

## THAT WOMAN'S SECRET.

CONTINUED.

AS FOR Edith, she was disgusted, even terrified by the major's impudent familiarity, which inspired her with a repugnance for him which she never afterwards conquered.

As soon as possible after the occurrence, Edward Bentley managed to obtain speech aside with the major.

"That action must never be repeated, sir," he said, fiercely.

"My dear boy," deprecatingly, "what action?"

"Man, you know what I mean. Do not trifle with me. I have acquiesced in all your demands hitherto, but if you ever again attempt such odious familiarity with my daughter, I shall, forgetting all, bid you defiance, and eject you like a dog from the house."

"Well, my dear boy, your wish is my law, of course," said the major.

"Promise me you will never repeat that insult."

There was a light in the banker's eyes that warned Major Heith that it would be dangerous to trifle with him on this subject, and so he said:

"Mr. Bentley, if you wish it, of course I promise."

No more was said on this subject.—Heith was surprised and disconcerted.—He saw that he might go too far, that his power was not absolutely unlimited, and by his future conduct he showed that he had profited by the lesson.

After a few minutes had elapsed, the major again addressed Mr. Bentley, saying:

"My dear boy, there is one subject of which I must speak. You know a young man, an author, or something of the kind, I think, named Walter Elmore?"

"I do."

"I have discovered that he loves your daughter. Have you any reason for believing that she cares for him?"

"No," replied the banker, "though I have suspected that he entertained an affection for her, and have encouraged their acquaintance."

The major frowned.

"Bentley," he said, "this must be stopped at once. If Elmore proposes for your daughter's hand, you will at once give him a peremptory refusal."

"Sir," exclaimed the banker, "will nothing content you but this marriage of your son and my daughter? Will you not relinquish the plan? Name any sum within my control, and it is yours, if you will but leave me and mine forever. Will you do as I ask?"

"My dear Bentley," replied the major, "I will not. Nothing on earth shall make me relinquish this project.—Your daughter must marry Rodney, and no other. And why not? He will make her a good husband, and you a dutiful son-in-law, I have no doubt. Let us hear no more of this Elmore. If it should, unfortunately, appear that your daughter imagines herself in love with him, means must be found to disenchant her, and if this young author is persistent, I will find a way to silence him."

Late in the afternoon the major left his new home, and proceeded down town until he arrived at East Broadway, into which thoroughfare he turned.

Walking slowly along, he scanned the houses on either side, muttering:

"No wonder, after all these years and all I have endured, that memory fails to serve me. I am sure the house was in this immediate vicinity. Ah! here it is, now."

And he rapidly ascended the steps of a dingy, two-story brick building, on the door of which was a plate, bearing the name "Van Dyke."

"Everything is as it was," soliloquized the major. "I recollect it all, now.—The name on the door is the same, so I suppose the woman still lives."

His ring was answered by a slatternly-looking girl, of whom he asked:

"Is Mrs. Van Dyke in?"

She replied by flinging open the parlor door, and motioning him to enter, which he did, seating himself upon the sofa.

The girl immediately disappeared. A few minutes later, an elderly woman entered the room. She was most unprepossessing in appearance, tall and very thin, with a face which plainly indicated a hard and cruel nature.

"You asked to see me, sir," she said.

"Ah!" exclaimed the major, "still the same winning, fascinating lady, still the Mrs. Van Dyke of old. What recollections of the past your face calls up, dear madame."

"I do not recognize you, sir," in a freezing tone.

"Not recognize me—not recognize your friend? Mrs. Van Dyke, think again."

"Will you oblige me with your name, sir?"

"My dear madame, though I feel positively hurt, though the tenderest emo-

tions of my nature are wounded by your forgetfulness, I consent to refresh your memory. To do so I will relate the circumstances of our first meeting.—Eighteen years ago last August, I brought to you, in a most mysterious and melodramatic manner, an infant; which for a pecuniary consideration, you consented to adopt, and care for as your own daughter. I—"

The woman interrupted him.

"You are Mr. Sydney?" she exclaimed.

"Sydney was the name I gave you when you asked me for one. It is a very good name, and answered very well under the circumstances; but at the same time allow me to state that you are not as shrewd as I believed you to be, if you thought it my own. It is an excellent cognomen, but, with your kind permission, dear lady, I will, in the future, be known to you as Major Heith."

"I had given up all idea of ever seeing you again," said the woman.

"No doubt—no doubt," said the major; "but here I am again, after all these years."

"I recognize your voice," said Mrs. Van Dyke; "but your face is wonderfully changed."

"I believe you," the major replied, with satisfaction; "and I am glad of it. But to business. When I left this girl with you I was convinced that you was a woman who knew enough to hold her tongue when there was money to be made by so doing. I had heard of you before, and I knew that you were a very smart woman; an unscrupulous and daring woman; in short, just the person I was in search of, so I brought the child to you, telling you her name was Mora Sydney, and that she was my daughter, from whom I was obliged to part on account of family troubles, which I was not at liberty to make known. You believed as much, or as little of this story as you pleased; you asked no questions, but took the girl. I instructed you to educate her to the belief that she was an orphan, and your niece, and I agreed to pay you a reasonable sum per annum for your trouble."

