

THE MYSTERIOUS KEY

OR, PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

CHAPTER VI.

"Ellen!" exclaimed Lady Bromley, somewhat sternly, although she was herself not a little startled by the girl's wild manner, her strange and incoherent language, "get up from the floor at once, and sit upon this chair. There!" as her young servant obeyed her; shocked into a semblance of composure by her mistress' unusual tone, "now collect your thoughts and tell me what all this excited mumbbling means. What is that you know? Why were you so startled when I spoke of Mr. Hubbard? What is it that you are going to tell, even at the supposed risk of your life?"

"Oh, it is a queer story, marm, and I didn't understand what it all meant at the time; but now I see! now I see!"

"Hush! be quiet! don't excite yourself again!" interposed Lady Bromley. "Do you know Mr. John Hubbard?"

"Don't I know him! I should think so; he kicked me once," said the girl vindictively.

"Kicked you?"

"Yes; I was letting him in one day, and not meaning to, I knocked his hat, and it got jammed. Then he swore, and gave me a kick."

"You were letting him in—where?"

"Into our house."

"What was he doing at your house? Was he in the habit of calling there? I thought your aunt was very poor."

"Yes, so she was; but we lived in a tenement that belonged to Mr. Hubbard, and he used to come every month for his rent. After a while he and aunt Lu got very thick over something they were planning between them. I couldn't make head nor tail out of it, though I used to listen when I could," said Ellen, as innocently as if listening were the most proper thing in the world to do. "But one day I heard him tell her that if she'd help him out, he'd make her a rich woman, and she'd never have to sew another stitch for her living; he said he'd come the next night and explain the whole thing to her. The thought of being rich almost took my breath away. I got all stirred up over it. I thought of nothing else all that day and next, and finally made up my mind that I would know what was going on if I could manage it. There was an old-fashioned sofa in our sitting-room; it had a valance around it, to hide the legs, and it popped into my head that if I could slip underneath it, I could easily hear all that was said. So I pretended to have a toothache, so I could make an excuse to go to bed right after supper—"

"Oh, Ellen!" said Lady Bromley regretfully, at this point.

"Oh, of course, I know that a lady like you, or—her," glancing at Allison's picture, "wouldn't do anything like that; but you just try being as poor and abused as I've been, and see if you wouldn't get to lying after a while; it's a good school for liars," said the girl half-defiantly. "Well," she resumed, "I just watched my chance, while Aunt Lu was in the bedroom changing her dress. Anna had gone out—"

"Stop a moment, Ellen," her ladyship here interrupted; "who is Anna?"

"She's my cousin; Aunt Lu's daughter."

"Yes, yes, I see; now go on," said her mistress eagerly, and tinging in every nerve as she began to grasp certain important points in this remarkable story.

"As I was saying," Ellen resumed, "I watched my chance, crawled under the sofa, and lay flat on the floor. It wasn't very comfortable, especially after that man came and plumped himself down right over me, for I didn't dare to move so much as a finger—hardly to breathe full and strong."

"Now, wait just a minute, Ellen," Lady Bromley here interposed. "When was this—how long ago was it when Mr. Hubbard paid this visit to your aunt?"

"Oh—let me see," said the girl reflectively; "it must have been somewhere about the last of July. It was on Tuesday night—the next day I went to Doctor Ashmore to have the splints taken off my arm. That was the time I fainted, and he told me I might go to olive with

him. It was the second day after that I went, and I have never seen either Aunt Lu or Anna since."

"But if there was a prospect of your aunt becoming rich, why did you wish to run away? You might have fared better if you had remained with her," her ladyship observed.

"You'll see why, when I've told you what I heard that night," Ellen replied, with a shiver. "Well, Mrs. Brown, Mr. Hubbard said, as he sat down—"

"Brown!" repeated Lady Bromley.

"Yes, that was Aunt Lu's name—she married my uncle, Alan Brown."

"Ah!"

"Well," he said, "I guess I've got everything fixed just as I want it at last, and you can change your name and position just as soon as you choose—that is, if you think you've got grit enough to carry out this plan of mine."

"I've got grit enough for anything on earth that will get me out of this terrible grind," said Aunt Lu. "Have you been to New Haven yet, to look at those records?"

"Yes," he said, "and, as luck would have it, I found them exactly as you said. Brewster was married on the same day you were; how did you happen to know about it?"

