

# THE MYSTERIOUS KEY

## OR, PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

### CHAPTER XII.—(Cont'd)

She felt almost heartsick in view of the revelation to which she was about to listen, for it seemed to her that if her suspicions proved to be correct it would be sadder than death to have Allison restored to Gerald in such a condition as this.

What a living trouble it would be to always have to look into those blank, though still beautiful eyes, and never receive one responsive glance of recognition! To watch the loved face, to hear the sweet, familiar voice, and yet feel that the dear one was forever lost, and as surely lost as if she had been lying at rest in her unknown grave, as they had believed her to be!

Lady Bromley felt weak and ill in view of this terrible picture of the future, and yet she knew that there would be a certain satisfaction in having the harrowing and long-perplexing mystery of Allison's strange disappearance solved.

"Yes," her companion responded to her remark, "but before I relate her story, will you kindly tell me if you know anything about the girl? You appear so agitated you inspire me with hope."

"I have never seen her before," said Lady Bromley, her sad eyes wistfully searching the sick girl's face. "I only know that she strongly resembles a young lady—I have seen a fine picture of her—who left her home in New York last July and has never been heard from since. She was the betrothed wife of a dear young friend of mine, who has been heartbroken over her loss, and yet I—I almost dread to have my suspicions that your unfortunate charge is the same person proved true."

The gentleman sighed heavily as she concluded, for he could well understand and appreciate her feeling.

"My name, madam, is Lyman," he observed, after a moment, "and on the thirtieth day of last July—"

"Ah, yes, that was the very day," interposed Lady Bromley with a gasp.

"I was a passenger on the New York and New Haven express, bound from that city," Mr. Lyman resumed. "In the seat opposite me was this beautiful girl, in whom I became at once deeply interested on account of her singularly delicate beauty, and because she appeared to be so excessively weary, sleeping throughout almost the entire journey. When the accident occurred, as soon afterward as I recovered from the shock of it, my first thought was for my lovely neighbor, and I began to look around for her. I finally found her lying among the debris, apparently dead, for when I succeeded in extricating her there was a terrible wound upon her head, which seemed sufficient to cause death. I cared for her as well as I could under the circumstances, and then searched for the hand-bag which I had observed in the section with her, with the hope that its contents would reveal her identity and thus enable me to restore her body to her friends. I found the bag, but in a sadly demolished condition, and, although I gathered up all the articles that were scattered near it, there was nothing among them which gave me any clue to her name or her home. There was a few toilet articles in it, some handkerchiefs, a gold vinaigrette—"

"A vinaigrette? Ah! Was it anything like this?" eagerly interrupted Lady Bromley, as she suddenly plunged her hand into her pocket and drew forth a beautiful little toy of that description.

The man started as his glance fell upon it.

"It was the exact duplicate of that, madam," he said.

"Oh, then there is not the slightest doubt of her identity," said her ladyship, with pale lips. "Both your story and the vinaigrette prove it, for last Christmas Mr. Gerald Winchester, the young lady's fiance, gave me this, remarking as he did so that he had once given his betrothed one exactly like it. Yes, this poor child must be Allison. Poor, poor child!"

As she ceased speaking, she leaned forward to look into the face of the lovely girl in the chair. The invalid seemed to be attracted to her, and, looking up into her eyes,

smiled with pleasure, revealing two rows of perfect, milk-white teeth as she did so.

Every nerve in the woman's body seemed to be pierced with needles at that look, and with a feeling akin to despair she murmured brokenly: "Oh, the pity of it! the pity of it!"

"Ah!" observed Mr. Lyman, "what you have told me inspires me with the hope that she may yet be restored to her friends. There were several who were killed in that accident," he resumed, "and their bodies were placed in a baggage-car; but I could not allow her to be taken there. I secured a stateroom in one of the parlor-cars and kept guard over her during the few remaining miles of that sorrowful journey. Just as we were rolling into the station, however, I thought I detected slight signs of life in my charge. I placed my hand over her heart; there was warmth and the faintest perceptible pulsation there. 'She shall never be taken away with the dead,' I said to myself, and, acting upon the impulse of the moment, I hailed a cabman the instant the train stopped, conveyed her with his assistance to his vehicle, and took her directly to my own home, where I resolved to spare no pains or expense to resuscitate the injured girl, feeling quite confident that her parents or friends would fly to her immediately upon seeing the notice which I intended to insert in the papers. I called my own family physician to attend her, and he did his utmost for her. The wound on the head, he said, was a serious one. A portion of the skull was doubtless pressing upon the brain, which accounted for her continued insensibility. An operation was performed the next morning, which so relieved the pressure that consciousness was partially restored, and upon asking her name the child murmured something that sounded like Alice, and so Alice she has been called ever since."

