

THE MYSTERIOUS KEY

OR, PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

CHAPTER VIII.

The moment Ellen found herself free she darted across the hall and sprang inside Lady Bromley's apartment. Her face was pale, and she was so nervously excited that her teeth actually chattered audibly. Her mistress followed her more leisurely, quietly closing the door after her. Then, turning to the still quivering girl, she inquired:

"Who was that woman, Ellen?" "Aunt Lu," gasped the girl hysterically.

Lady Bromley looked slightly startled at the information.

"Can that be possible? What a singular coincidence!" she exclaimed. "Where did you meet her?"

"I had just come up the stairs, and had got as far as the elevator, when she came out of it, and ran square into each other," Ellen explained.

"What reason did she give for detaining you? Why did you scream?"

"I'm sorry I made such a noise," said Ellen humbly, "but she frightened me so I cried out before I thought. The minute she saw me she pounced upon and grabbed me as a cat would a mouse, and shook me until I could hardly breathe."

Lady Bromley looked both indignant and disgusted at this account.

"What reason did she give for doing so?" she inquired.

"She didn't stop to give any reason—she just snapped out: 'Oh, you tricky minx; so I've got on your track at last!' Then she asked me what I was doing here. I told her I was living here with a lady. At that she grew madder than ever, and pinched me so I had to scream. She was going to drag me into her rooms when you opened the door."

"Her rooms!" repeated her ladyship, surprised.

"Yes; she says she lives here, too. Oh, Lady Bromley, I can't stay here!" Ellen interposed in great distress. "She has found me out, and now I must go away, or she will do something dreadful to me. I'm more afraid of her than ever, now that he has got all that money."

"What was it she whispered to you just as she let you go?" questioned her ladyship gravely.

"She said if I dared tell anybody about her, who she was, or where she'd lived before, she'd 'settle' me. You see, she means to find some scheme to get me out of the way," the girl continued timidly.

"Do not allow yourself to be at all disturbed, Ellen," said her mistress reassuringly. "As soon as Mr. Winchester returns, we will have a talk with him, and I am sure we shall be able to make some arrangements so that you will feel perfectly safe. That woman certainly cannot harm you while you are here under my protection, and I will not send you out again until we can decide how best to provide for you. Now, do not spend another moment worrying about it, but come and hold my worsteds while I wind them," she concluded in a cheerful tone.

And the girl, apparently greatly comforted and reassured by her words, removed her hat and wrap, and then contentedly sat down to comply with her request.

When Gerald returned that evening he was astonished beyond measure by the wonderful developments of the day, as related to him by his friend. He was, of course, also greatly delighted to have the evidence already in his possession so strongly re-enforced, and felt confident that the victory in the coming lawsuit would be his.

He was deeply touched by the account of Allison's kindness to the unhappy waif, whom she had found such a sufferer on Broadway on that last day that they had spent so happily together in Central Park, and also with the girl's almost unexampled reverence for her benefactress.

He called Ellen into the room after Lady Bromley had concluded her recital, and, after asking her some searching questions, had not a doubt that justice would soon overtake that arch-plotter, John Hubbard, and bring him his proper reward.

He smiled, though rather bitterly, as he opened the little locket

which he always wore, and gazed fondly but sadly upon the faded leaves and petals of the rosebud that Allison had so playfully thrown at him in her father's office so long ago.

"What changes even a little time will bring forth!" he sighed. "I shall never forget how lovely she was in that pretty dress and that dainty hat, with those graceful plumes nodding at me with every movement she made; how frank and sweet and lovable she was; how her eyes gleamed with roguishness as she threw this bud at me. Ah, me!"

"Neither shall I ever forget how that wretch appeared a little later—what an evil look he wore when he brushed it upon the floor and set his heel upon it," Gerald continued, with compressed lips, his whole face darkening. "He did it purposely, because she had given it to me. He was jealous of me because he saw that she was fond of me, and so he meant to crush me as effectually as he crushed my rose. I wonder how he will feel when he finds that the tables are turned—when he comes to be arrested for forgery and conspiracy, and learns that I am the rightful heir to the Brewster estate!"

Gerald would not have been human not to have experienced a certain degree of triumph in view of the dismay and mortification that his enemy would experience when he should learn how all his plotting and scheming had been overthrown, and by whom, and who was to reap the rich harvest which he had so coveted.

That same evening he made some inquiries about the new occupant of the suite at the end of the hall, and learned that "the lady was a widow, Mrs. Adam Brewster by name, and had engaged the apartment for a year."