"Why, Alan was one of the janitors at the college, and knew young Brewster well; and when he went for our license, he met the swell just coming out of the city clerk's office. He thought 'twas queer, but the book was lying open on the desk, and he saw his name and his girl's—Miriam Harris—and understood what was up," Aunt Lu explained. "But as he was a rich chap and not through college, Alan knew he had done it on the sly, and that it would be for his interest to keep mum; he never said a word about it; he didn't tell even me until years afterward. How queer things do come about," she said; "I knew Miriam Harris, and she wasn't any better off than I, even if her father was a musician, and mine a journeyman tailor; they were as proud as Lucifer, and as poor as church mice, and now here you propose that I step right into the shoes that were intended for her!"

"You think you can keep a stiff upper lip?" said Mr. Hubbard.

"You bet," said Aunt Lu.

"Well, get me your certificate," he told her, "and I'll fix it up for you."

"Aunt Lu took a paper from her pocket, and handed it to him. I couldn't see what it was, but it rattled like letter-paper."

"Ha!" I heard him laugh, "it's a piece of real luck to have everything turn out so cleverly; when I found out that your husband's name was Alan Brown, it struck me that it might very easily be made over into Adam Brewster."

"I don't see how you are going to do it," said Aunt Lu nervously. "I don't want to get caught in any law scrape."

"See here," he said, and then he showed her how he could make an 'I' into a 'd,' and—oh, I can't remember all the rest; but when he got through explaining, she seemed satisfied and well pleased.

"Yes, yes," she said, "I believe you can do it; and if I do my part, you swear that you will hand over a lot of money to me?"

"Mrs. Brown," he said, speaking very slow and positive, "you'll never need to do another day's work as long as you live."

"Oh! what a blessed relief that will be," she told him, and just ready to cry. "I don't think I could have stood it much longer without going mad. I've been more'n half-tempted to jump off the Brooklyn Bridge into the East River many a time—guess I should if it hadn't been for Anna; I thought it would be cruel to leave her to struggle on alone."

"Oh!" here breathed Lady Bromley, with a shiver, "what misery there is in the world! To what desperate deeds poverty drives mankind!"

"Yes," said Mr. Hubbard, "I went on, without heeding the interruption of her mistress, "Anna is too fine a girl to be left to hoe her own row alone. What have you to say to that other plan which I hinted at a few days ago?"

"What? About your marrying Anna?" said Aunt Lu, when my heart gave such a jump that I came

near crying out, I was so stirred up. But I caught myself just in time, and shut my teeth together hard.

"Yes," that man said, as if he thought he was the Great Mogul, "don't you think it would be a rare chance for her?"

"I know it would, of course," she answered, "but I can't tell how she may feel about it. I haven't said anything to her yet; but I'm of the opinion that she'll be ready for almost anything that will improve her condition."

"Well, it strikes me that we had better all cast our lots into one box together, and have a good time for the rest of our lives," he went on. "I will settle a handsome income on you the day she marries me, then I will take her all over the world, and she shall have everything she wants. She'll make a handsome woman dressed in her satins and diamonds."

"I don't believe there's a bit of doubt about her doing as you want her to; she's dead discouraged with the grind she's had ever since her father died. I'll do my best to persuade her. Oh, I'd almost give my eyes to see her wearing velvets and diamonds," Aunt Lu said, almost ready to cry again.

"It would be the most comfortable way to settle matters, for all parties," he said; "but what will you do with that little fool of a niece of yours?"

"I tell you, marm, I was nearly choked again with the jump my heart gave at this," Ellen here observed, her face growing very pale with the remembrance of the experience; "it told me right off that I wasn't expected to have any share in the good time that was coming."

"She isn't any niece of mine, and I'd have been mighty glad to get rid of her long ago, if I hadn't needed her in the kitchen," she told him, in a spiteful way that made me just ache to strangle her."

"Oh, hush! Ellen," reprovingly breathed her companion.

"I know it's wicked," said the girl stoically, "but poverty is the devil's training-school, and it finishes off more devils than anything else."

"My child, you must not talk so," said her mistress authoritatively.

"But it stirs up all the bad there is in me, whenever I look back and think of how that woman treated me," was the sullen reply.

"Well, go on and get through with your story as soon as you can, then we will try to find something better to think about," responded Lady Bromley, in a gentle tone.

"You were saying that Mrs. Brown wanted to get rid of you?"

