

and flattered by such a proposal as you intend making Miss Bentley. I assure you, my dear, Walter, the author of— is considered quite a 'catch.'"

There was a short silence, which was broken by Walter, who exclaimed:

"Henry, there is Mrs. Clayton on Broadway; she is coming in this direction. I will join her, and strive once more to learn from her the secret of my birth which I am certain she possesses. By all she holds dear and sacred I will implore her to relieve my mind of this terrible doubt and uncertainty. I will try to learn that woman's secret."

"She is a strange woman," said Dr. Oakley. "Do you know where she lives, Walter?"

"No; all I know of her is her name; and even that I doubt. For years I have been familiar with her face. I have often met her on the street, and several times she has warned me of impending danger, and I believe, saved me much trouble and distress. She has always interested herself in my welfare, although we have spoken but few words together. I am positive she could solve the mystery of my parentage if she would, Henry, but whenever I mention the subject to her she refuses to speak, or gives me an evasive answer. I will go to her now; and if I can by words move her heart I will do so; for at this time the knowledge would be, indeed, a Heaven-sent blessing."

So saying he hastened toward the lady his friend going in an opposite direction. The two men whom we have mentioned as listeners to the above conversation arose. They were no other than Major Heith and his son. As this is the latter individual's first appearance in our story we will pause a moment to describe him. Rodney Heith was a tall, well-built man, perhaps twenty-five years of age, very dark complexioned, with black hair, and eyes of the same color. Peculiar and very expressive eyes they were too; now flashing with baleful fire as some angry emotion thrilled his being; now gleaming with a sinister light as the current of his thought changed its course; now soft and tender as a woman's. In short his eyes were a perfect index of his mind. He was a remarkably handsome man, of that bold, dashing style of beauty so pleasing to some women. And he was an unscrupulous man; a man without a conscience; possessing a daring and bravado of which few men can boast, and yet which was cloaked by an exterior so mild that no one could have suspected the true nature of the man.

For a few moments after the departure of Walter Elmore and his friend the two men stood looking at each other in silence.

At last Rodney said, with a laugh:

"So, it seems I have a rival."

"Bentley did not mention this fellow to me," said the major, frowning.

"According to the young man's own confession the banker does not know of his aspirations to Miss Bentley's hand."

"True; I had forgotten that. Well, he must be warned of this; and must put a stop to their intimacy at once; we will not be foiled by this boy. Still, I shall not seek another interview with Bentley until Tuesday. If this young *literateur* should make his proposal for the girl's hand the old gentleman will know it won't do to accept him. No—no, Rodney, I have decided that she shall be your wife, and yours she shall be in spite of everything."

"Suppose Miss Bentley should really be in love with this young man?"

"Then, my boy, you must transfer her affections from him to yourself."

The young man said no more on the subject, and the couple repaired to their hotel, an obscure, down town house, where they were stopping under assumed names, awaiting the day which was to be signalized by their *debut* in fashionable society.

Let us now follow Walter Elmore. Immediately after leaving his friend he joined the lady he had spoken of as Mrs. Clayton.

She was a tall, remarkably fine-looking woman, perhaps fifty years of age. Her hair was perfectly white, yet was thick and luxuriant as a girl's. Her features were purely Grecian in outline, her eyes dark and expressive.

Her's was a face of rare beauty; but it was marred by deep lines which told that her life had been a stormy one. Though past her youth, she was beautiful.

"Good afternoon, madame," the young author said, bowing.

"Ah, Walter Elmore," the lady said, in an exquisitely modulated voice, her face lighting up. "I am glad to see you. Are you well?"

"Well in body, Mrs. Clayton, but troubled in mind."

"Have I claim enough upon your friendship to ask what troubles you?"

"I was about to tell you, madam," the young man said, adding, quickly and passionately, "Mrs. Clayton, who are my parents?"

"Why do you ask me this?" inquired the lady evidently struggling to overcome some inward emotion.

"Because I am convinced that you know; because I am wretched without the knowledge. Madame, have pity and tell me all."

"What reason have you to suppose that I know aught of what you ask?"

