

A Broken Snare.

CONCLUDED.

"Dear Carlton.—I am going away. I cannot tell you where, for we had better not meet again just now. I see that it will not do. They want me to marry Mr. Dangerfield. He has a mortgage on the place, and will foreclose if I do not. We are very poor—so poor that I shall have to earn my own living, for I can do that, but I cannot marry Mr. Dangerfield. Good-by. I have no time to write any more. I do not know that you will find this, but you did not give me any address to write to you."

Selina read this over, and then withdrawing to the wood, sat down and commenced erasing some words, and substituted others, until two sentences were altered from their wording above, into "I am going to marry Mr. Dangerfield," and "I shall have to earn my own living else; I cannot do that, I can marry Mr. Dangerfield." When Selina had done this she contemplated it with a grim smile.

"That will keep him away for a little while," she said, "while I find the little fool."

She replaced it in its hiding place, where, shortly after Carlton found it, having be thought him of the probability that Kitty might leave a billet for him there. He had no suspicions of the note having been tampered with, for he did not know that Selina had discovered the secret of the rock. Carlton Brome believed implicitly in the fraud put upon him. He tore the note in wrath.

"Does a woman never trust any one but a villain?" he said to himself, bitterly. "If I had been lying to Kitty all this time, she would have turned to me first, and stood by me to the last; but because I have been a simple ass, and have been from the bottom of my heart planning to live a godly, sober and righteous life for Kitty's sake, she must treat me like this, and coolly write me word that 'she is going to marry Mr. Dangerfield!' E'en so let it be! and I heartily wish Mr. Dangerfield joy."

And then Carlton walked away, not tearing his hair, nor grinding his teeth, but slowly whistling "Tommy Dodd," a certain evidence, had an intimate met him, that something had gone sadly wrong, for he never, or seldom whistled popular tunes save when he was vexed to the very soul, and misanthropic in consequence.

"If Kitty was going to marry Mr. Dangerfield, Mr. Dangerfield probably knew where she was," thought Carlton; for after the first ebullition of feeling he did not feel at all disposed to give her up to Mr. Dangerfield so easily. Mr. Dangerfield was not likely to tell; and he did not. In brief, Carlton lost sight of Kitty for three whole months; he knew she was not married, and that was all he knew. At last he got a clue to her.

He read a little poem in a magazine that he had seen in Kitty's manuscript, and made earnest inquiry concerning the author of the editor who was a friend of his. The result was that he found Kitty keeping school in a far out of the way district in Maine, and interrupted the arithmetic class in the very agony of simple interest by walking into the school. Kitty expelled him from the school as ruthlessly as Mary's "little lamb" was expelled on a similar occasion, and for much the same reason: it made the children laugh. She told him where she lived, however, and Carlton walked to the residence of Mr. Mortimer Varney. Mr. Varney had been in former days the foreman on the Heybolt place, and Mrs. Varney had been a particular friend of Kitty's in those days. Mr. Varney now owned a farm of his own, and was a man of influence in his present neighborhood. Kitty had no knowledge of any one in the world who would give her a home but Mrs. Varney, and she had often contemplated going to her. During the last few weeks of her stay at home she had written to Mrs. Varney and received a cordial invitation to come. Mrs. Varney had a bitter feud with Selina, and needed very little explanation of why Kitty wanted to leave home. She was made welcome, but her intention was not to make herself dependent upon them. Among Mr. Varney's dignities was that of being on the school-committee, and a school becoming vacant Kitty implored him to help her in getting it. Mr. Varney laughed at the idea first, but when he found she was in earnest, he consulted his wife in serious trouble. Kitty could not take that school. There were girls and boys there as old and older than she, and doubly as big, and the girls were worse than the boys.

"I guess we'll have to humor her, Mortimer," said Mrs. Varney. "Let her try the school, and by the time she gets tired of it, Delphine will be ready to come and take it."

So Kitty was keeping the school when Carlton found her. She was beginning to get tired of it, though she would not confess it; for, of course, when they met face to face the caud about Mr. Dangerfield vanished in thin air, and the alteration of the note scarcely needed explanation.—Kitty would not consent to marry Carlton immediately, urge it as he might. She had taken more notice of Selina's words than she had owned, and one repeated picture of Carlton's future and her own had made an impression upon her. She thought she ought not to marry him, while his means were by his own confession precarious.