The next morning Lady Bromley told her little maid that she was going out, but that she need have no fear over being left alone, for if the bell rang she need not answer it, and thus she would run no risk of a visit from her aunt if she should be impelled to seek another interview with her.

Her ladyship was absent all the forenoon, but found everything quiet and serene upon her return—Ellen being contentedly engaged with some sewing which she had left her to do.

That afternoon all her trunks and belongings were quietly packed, and at an early hour the next day they were removed to another apartment-house farther uptown, where, before night, the small family of three were cozily settled, and better satisfied in every way with their new home.

Ellen was especially delighted and deeply grateful to the kind woman who was proving herself such a devoted friend to her.

When Mrs. Adam Brewster discovered, later in the day, that the occupants of No. 7 had removed, leaving no clue to their whereabouts, she was excessively disturbed, and for days afterward haunted the street cars and elevated trains, with the hope of running across either Ellen or her mistress, and so be able to trace them.

But she was doomed to be disappointed, for she never met them until some months later, when she was unexpectedly brought face to face with them.

"Mr. Lyttleton," said Gerald, one morning, shortly after this change, as that gentleman entered his office, "what do you say to sending Mr. Plum to New Haven, to take a look at those records?"

"I think it would be a very wise proceeding," heartily returned the lawyer. "I haven't a doubt that there has been some very clever forgery done there, and he will be just the one to ferret it out. Go ahead my boy; get him started as soon as possible. I want to get all our evidence together with as little delay as practicable, for it will take some time to arrange it properly. I am getting very impatient for the arrival of the hour when I can place a warrant in the hands of some trustworthy official, and send him across the water, to cut short the brilliant career of that happy couple who are sporting so gaily upon other people's money, and have them brought home to a final reckoning."

"How eager you are for this

fight!" said Gerald, smiling. "You are right. I am like an old war-horse, scenting the battle from afar, and eager for the fray. I shall await Mr. Plum's report with a good deal of interest and impatience."

So Mr. Plum, the chirographic expert, who had figured so successfully in Gerald's trial the previous winter, was at once consulted regarding the wisdom of going to see what he could discover in connection with those mysterious records in the office of the city clerk at New Haven.

He was now at liberty when Gerald went to interview him, but after listening to the facts which the young man presented, said he would attend to the matter in a few days, and then report at once.

Accordingly, one morning, five days later, the queer little man appeared before his young patron, with a very scornful and disgusted expression on his small round face.

"Well, what news have you for us?" Gerald questioned, and regarding him curiously, but wanting to laugh at his comical appearance.

"Humph! If there were ever a daring piece of rascality undertaken, you'll find it on those books at New Haven, and it's a bungling piece of botch-work, too! Bah contemptuously asserted Mr. Plum, as he plunged his hands into his trousers pockets, and began to pace up and down the room, to walk off his disgust.

"How so?" eagerly inquired Mr. Lyttleton, showing aside the work upon which he had been engaged, and swinging around in his chair to face the expert.

"See here!" said the man, coming to his desk, and seizing a sheet of paper and a pencil. "I'll give you the whole plot in a minute, so to speak. Adam Brewster is the name that is on the certificate in your possession, eh?" cocking his eye up at Gerald inquiringly.

"Yes," he assented. "And Alan Brown is the name of the man the girl, Ellen Carson, told was her uncle?"

"That is right," said Mr. Lyttleton.

Mr. Plum wrote both names on the piece of paper; then, with a careful use of a sharp ink-eraser and a few strokes of his pen, he changed Adam Brewster into Alden Bronstern, and Alan Brown into Adam Brewster.

"By Jove! you've hit the right nail on the head this time, if you never did it before!" exclaimed the lawyer, seizing the sheet of paper and examining the names critically. "How do you solve the puzzle? I'm sure this doesn't look bungled, if that work in New Haven does."

He passed it up to Gerald as he concluded.

"No, I should say not," the young man observed, with an amazed look; "one would almost be willing to swear that the names had never been tampered with."

"Well, I flatter myself that I have made a fairly good job of it," Mr. Plum observed, as he gave a satisfied squint at his work. "All the same, a man is a bungler who undertakes to alter another person's letters and figures without first making a careful study of their curves, angles, and other characteristics. There is a wonderful amount of individuality in chirography—it's a very interesting study, very. Mr. Winchester, did you take a magnifying-glass with you when you went to examine those records?"