"Have I not reason enough? Have not you, since my childhood, shown in me an interest far greater than could be felt by a mere stranger? Have you not warned me against danger, preserved me from peril, given me advice when I sorely needed guidance? You have shown a friendship for me which convinces me that you know more of me than I know of myself; that you possess the knowledge which I desire. Will you not give me the information I ask?"

"I can tell you nothing more than you already know," was the reply.

"Madam," continued the young man, passionately, "since childhood I have desired to learn this secret; have longed for its possession, heaven only knows how earnestly; yet, how much more do I desire it now when I wish to marry a lady whom I dearly love. Can I ask her or expect her to unite herself to one who has not even a name he can call his own?"

Mrs. Clayton was visibly agitated, but she replied:

"If the lady loves you, your misfortune will make you none the less dear. If she is a true woman she will not allow that to separate you, which is beyond your power to remedy."

"But which *you* can remedy!" rejoined the young man, impetuously:

"Will you not tell me what you know?"

"Walter Elmore," said the lady much moved. "I pity you; how sincerely, Heaven alone knows. I could give you certain information, I confess; but the secret I hold could do you no good, therefore I refuse."

"Madam," exclaimed the young man, "I beg of you, reconsider your decision. Whoever, or whatever my parents are I wish to know them. Tell me at least, are they living?"

Mrs. Clayton for a moment paused; then with much emotion exclaimed:

"Oh, Walter, why do you thus wring my heart? You open anew old wounds and bring back memories of a bitter past which I would fain banish forever."

"Mrs. Clayton," the young man said, "if you had felt the misery I have, you would not ask me why I question you. Will you not answer?"

"Why do you feel thus on this subject? You were tenderly cared for and educated by one who was all to you that a father could have been. Whose honored name you bear—"

"Feeling keenly," interrupted the young man, "how little right I have to it. Mr. Elmore was very kind to me; still he was not my father, Mrs. Clayton," Walter added, abruptly. "It will be just twenty-four years this night since I was left at his door. I would that on this anniversary day I might learn who the wretched being was that laid me there."

"Was there not a note left with you?" asked the woman, in tremulous tones.

"Yes, madam."

"Is it in your possession?"

"It is; I carry it always with me; for I feel that it may yet be the means of proving my identity."

"Will you let me see this note?"

In reply the young man drew a paper yellow with age from his pocket-book and handed it to Mrs. Clayton, who took it with trembling hands and read as follows:

"MR. GEORGE ELMORE: To you I commend this little waif; will you take it and care for it as its wretched mother cannot? Oh, for the sake of one who would die rather than harm this child, keep and cherish him. He was born in wedlock and his name is Walter. In all probability he will never be reclaimed. Do not encourage any questions he may in future life make regarding his parentage. It is better that he should remain in ignorance of all that concerns those whom fortune compels to discard him. Mr. Elmore, you had once a son—I will not say you have one now, for rumor tells me you have disowned him—who by his cruel treatment nearly broke your heart. Let this boy take his place; I am sure he will prove ever grateful to his benefactor. Tell him that his parents live; but that he must never, as he values his happiness, seek them. Farewell, and may Heaven reward your kindness to my child. I will sign no name, for my identity must ever remain a secret."

Mrs. Clayton read and re-read this letter, her bosom heaving with deep emotion.

"Heaven pity the poor wretch by whom this was written!" at length she said:

"And do you not know the writer's name?" asked the young man, looking searchingly into her face.

"Did Mr. Elmore provide for you in his will?" inquired Mrs. Clayton, not noticing his question.

"He died almost penniless, on account of rash speculations," was the reply.

"But I have an ample income of my own, secured by my literary labors; so I do not need his money. But madam;

we waste time. Once more I ask you to tell me what you know of my parentage."

"Once more I tell you I cannot—will not," replied Mrs. Clayton, firmly.

"Mrs. Clayton," exclaimed the young man, for the moment losing all self-control, "withhold no longer this secret, or by heaven, I'll wring it from you, I care not how!"

"Walter Elmore!" exclaimed the lady, in a tone of stern displeasure, "if you knew the history, the bitter history, of the past, you would not wound my heart by such language."