Carlton, in the time that had intervened, had formed various plans, and on Kitty's obstinate refusal to become his wife he left her again, telling her that when he came back, he would remove her scruples about the pecuniary part of the question, at least. She did not inquire what he meant to do, and did not expect to see him again very soon. In less than a week he reappeared, and throwing a package into Kitty's lap, told her to look at that. Kitty opened the envelop, and to her surprise found within bank notes and bonds to the value of three thousand dollars.

"What is this, Carlton?" she said, holding it in her hand and looking at him.

"Your dowry, Kitty," he answered. "I cannot tell you at present exactly how I came by it. It is yours, absolutely, and you may keep it and send me back to New York, or—put it to the use I hoped you would when I got it."

Kitty would have had him take charge of it, but he absolutely declined. In spite of the magnanimous declaration he had made, he did not leave her to her own decision in regard to the marriage, but would have it take place at once. Kitty gave her consent, and, after a few modest preparations, they were married in Mrs. Varney's parlor, much to the satisfaction of that lady, who had never ceased to protest against Kitty's keeping school. Carlton hastened their departure for New York, but the train they were to have taken was delayed by an accident, and the next one that arrived in the place brought Selina and a couple of strangers. Selina walked into Mrs. Varney's parlor, where Kitty was sitting in her travelling-dress, and took hold of her arm, by way of greeting. "You had better come home with me, Kitty, she said, with an ominous assumption of grave compassion. "It is as I thought it would be."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Heybolt," said Carlton, whom she had not deigned to notice, "Kitty is my wife. We were married three hours ago."

"The worse for her," said Selina. "Kitty, will you come with me, or see what you will not like to see or to remember?"

Kitty gave a frightened look from her sister to her husband, and caught Carlton's arm, whispering:

"What does she mean, Carlton?"

Carlton was looking through the window at two men who were dismounting from a carry-all at the door, in one of whom he recognized Mr. Dangerfield. In a few moments they entered the room, and one of them pointing at Carlton, said:

"There he is! That's the man that sold me the bond."

Mr. Dangerfield exchanged a look with Selina.

"What does this mean?" demanded Carlton.

"You sold me a City of St. Louis Bond for \$1000 last week?" said the man, excitedly.

"I did!" said Carlton. "What of it?"

"What of it? It was stolen, it seems, and I have been asked where I got it. That of it?"

"Stolen? From whom?" asked Carlton.

"Where did you get it, Mr. Brome?"

"From Miss Heybolt," said Carlton, turning to Selina.

"Is that so, Miss Heybolt?"

"No indeed!" said Selina. "I see your design, Mr. Brome."

Carlton hastily opened his pocket-book and ran over its contents, and then paused with an air of utter bewilderment.

"I had a note from Miss Heybolt here," he said. "It has been abstracted, and a blank sheet of paper substituted. This is the envelop."

"I addressed that envelop," said Selina, "but I did not write any note: You came to me," she went on, fixing her eyes on Carlton's face, "and charged me with having property in my hands belonging to my sister. I told you I had none that I could call either hers or mine, but that for reasons I need not go into now, I would try to raise a sum of money, and would transmit it to you through Mr. Dangerfield, which I did. I borrowed five hundred dollars from him, and put it in the envelop in his presence, and closed it up."

Mr. Dangerfield confirmed this.

"Then Mr. Dangerfield opened it afterwards," said Carlton. "For when I opened it, it contained two bonds for \$1500 and \$1000 respectively, besides five hundred dollars, as well as a note from Miss Heybolt requesting me to take no further steps in regard to her sister's claims, as she was prepared to meet any demand, and also desiring me to say nothing to her sister concerning what had passed between us."

"I wrote no such note," said Selina, "and I had no such request to make. Mr. Dangerfield knows there was only a verbal message with the money."

"Mr. Dangerfield knows more of the matter than any one else, I suspect," said Carlton. "Do you accuse me of stealing the bonds from you, sir?"

Mr. Dangerfield shrank back a little from the fierceness of the tone, and said, nervously:

"Well, it has been traced to you, young man!"

"How am I supposed to have obtained it?"

