"Winifred!" said Miss Elvira, with mild rebuke. "It is—unladylike to be so—forceful."

"Yes, I have heard," Miss Elvira sighed, in answer; "that is why I went to my devotions. Then Winifred said that she had been weeping."

"I am not a girl," she said, sadly, "when Nicholas rode away in the rain that summer night, nearly nine years ago. It can never come again."

"You are cruel, you are wicked to say that!" cried Winifred.

"I loved Nicholas dearly, but when I think of his coming now my heart fails me. There will be a difference; it is only kind to warn you."

"What difference?" Winifred demanded, with fire in her eyes.

"Why should we deceive ourselves, child?" said Miss Elvira, querulously. "You know that Nicholas will not return alone."

"Would not Doss be my sister?" cried Winifred. "Doss he not be your niece and my father's daughter? She is beautiful, and she is good; I accept Doss."

"Oh, Doss," said Miss Elvira, slightly. "In a certain sense she, too, accepted Doss; that was inevitable."

"And as to the little boy"—Winifred began, with a tremulous tenderness.

was lost, was found again, and he took the exile in his arms.

And there was a great silence, broken at last by old Gilbert's devout ejaculation, "Praise be for glory!"

"Praise be for glory!" said Winifred, with a vigorous thrust of her elbow, and the inquiry: "Is you plum forgot de manners you tuk away from Thorne Hill?"

Doss, beautiful still, with a certain majestic grace, in spite of her poor and faded dress, stood apart, proudly shy; for at this supreme moment, no one thought of her or the boy, whom a giant, grim giant held in her arms with an air of determined proprietorship.

To Missy her brother looked like a stranger, but when he turned to her she threw herself into his arms with a passionate burst of tears that had, alas! little kinship with joy.

The colonel gave his son's wife a more graceful welcome than Missy had dared to hope, and he took his little grandson in his arms and kissed and blessed him; but for Roxanna White his only greeting was a stiff bow.

Time had made his mark upon this vigorous amazon since the day she attacked the colonel on the road side; but she still carried her head high, and the fire in her eyes was not quenched.

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complacently. "Management ain't wick-edness; an' I'd a squar right for manage-ment, ez I did. Squar up. I was dot not bogin' him comin' home; but how you reckon I come ter change my mind?"

"You repented, I hope," said Winifred, severely.

"No, I didn't. You seeddown an' lemme tell you. Ez nigh ez I ken mek out, hit was a Yankee."

"I said a Yankee, Lawd, they've been plenty enough of late! I knowed him fur a Yankee two minutes he opened his mouth; they can't talk natch'ral, like us southerners. This Yankee was a huntin' N'ick Thorne," pursued Roxanna, significantly. "Pr'aps you know somethin' 'bout him."

"I know nothing whatever about it," said Winifred, stiffly.

"Well," Roxanna continued, "I was skart ter ask what fur he was a huntin' of N'ick; but I kep' my eyes skinned, an' I found out he was preachin' ter gitt N'ick ter mek hit up with the colonel, an' then I was riled! I had brung N'ick ter my way 'o' thinkin' that he could live an' die 'thouten his kin, an' I didn't want no Yankee meddlin' with my business. Mo'over, I spicioned the colonel soun' him."

"No such thing!" Winifred contradicted, hotly.

"No, I foun' out mighty soon ez hit was 'bout the colonel," Roxanna said, and paused; but her listener sat with averted countenance, and would give no sign; whereupon Roxanna boldly declared, "Hit was you!"

"That is not true!" cried Winifred.

"Bless yo' soul, no!" returned Roxanna, compactly. "No need ter gild. He ain't said no, but Lawd, child, hit don't always need word 'o' mouth ter git yo' arrands done; an' when that air gittin' Yankee argued with N'ick Thorne, Col. Thorne was not vulnerable to Roxanna's thrusts; he had the air of looking over and beyond her into space, and to a certain extent he ignored her. Not that he held her devotion to Nicholas cheap. He had desired, indeed, to make some substantial acknowledgment of her services to his son, but when he spoke of this in a private interview, not long after Nicholas' return, Roxanna took fire."

"Pay mo'!" she shrieked. "Is that yo' meanin'! You can't pay me! The war ain't cleaned you out entire, Col. Thorne, but you can't never give yo' son an' yo' grandson mo' what I've give 'em. They an' Doss together have had the heart outen my body; what kin pay me fur that but theyself? I spoke my mind once pretty free, Col. Thorne, which hit done me good; an' I'm bound ter speak hit free some mo'. Don't you go ter believe hit was all N'ick's grit what hit him back from you so long; he ain't never got yo' letters, 'cause I kep' 'em from him."

And she laughed with settled satisfaction.

CHAPTER XXXI. FOR WINIFRED'S SAKE.

"Yes," said Winifred, and she put her hand in his again.

"Do you know why I came back?" said John Fletcher abruptly one morning, when he chanced to find himself alone with Winifred.

They were in that rigidly arranged parlor, with the same table between them across which he had stretched his hand, that she would not see two years before.

"You know I did not have an opportunity to say good-by."

"Ah, then, you came back to say good-by," exclaimed Winifred.

"To say good-by, if that be your pleasure," he answered gravely; "but—to say something else first. I came to confess myself—a coward."

Winifred looked at him in surprise.

"When I saw you last," he went on, impetuously, "in this very room, beside this very table, I let a more uplifting of your hand impose silence upon me, though I had a right to speak—the right of every man with a heart to feel. I was a coward not to tell you then what I have come to tell you now. Alien though you deem me, I love you; were you to proclaim a thousand times that the war is not over, still, still I love you."

"Between you and me there is a great gulf fixed," she faltered.

Winifred, with furious color. "And if

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This father forgot his injured pride.



Little sister, this friend of mine is no stranger to you.