"And you have kept your promise, have you not?" sneered the woman.

"For several years I paid you regularly and promptly, as you know, but for the past few years the state for my finances has been such as to make it impossible for me to remit the cash. It's non-appearance must have greatly annoyed you, my dear madame; but here I am again, ready to make everything all right. What did you think had become of me?"

"I could not imagine; I thought perhaps you were dead."

"You were mistaken in that conjecture. I assure you; but did you not make any inquiries regarding my whereabouts?"

"Now, of whom could I have inquired? I did not know where you lived; I did not know your name—for I never believed it to be Sydney. In fact, I knew almost nothing about you; and the nature of our transactions prevented my making any very public inquiries."

"That is all right," chuckled the major; "and now, most important question of all—what became of the girl?"

"She was useful to me around the house, and so I kept her. Two years ago she learned the dress making business, and now she is working by the day for Messrs. Marston & Miller, one of the largest houses in the city, and first class wages she gets, too."

"And the girl still believes that you are her aunt, and that her parents are dead?"

"Yes."

"Good!" exclaimed the major, "this is as it should be. And now, my dear Mrs. Van Dyke, although I have no doubt you have made the girl pay her board half a dozen times over, in work, during her stay with you, still I want to do the correct thing by you; so please mention what sum you will accept, and consider yourself amply remunerated for all your trouble."

The major smiled benignly on his companion while she considered how much she had better demand.

"One thousand dollars," she finally said.

"A preposterous sum, my dear madame!" exclaimed the major, still smiling, "really a ridiculously large sum; but as there is quite a balance in my favor at my banker's—Mr. Bentley, of Wall street, Edward Bentley, of course you know him—it is yours; and here is two hundred dollars to bind the bargain. The rest I will bring to-morrow."

The woman took the roll of bills with a grim smile, saying:

"I shall expect it. Would you like to see the girl?" she added.

"If convenient, my dear madame," Major Heith replied.

"She will be here in a few minutes," said Mrs. Van Dyke. "It is time for her to leave the work-room now."

"What kind of girl is she, Mrs. Van Dyke?" inquired the major.

The major stopped very abruptly. "Here is Mora now," said the woman, hastily, as the sound of a closing door reached her ear. "I will call her in here and you shall see her. Shall I introduce you?"

"No—no," replied the major; "at least not now."

Mrs. Van Dyke addressed a few words to her and then dismissed her.

"Was I not right?" the woman asked, turning to the major when the young girl had left the room.

"She is perfection—simply perfection. Well," he continued, rising, "I'm delighted, my dear lady, to have renewed our most agreeable acquaintance, and trust it may be long continued."

"I shall expect that money to-morrow," observed the woman.

"Ha—ha! my dear madame," laughed the major, greatly entertained, "how charmingly you combine business with pleasure. Yes—yes, my dear Mrs. Van Dyke, you shall have the money to-morrow without fail. And now, *adieu*!"

And the major tripped down the steps, kissing his hand to the grim woman who watched his progress down the street.

"Dear me!" exclaimed Mrs. Bentley, when alone with her daughter on the afternoon of the major's arrival, "what a perfect young gentleman Mr. Heith is—and so handsome, too. And the major, what a charming creature he is, so polite and so full of life and spirits. Really, I don't know when I've seen any one I liked better, and—my dear, I don't believe you hear a word I am saying!"

The loquacious mamma paused, and Edith, aroused from her reverie, looked up with a smile, saying:

"I was thinking, mamma, and did not notice what you were saying. Forgive me."

"Well—well, my dear, I think I can guess the subject of your thoughts; it was that handsome young Mr. Heith."

"You are mistaken, mamma," interrupted Edith, quietly. "Mr. Heith was very far from my thoughts. And now," she added, anxious to change the subject, "I think I will go to the park for a promenade."

"Order the carriage, Edith," said Mrs. Bentley, "and I will go with you."

"I would rather walk, mamma," rejoined the young lady; "but if you wish to go I will order the carriage for you."

"What pleasure can there be in walking over those dusty roads I can't see!" exclaimed Mrs. Bentley, "especially when you can have the carriage just as well as not. But do as you please, and if I conclude to go I'll order the carriage myself."

The young lady left the room and proceeded to her own apartment where she arrayed herself for a promenade. Perhaps one of Miss Edith's reasons for desiring to walk was that she thought it very probable that she might meet the handsome young author, Walter Elmore.

It was four o'clock when Edith left her father's house and hastened down the avenue. Though the month was November the weather was very mild, and the street was crowded with promenaders. Edith had scarcely entered the park when she met Walter Elmore. Both young hearts bounded as eye met eye and hand clasped hand. It was the old—old story, confessed by each beat of the heart, each glance of the eye, each pressure of the hand.