"You were in my office some time, alone

before I came in. After you went out I went to unlock the safe. I couldn't do it. The combination had been changed. When I got it open, I found it had been robbed of the most valuable contents, and nothing has been heard of any of them except these bonds."

"You probably know where to look for the rest of the missing property as well as for this," said Carlton.

"This is only a small part—only a very small part," said Mr. Dangerfield. "If I could recover the rest, I would not mind this—"

"Come," said Selina, rising, "this is uselessly prolonging a very painful scene. Catherine, the sooner we return home the better."

But Kitty shrank from her, and laid her hand on Carlton's.

"I need not leave you, Carlton?" she said, in a low tone.

Selina interrupted his reply, and drew Kitty away.

"Don't you understand?" she said, in a low and far from consoling voice; "he will leave this place in the charge of police officers, and if you go with him, people will say you were his accomplice, it may be."

"Let them say so," said Kitty. "If he is guilty, I am, too."

"You shall come home," said Selina, vehemently. "I have had disgrace enough already through him and his—"

"You do not say that my offence against you is that I am my father's son, Miss Heybolt," said Carlton, in a voice audible only to her.

Selina turned away from him, with a scowl, but a dull red came into her face.

"Fool!" she said. "What do I know of your father?"

She drew Kitty towards the door, but was checked in her impetuous motion by some one who paused in the doorway, as if struck, like herself, with an ungrateful sight.

Recovering himself in a moment, Mr. Brome passed Selina with a bow, and went up to his son.

"I know it all," he said, interrupting him; "I come from Mulgrave."

"You know it all? Do you know the charge Mr. Dangerfield brings against me?"

"Certainly, I do," said Mr. Brome. "I have received a letter from Mr. Dangerfield, making the charge and offering to compromise the matter."

"Make him prove first that he has lost anything," said Carlton. "The story is a mere fabrication."

"No," said Mr. Brome. "the man has undoubtedly been robbed. I am convinced of that. He has not the nerve to carry out such a deception, much less the art to act his part as well as he does."

Mr. Dangerfield's anxious and drooping face lighted a little at these words. He drew a little nearer to Mr. Brome as to an advocate, and said, insinuatingly:

"If the young man could assist me to recover the balance, I would—I would—put it down to his account, and be as easy as my duty to society will permit."

"Many thanks," said Mr. Brome, smiling. "I trust your duty to society will never interfere with either your case or mine. Miss Selina Heybolt knows that I have not seen her since the day when I discovered that she had fabricated a slander concerning myself and the young lady whom her father subsequently married, and that I kept her secret from him to her great advantage. She will probably, therefore, not be surprised that I ask some one else to beg her open the shopping-bag she has in her hand."

Selina cast a glance at the neat, spacious, steel-trimmed bag to which he alluded, and grasped it a little tighter.

"No one dares to be so impertinent," she said. "As to you, George Brome—you are a base liar!"

But Mr. Dangerfield, who had exchanged a word and a look with Mr. Brome, sprang forward with a low howl of triumphant dismay, and clutched the bag.

"Leave it alone!" said Selina. "Zabdiel Dangerfield! are you mad?"

He might have been thought so, as he tore the bag from Selina's hands and attempted to open it. Mr. Brome handed him a knife. Selina glanced at the door. It was inaccessible. Mr. Dangerfield cut the bag open, and looked at its contents, which were all papers.

"Selina!" he said.

"Are those your missing bonds?" asked Mr. Brome.

"Yes," said Mr. Dangerfield, continuing his examination. "I—I am confounded!"

"You cannot be much surprised. You knew that she had concealed a large part of her father's property, and were her confederate in a manufactured claim."

"I did advance money," said Mr. Dangerfield. "And I only suspected—only suspected—ahem!"

Selina sat with a blank and sullen face, betraying neither shame nor fear.

"I only suspected, at first," said Mr. Brome. "Miss Heybolt has for some time past employed Mr. Gullford Warner to make investments for her in New York. I have transactions with him. Last summer when my son first came to Mulgrave, Mr. Warner saw him, and told Miss Heybolt who he was, it seems. He told me also, of Miss Heybolt's investments, when I

questioned him. There was such discrepancy between these investments, and the current story of the insolvency of the estate, that I saw there was probably fraud."

"The money was my own," said Selina, "it did not belong to the estate."