"Pardon me, madam," said the young man; "I am grieved that I spoke as I did; but if you can but faintly conceive how deeply I have thought on this subject, how it has moved my being, you will not withhold your forgiveness."

"I do not," said Mrs. Clayton; "but you must learn to bear these trials more patiently."

She was moving away, but he detained her.

"Mrs. Clayton, may I not hope to some day, learn the secret regarding myself which you possess?"

"No—no; do not think of it; I am bound to secrecy."

"But stop one moment. Madam, I conjure you; tell me, is the suspicion I have sometimes entertained correct—are we related?"

Mrs. Clayton was terribly agitated.

"Ask me no more," she cried. "I cannot forget the past; therefore I cannot answer."

So saying, she took his hand in hers, pressed it with passionate fervor, murmured a few inarticulate words, and hastened away.

"Mysterious woman!" exclaimed Walter. "Why is she thus reticent? In what way are our two lives linked together? Oh, if I could but read her mind! But she possesses the secret, and must make it known to me. I will not rest in my search until I know all."

Three days have passed. It is Tuesday, and the arrival of Major Heith and his son is hourly expected by the Bentley family.

"The vessel probably arrived this morning," said Mr. Bentley; "and the gentlemen will, doubtless, soon be with us."

"It seems strange to me," remarked Mrs. Bentley, "that I never heard you mention your friend, Major Heith, or his son, until so lately."

"Probably I have spoken of them, but you have forgotten," replied the father, an expression of uneasiness appearing upon his face, despite his efforts to seem carelessly indifferent. "Besides, they have been abroad for years, and until within a few months I have had very little communication with them; so it is possible I have not mentioned them for some time until lately."

"I am positive you never uttered their names in my hearing until within the past week," asserted Mrs. Bentley. "But, however that may be, I hope they will prove agreeable additions to our circle. You say they are wealthy?"

"Yes."

"Well," pursued the lady, "as one is a widower and the other a bachelor, perhaps we may secure an establishment for Edith. If she would only fancy one of them! But she is such a strange girl—I am out of patience with her. She has refused some of the best offers a girl ever had, this season. Had she followed my advice, she might now be at the head of one of the finest establishments in New York. Really, my dear," turning to her daughter, "I cannot understand."

The young lady's face crimsoned with vexation; but she made no reply.

Edith Bentley was a very lovely girl. In form she was somewhat below the medium height, slender and indescribably graceful. She had many admirers among the gentlemen whom she met in society, but she had shown favor to but one; the young author, Walter Elmore. But we will not seek now to learn the secret of Edith's feelings toward him, but will proceed with our story.

The door-bell rang.

"Here they are now, I do believe!" exclaimed Mrs. Bentley.

It was indeed Major Heith and his son. Mr. Bentley met them at the door. "My dear Bentley, the major exclaimed, in a loud tone, grasping the banker's hand; this is indeed a pleasure! After all these years we meet again! My dear boy, I'm delighted. And allow me to present my son Rodney, whom I believe you have never met."

Rodney Heith acknowledged the introduction gracefully. In spite of himself, Edward Bentley was pleased with the young man's appearance. There was something indescribably attractive and winning about this young adventurer; many a person beside Mr. Bentley had felt this; more than one to their cost.

"My dear Bentley," continued the major, "be so kind as to desire a servant to show us at once to our rooms; for, by Jove! that ocean voyage has complete-

ly upset me; and I couldn't think of meeting the ladies, you know, until I have rested a little, and made myself somewhat more presentable."

Mr. Bentley ordered a servant to show the gentlemen to their apartments, which was done at once.

When the two men were alone together in the elegantly furnished parlor which was assigned them, and which adjoined their sleeping rooms, the major rubbed his hands gleefully, and walking up and down the apartment, he exclaimed:

"How is this, my boy? Isn't this sumptuous? Ah, Rodney, it's a great thing to possess a rich man's secret."

"I think as much," remarked the young man quietly.

There was a short silence, and then the major said:

"During the week we have been in New York, I have neglected one thing I ought to have attended to; that is to call upon a certain person with whom I have in the past had slight acquaintance, and in whom I still feel some interest."