"No; I never thought of it," Gerald replied; "but Mr. Lyttleton asserted at once, upon my return, that forgery had been attempted in connection with those names."

"Humph! It's as plain as the nose on your face," returned Mr. Plum sententiously.

"To you, perhaps, Mr. Plum; but really, I do not believe that one person in a thousand would think of such a thing while reading those names. Truly, if John Hubbard tampered with them, it has been very cleverly done," the young man thoughtfully replied.

"I'd like to be as sure of my life and health for the next year as I am that those letters have been changed just as I've shown you," said the expert. "I'm not often fooled with such jobs."

"I haven't a doubt that you are right," said Mr. Lyttleton, "although I should never have thought those names could have been made over like that. You have a natural aptitude in discerning such things; then, you have made a study of such tricks for so many years, you have a right to feel confidence in your judgment; but to us, who are inexperienced in such matters, those records would, doubtless, appear genuine. They must have appeared so to that justice who witnessed the copy which was produced in court last year, to prove the iden-

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FROM BONNIE SCOTLAND

NOTES OF INTEREST FROM HER BANKS AND BRAES.

What is Going On in the Highlands and Lowlands of Auld Scotia.

Two good-sized whales were observed some miles north of the May Island.

There are 200 licensed houses to each 1,000 of the population in Stevenston.

There are prospects that a zoo will be started by a private company in Glasgow.

Last year the Abstainers' Union in Glasgow sent 1,152 patients to the Kilmun Seaside Home.

A guillemot has been found in the salmon nets at Berwick with a large mussel gripping its wing.

Ten young men left Hawick lately en route for British Columbia, and they had a hearty send-off.

Mr. Sheriffs, Altnaclunie, dropped dead in Braemar Parish church when about to open Sunday school.

Mr. Bowmont Weddell has been appointed headmaster of all the schools under the Selkirk School Board.

The employees of Wm. Hamilton & Co., ship builders, Port Glasgow, have this year allocated to charities \$490.

Fairlie, like other coast places, is suffering from a supply of unfurnished houses, which exceeds the demand.

Kilbirnie and Glengarnock Water Sub-committee have granted a supply of water from their works to Barkip.

The prevalence of fever and measles is seriously affecting the attendance at schools in the Parish of Lesmahagow.

In Glasgow the Court recently licensed 16 theatrical places, 10 dancing halls, 4 music halls and 73 billiard rooms.

Greenock seems to be picking up in the sugar industry. The imports will be 20,000 tons in the course of this month.

Margaret Blain (3½ years), Tarbrax, near Carnwath, was fatally burned on the 10th inst. by some dry grass she set on fire.

Bothwell School Board are equally divided as to opening their meetings with prayer, and the chairman refuses to give a casting vote.

The Outlook Tower Open Spaces Committee have inaugurated a movement for gardens in waste areas in slum districts in Edinburgh.

Mr. and Mrs. John McLean, Stranraer, recently celebrated their golden wedding. They reside in the house in which they were married.

In a population of some 40,000 there was not a single complaint lodged in any of the four police offices on the 8th inst. in Clydebank.

The demolition of the house in Douglas street, Kilmarnock, in which Alex. Smith, the poet and essayist, was born, is about to be commenced.

A tragic affair occurred at Aberdeen recently, a quarrel between a fish vendor and an ex-militiaman ending in the death of the latter, stabbed through the heart.

Rev. S. J. Ramsay Sibbald, D.D., chaplain-in-ordinary to the King, represented his Majesty at the funeral of the Rev. John Marshall Lang, D.D., at Aberdeen.

WORK FOR CANNIBALS

"Almost idyllic happiness prevailed in many of the eastern Pacific islands a hundred years ago," said Sir Edward Im Thurn, Governor of Fiji. "Among the ferocious inhabitants of Fiji, however, cannibalism was practised to an extent never at any time equalled elsewhere. The custom appears to have been shared by white renegades who had settled among them. A problem of employment in the remote Gilbert and Ellice islands, formerly equally barbarous, was caused by the prohibition of internecine warfare—formerly the natives' chief occupation. It was difficult, in view of the character of the islands to find them fresh pursuits."

A PROVISIO.

Bride—"Here is a telegram from papa."

Bridegroom (eagerly)—"What does he say?"

Bride (reads)—"Do not return and all will be forgiven."

NOT GUILTY.

Magistrate—So you are a member of the light-fingered fraternity, eh?

Prisoner—No, your honor, I seldom get my hand in until after dark.