"I knew," pursued Mr. Brome, "that there would be some difficulty in proving the fraud, but I thought Mr. Warner could do it; or at least, so much as would make her unwilling to stand an investigation. While I doubted if I should interfere, Mr. Dangerfield's letter called me to Mulgrave, and I went to call on Miss Heybolt. She was not at home, nor could I find any one on the place. My business being urgent, I determined to await her return for a few hours at least, and did so. I remained in the vicinity of the house, and finally sat down under a grapevine trellis. While I was there Miss Heybolt suddenly appeared in the garden, and began tending her flowers—an eminently feminine occupation. She removed an oleander from its tub, and took from the ground beneath the roots, a box, which I should have thought some rare fertilizer, if I had not seen her take papers from it and put them in a bag like that one. When she had done gardening, and entered the house, I rose to follow her; as I passed the oleander I picked up a slip of paper. It was a promissory note to Zabdiel Dangerfield, answering the description of one in the list of missing papers. This determined me to see Mr. Dangerfield first. I left without a word to Miss Heybolt, and followed Mr. Dangerfield here, not expecting to meet Miss Heybolt. Do you identify that, Mr. Dangerfield?" handing him the note.

Mr. Dangerfield did.

"I never thought of this," he said. "She came and went in my office as freely as myself. I dare say I have often left it open, or the key in it, when she was there. I am perfectly shocked. But then—everything is not clear to me yet. What got the note your son said she wrote him? She had no chance to remove that."

The circumstances were more particularly explained to Mr. Brome, who asked to see the envelop. He examined the blank sheet within, rubbed the surface with his finger, and held it to the light.

"There has been a chemical juggle here, that is all," he said. "The paper is the same, the ink has vanished."

"This is an infamous plot, to save Brome and ruin me!" she said.

"Selina! Selina!" remonstrated Mr. Dangerfield; "don't be rash, Selina. You are completely at Mr. Brome's mercy."

"I?" said Selina, with a look of mingled rage and hate at Mr. Brome. "Mr. Brome. I defy him. He has always hated me, since the day I discovered a plan between him and a woman whose lover he had been, that she should marry a rich old man while he married the rich old man's daughter. Half the plan failed. The woman married my father, however, and now her daughter cheats me out of half I should have had."

"You admit then, that there is property?"

"I admit nothing," said Selina. "Prove what you can. Prove it, and send me to jail, if you like; I will not make any confession, or compromise. You are fully equal to carrying out your plan without my help, George Brome."

It was plain, however, in spite of her tone, that Selina was secretly mortified and confused. It was the second time she had been foiled. Once in jealous rage she had made an attempt to ruin a rival, as she thought, and had been shamed by being convicted of a lie, and by George Brome's consequent renunciation of her. Her revengeful hate for him had only slumbered. It blazed out again when she found his son the accepted lover of the woman she had hated as bitterly as she did Brome. If this marriage took place her fraud would be found out, she feared. It was to bury it in silence that she would have had Kitty marry Mr. Dangerfield, who was more in her confidence than he pretended. Fearing he would betray her, or desert her, she had resumed possession of some securities she had entrusted to him, taking more to avoid the suspicion she plotted to throw upon Carlton Brome. When all was known, she would still have fought, if she could have done so.

Carlton and Kitty escaped from the room to speak confidentially of the late events, and introduce pleasanter features than could be found in contemplating Selina and her baffled schemes. Mr. Brome followed them after a while, and gave Kitty a paternal welcome, for which there had been no place before. He was greatly troubled by his mind by the sight of Selina, under such circumstances, they could see.

"There is a bitter warp in that woman's mind," he said. "She might have been something better; she has mental power enough, if she had not crystallized it all into a little spite."

"Mr. Dangerfield will not prosecute her, I suppose," said Carlton.

"Of course not," said Mr. Brome. "Bond robbery isn't prosecuted now; besides, Mr. Dangerfield is a little afraid of her. The failure of the scheme she laid, and the loss of the money, will be a severe punishment for her, in itself."

It may have, for she held on to the spoils with a grasp that neither threats nor civil suits could unloose; she disgorged twenty thousand dollars, but it was certain that

she still retained something. She became a perfect miser after that time, and lived rich, cankered and alone, using all the expedients and suffering all the privation of poverty.

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