"To whom do you refer?"

"To Mrs. Van Dyke."

"Ah! the woman in whose charge you left the girl of whom you have told me."

"The same; I do not know whether the girl is living or not. I must search for Mrs. Van Dyke this very day and learn what has become of her. If she still lives she must be about twenty years of age; and, if the promises of her childhood are faithful, a very lovely girl."

"She may be married."

"Perhaps, Rodney, when I left her with that woman it was my determination, to when she arrived at the years of maturity, drag her to the lowest depths of degradation—to make her a thing loathed and despised by all, and when I had completed this task of revenge, to make her known to her parents, that they in their agony might feel pangs as sharp as those they once inflicted upon me. That, I say, was my determination years ago; all the time that has passed has not altered my will, or softened my hatred. For what I once suffered I will be doubly revenged."

An hour afterward the major and Rodney met Mrs. and Miss Bentley in the drawing-room.

"Charmed, I assure you—delighted," ejaculated the major, when he was presented to the ladies. "My dear young lady," to Edith, "pon my honor you are the very image of your papa; and for his sake," bending down, "let me kiss you," and he did so, saying: "An old man's privilege, my dear; the privilege of an old friend of your papa's."

The banker turned ashy pale, gave a single step forward; but restrained the words which rose to his lips as the major's glance met his own.

TO BE CONTINUED.

A Mule Story.

"NO man living ever saw a mule die, I s'pose?"

Thus remarked Mr. Daniels, lighting a fresh cigar: "In 1850 I was mining on the south fork of the Yuba, and it came my turn to cook for my gang. We took turns each week, you know. Well, I was going to show how economical I could run the commissary. I went and bought a peck of dried apples; they were all stuck together on a lump, but I got 'em jam'd into the pot, poured in some water and started the fire. Presently a few of 'em began to rise up to the top of the pot, and so I skimmed them off and put 'em in the pan. The first thing I knew, after I had skimmed that blasted pot a while, I had to get another pan, and then another, and by the time I'd got four pans heaped up full, dang my skin if there wasn't more apples in the pans than there was in the pot. That is, I thought so at the time. I kept getting more pans and buckets and lard cans, and all the while plumb frightened to death for fear some of the boys would come in and see how extravagant I was, for I had been blowin' on how cheap I could run the mess. The blasted apples still kept a comin' out of the pot. I put some papers out on the floor and covered 'em with fruit, and, by Jove, the place looked like a Santa Clara fruit-drying establishment, and the pot was still bilin' full."

"What has that got to do with a mule dyin'?"

"Wait a minute, I'm comin' to the mule. Finally I got desperate and dumped over twelve bushels of the apples back of the cabin, behind a tree. In about an hour I heard a devil of a noise, and ran out. What do you suppose I found? Why, a four-hundred-dollar mule kickin' in the agonies of death. The apples was gone; the mule nearly so. He was swelled up like a balloon, and the first thing I knew he busted. Pledge my word, gentlemen, he exploded like a giant-powder blast, and brought the whole camp to the place. I kept still; they could not find the mule, and it cost 'em \$10 to advertise a reward for him in the *Sacramento Union*. About two weeks afterwards they caught a couple of greasers hanging round, and they put it up that they stole the mule, so they hung 'em. I was there, but did not say a word for fear the boys would find out how extravagant I had run the commissary. Let's have something."

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Mr. H. R. Stevens:—Dear Sir—Fifteen years ago last fall I was taken sick with Rheumatism, was unable to move until the next April. From that time until three years ago this fall I suffered everything with Rheumatism. Sometimes there would be weeks at a time that I could not step one step; these attacks were quite often. I suffered everything that a man could. Over three years ago I commenced taking Vegetine and followed it until I had taken seven bottles; have had no Rheumatism since that time. I always advise every one troubled with Rheumatism to try Vegetine, and not suffer for years as I have done. This statement is gratuitous as far as Mr. Stevens is concerned. Yours, &c., ALBERT CROOKER, Firm of A. Crooker & Co., Druggists and Apothecaries.

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