"Yes, and he answered, sharp and quick, 'We must get rid of her now; she'd make it very hot for us if we kept her on the string; she would be sure to blurt out, some day, that your name was once Mrs. Brown, and then our fat would all go in the fire.'"

"But what can I do with her?" Aunt Lu asked.

"I think I know of a school, in a certain town out West, where she could be sent, and would never be likely to trouble us again," Mr. Hubbard told her, in a voice that made me creep all over. But I said to myself that neither of them would have a chance to work me out in that way—that I should light out all of a sudden, and then, if I ever saw my way clear to give them the grand bounce for their golden stunts, I'd do it. At first I thought I'd go that very night, after the house got quiet; but a few minutes afterward he told her that it might take a few days to fix things up before he could bring them to a—"

"Crisis?" suggested her ladyship, as Ellen appeared unable to think of the word she wanted.

"Yes, that was it. So I told myself that I needn't be in any great hurry. I could look about a bit for a place. I had that ten dollars that she," with another fond look at the photograph across the room, "gave me, and I knew I needn't suffer; I could take care of myself for a while, even if I ran away before I found anything to do. Before Mr. Hubbard left he told Aunt Lu that in a week or so, he should want her and Anna to move into a better place, and they must have some good clothes to wear—they mustn't get anything swell or showy at first, but a few nice things to make them look ladylike and respectable. He was going to New Haven the next day, to file the records, and when he came back he'd be ready to push matters, and would give her some lessons on law points, and what she'd have to say and stick to in court; for he expected there might be some tough fighting, as there was somebody else who would try to get the Brewster fortune."

"Did he say who—did he mention any names?" inquired Lady Bromley.

"No; and he didn't talk as if he had any fear of them. Aunt Lu said she'd do whatever he told her—she was ready to swear to anything, for the sake of having an

easy time for the rest of her life. He went away then, and a little while after Anna came in. Aunt Lu told her all about Mr. Hubbard's call, and when she came to what he had said about marrying her—Anna—she laughed until I thought she'd burst a blood-vessel."

"Oh, he's a clever one, mother," she said, when she could get her breath.

"What do you mean?" Aunt Lu asked.

"He means to nail everything, so there will be no fear of ever losing his grip on that money," said Anna.

"I don't understand you," her mother told her.

"Why, I should think you'd have seen through his game from the first," Anna snapped. "Of course, John Hubbard meant to have the lion's share of this feast, under any circumstances; but he was keen enough to see that it wouldn't do to leave any loophole for us to go back on him; so if he married me, our interests would be so mixed up with his that we couldn't blow on him or be grinding more money out of him all the time."

"Yes, I see," said her mother, then she went on anxiously, "But I hope you will marry him, Anna—he can't be such a great deal older than you; girls often marry men older than he. Then just think of the good times you'll have—the travel, nice clothes, and jewels—"

"Oh, yes, I'll marry him," she said sharply. "I'd marry almost any other dried-up, old bachelor for the sake of getting out of such a hole as this, and having all the money I want to spend. Good gracious! it seems almost too good to be true, though!"

"They went to bed soon after that," Ellen resumed, "and I was mighty glad of it, for I ached in every bone from lying still so long upon the floor. Then, as soon as they settled themselves to sleep, I crept out from under the sofa and slipped away to my room."

"But I didn't get much sleep that night—I kept thinking over and over of what I had heard, and, besides, I was mad through and through, to know that when I'd been doing all the drudgery in the house for years, Aunt Lu had no notion of letting me share the easy time and good things that were coming to her. I'd have been glad if I could have stopped their game then and there, just out of spite, but I didn't understand it very well, so didn't know just how to go to work."

"The most I could get through my brain was that by some kind of trick they were going to get a lot of money, but Mr. Hubbard was a great lawyer, and I thought nobody would believe me if I tried to give them away, and I might only get myself put in jail for meddling. I suppose I could have told that Aunt Lu's name had always been Brown, and she was only playing at being Mrs. Brewster, if I had waited until they sprang their trap; but I was afraid of them all, and I knew they'd be just about ready to kill me if they should find out all that I had learned of what they were up to. At any rate, it was plain enough that they meant to get rid of me by sending me off to some horrid place, so when I fainted that next day in Doctor Ashmore's office, and he said I might go to live with him, I made up my mind right off what I would do. I made up my bundle that night and skipped out the next morning, as I've told you."

"And you have never seen either your aunt or cousin since?" inquired Lady Bromley.

"No, and I don't want to," said Ellen sharply; "I want to give them a wide berth, and hope they'll do the same by me."