"How lovely she looks," thought the young man, "dare I hope that she will ever be mine?"

He had reflected much on this subject since his conversation with Henry Oakley and his interview with Mrs. Clayton, and had determined to ask her he loved so dearly to be his wife. Yet if that word should be *no*, how dark would life seem to him! In spite of all his efforts to be agreeable the young author was unusually silent and taciturn that afternoon. Edith noticed it.

"What is the matter with you, Mr. Elmore?" she asked, "something weighs upon your mind I can see. Won't you unburden yourself to me? Sit down here, and let me act as your confessor," and she sank into a rustic bench. He seated himself by her side.

Why not tell her all now?

"Miss Bentley—Edith," he said, "I will entrust my secret to your care; it is told in three words—I love you."

Her reply was only an utterance of his name; but the glance that accompanied it told him he might hope.

"Edith," he continued, "I have long loved you, tenderly and truly. Dare I hope that my affection is returned?"

"Walter," she said, "think me not bold or unmaidenly if I say at once that I do love you most truly; that I can only be happy with you."

"And you will be my wife unworthy as I am of you; though I am nameless—though there is not on earth one being with whom I can claim kinship?"

"Walter," said the young girl, "I have heard your history; but can you for a moment suppose that I could reject

you on that account? If I could I should be most unworthy of you. No—no; I love you; and whatever your parents may be I shall be proud to be your wife."

"Your father, dear Edith—will he consent to our marriage?"

The young girl's face clouded as she thought of what had been said regarding a match between her and Rodney Heith. In a few words she told Walter of the arrival of the major and his son, and of what her father had said.

"Still," she concluded, "I do not think my father would wish me to marry where I cannot love; and as you have always been a favorite of his, Walter, I do not think you need anticipate any trouble. But whatever happens, remember I will be true to you always."

The couple remained in the park a short time longer; but we will not listen to the remainder of their conversation, which can be very easily imagined by any one who has been similarly situated.

That evening, as Mr. Bentley was seated in his library engaged in conversation with Major Heith, a servant entered and handed him a card.

"Walter Elmore," read the major, looking over his shoulder. "Perhaps he comes to propose for your daughter's hand," he whispered; "tell your flunkey to show him up."

"James, conduct the gentleman to this room," ordered the banker.

"Yes, sir," and James departed.

"Introduce me to this young man when he enters," said the major; "and then, in the language of the ancients, I'll cut stick, and leave him to transact his business, whatever it may be, with you. And if he is here to ask your daughter's hand, you know how to act."

The banker would have replied, but at that moment, Walter Elmore entered the room; Mr. Bentley introduced the two men.

"I'm pleased to meet you, sir," said Heith, in his most obsequious manner; "delighted, I assure you. But doubtless you have business to transact with our mutual friend, Bentley, so I'll take my departure; trusting that our acquaintance may be long continued, and as agreeable to you as I am certain it will be to myself."

And the affable major bowed himself from the apartment and closed the door. After assuring himself that he was not watched he applied his ear to the key-hole, and prepared to listen to all that might be said by the two gentlemen.

"I am here, Mr. Bentley, to ask your consent to the marriage of your daughter and myself."

The banker had expected this, and yet, now that the words were uttered, he could find no language in which to reply. He would have been happy to have seen his daughter united to the young author, for whom he entertained a sincere regard. His heart pleaded for Elmore, yet his lips were sealed. Torn with conflicting emotions, he turned deadly pale and his head sank upon his breast.

"Sir, Mr. Bentley!" the young man exclaimed, "you are ill; let me ring for assistance."

"It is nothing," said the banker, rising his head with an effort; "I am better now. Mr. Elmore, you have asked what I cannot grant. My daughter can never be your wife."

"Sir," the young man stammered, scarcely knowing what he said, "you cannot mean this!"

"I do mean it; it is my final answer."

"I shall trust to time to change your resolution, sir."

"Nothing will change it," said Edward Bentley, "I shall never consent to this marriage."

"At least inform me on what grounds you thus so decidedly refuse me, sir?"

"Mr. Elmore," replied the banker, "I have already, I believe, informed you that I do not propose entering into an argument with you. Therefore, allow me to wish you a very good-evening."

"Good-evening, sir," said Walter, leaving the room.

Enter the major.

"Well done, Bentley!" he exclaimed, "excellently done, 'pon honor! And so it appears we are at last rid of this aspiring youth, and the field is clear for my son."

"I cannot forbid them meeting, although," said the banker. "Edith loves him; she will not give him up."

"If she is an obedient daughter she will," laughed the major. "Oh, don't worry about that, my dear Bentley; I don't think we need anticipate any trouble from Elmore."

As Walter was leaving the house he was met by Edith. In a few words he told her of his interview with her father. She was surprised and deeply grieved; but placing her hand in his, she said:

"Dear Walter, notwithstanding this I will be true to you. I will wait patiently for my father's consent, and I hope it may be obtained; but in two years I shall be of age, and then I am yours though all the world would turn against me."

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