(To be continued.)

On the Farm

ALFALFA FOR SWINE.

As a pasture or soiling crop for sows and young pigs, alfalfa proves a wonderfully helpful ration for milk-making in the sow; and for growth in the pigs. Experiments have shown that pigs make better growth when the dam is fed considerable alfalfa than those from sows fed the best of commercial rations, but with no alfalfa. Of two sets of pigs, one fed clover, rape and soaked corn, and the other with access to alfalfa, in lieu of clover and rape, those having alfalfa seemed to grow the more rapidly. For brood sows, it is a most valuable food, either as hay, a soiling crop, or as pasture. The litters of such sows are generally large and vigor-

ous, and the dams have a strong flow of nutritious milk. Alfalfa meal in slop may be used with profit where the hay is not to be obtained. It is also claimed that sows fed on alfalfa during pregnancy will not devour their young, its mineral elements seeming to satisfy the appetite of the sow while contributing to the foetal development of the pigs.

On a farm of former Governor Hoard, in Jefferson County, Wisconsin, all the brood sows have for several years been wintered on alfalfa hay of the season's third cutting, and their drink skim milk from the dairy, without any grain until the last two weeks of gestation. Mr. Hoard says the object is to give the sows a food that will keep them in a non-feverish state, and furnish protein sufficient to build the bodies of the forthcoming pig.

A Finney County, Kansas, farmer reports having pastured 100 pigs on one acre of alfalfa from May 1st to September 1st, when they weighed 100 pounds each, and were in fine condition for fattening. Another Kansas farmer reports keeping 100 pigs from about the middle of April to September on five acres of alfalfa pasture. A little grain during the last two months would have gained him many pounds of pork. Many alfalfa-raising pig-growers insist that their pigs can be maintained from May to October on alfalfa for one-half what it would cost for almost any other feed.

The Utah Station found that young shoats gained one-third pound a day on alfalfa pasture, without grain. But the Station found, also, that the gain was not so great in older hogs. A Wisconsin dairyman reported that he kept nine sows all winter and spring on alfalfa hay and skim milk, without any grain, and raised from them 75 pigs, all healthy and vigorous.

The Colorado Station considers that a ration of three-fourths corn and one-fourth alfalfa hay is the best for fattening hogs for market, but for young hogs not ready for fattening the proportions should be reversed. The Station does not recommend grinding alfalfa hay for hogs, probably on the theory that the hog's time is not worth much, at best, and he can do his own grinding.—From Coburn's "Swine in America."

KILLING CANADA THISTLE.

At least one experiment station in the United States has suggested a practical method of fighting Canada thistle. An Iowa press bulletin says, truly, that a good method to eradicate the weed is to plow shallow and cultivate frequently during the summer. It is pointed out that the roots of the Canada thistle extend deeply down into the soil, hence for this reason deep cultivation will be of no avail. After plowing, the soil should be dragged, and the roots exposed to the sun and removed when possible. It may be necessary to run over the field with a hoe to cut off stray plants that appear. This method was tried on a patch several years ago, and no Canada thistles have since made their appearance in this place. Various crops, such as clover and sorghum, are said to be effective in subduing the thistles.

Of the chemicals which have been used to exterminate Canada thistles, none are more effective than sodium arsenite. It is applied at the rate of one and one-half to two pounds to 52 gallons of water.

Carbolic acid, at the rate of one part to one part water, destroys the root where it comes in contact with the mixture, and for a little distance beyond. This is not an effective method, as the roots sprout out from below. In response to circulars of inquiry sent out by the station, the majority of correspondents recommended shallow plowing, disking and harrowing, and continuing cultivation and hoeing as long as the thistles make their appearance. Some report successful treatment with salt, when scattered thickly about the thistles, especially if cattle or sheep are given access to it. Some reported success with carbolic acid where it is applied directly to the stem.

SUBSTITUTE FOR LEATHER.

Seaweed, dust, goat's hair, and Irish moss, compounded by a secret chemical process, is claimed to be, by its inventor, Mr. John Campbell, a perfect substitute for leather, vulcanite, wood, and marble. As leather, it makes serviceable soles for shoes. Among the things the compound is good for are picture frames, ornamental mouldings, imitation wood partitions, belting for machinery, upholstery, cotton-spinning bobbins, electric switchboards, flooring, golf balls, fountain pens, "marble" in all colors, chess boards, bookbinding, and "ivory" combs.