"Her name is Allison," said Lady Bromley.

"Yes, that is what your maid called her, and it is very like," replied Mr. Lyman. "That same day," he continued, "I was suddenly attacked with a severe illness resulting from the shock which I had received and which proved much more serious than I realized, and for many weeks I was too ill to give even a thought to the girl whom I had rescued. When I recovered sufficiently to betray any interest in her, I was told that she was slowly convalescing, but, not having fully recovered her reason, was unable to give any account of herself or of her home or friends. No inquiries had been made for her, at least none that seemed to point to her as their object, and we have never been able to gain any clue to her relatives. She gradually recovered a fair degree of health until she has become what you see her now. But the operation of which I speak only partially restored her mental faculties, and, although she is a sweet and gentle being whom every member of my family loves most fondly, she is but a child in intellect. Our physician, however, has all the time held out to us the hope that when she would regain sufficient strength another operation might possibly result in restoring her to her normal condition."

"Oh, that is a ray of hope!" breathed Lady Bromley eagerly. "If it only can be done, how grateful we all shall be, for Mr. Lyman, I am sure that this is the dear girl who has so long been mourned as dead. But how can I ever bear to send the tidings to one whose very life was bound up in hers? It would be worse than death for him to see her thus. It would be living over again the agony which very nearly deprived him of his own reason, and tears rolled thick and fast over the cheeks of the beautiful woman as she thought of the terrible shock which Gerald would experience upon learning the sad story to which she had just listened.

"I suppose you refer to the gentleman to whom you have said she was betrothed," said Mr. Lyman.

"Yes."

"Is the gentleman a resident of this vicinity?"

"No; his name, as I have already

told you, is Gerald Winchester, and his home is in New York City."

Mr. Lyman appeared to become absorbed in thought after this statement, and they walked along in silence for several minutes. At length he remarked:

"Of course, in view of what you have told me, and the probability that the young lady's identity has been established beyond a doubt, I feel very delicate about acting independently in connection with her case any further. Still, I will say that ever since she has been under my care I have done by her exactly as I would have done my own daughter."

"I am sure of it," said Lady Bromley heartily, and bestowing an appreciative look upon him.

"I have employed the most skillful physicians and surgeons to take charge of her. I have spared nothing which they could devise or suggest to benefit her or contribute to her comfort and ultimate recovery, and I had already arranged for the second operation, in accordance with their advice and desire. To-morrow will be the day which they had set for the trial of this vital experiment."

### CHAPTER XIII.

"To-morrow!" breathed her ladyship in a startled tone.

"Yes. The surgeons are agreed that there must still be some pressure upon a certain portion of the brain, and they are confident that if it can be removed, mental activity will be wholly restored. Of course, they cannot be sure that the operation will be successful but there is more than an even chance of it, and they claim that it would be culpable not to make the trial."

Lady Bromley looked very anxious in view of her duty in connection with the matter. Ought she to telegraph Gerald immediately what she had learned with reference to Allison? He, of course, was the most interested of any one, and it seemed to her that he should be consulted regarding this impending operation.

On the other hand, she knew that it would be a terrible shock to him to see her in her present condition. She simply could not bear the thought of his meeting that blank, meaningless look in the eyes that had once been such a delight to him, or hearing the childish babble that fell from her smiling lips.

"Will this operation be attended by any danger to her life?" she inquired, after thinking the matter over for a few moments.

"Well, of course it will be a duplicate piece of work. There is always a risk, you know, about such undertakings," her companion gravely replied. "Still, the surgeons encourage it, and if she were my own child I should risk it. I should feel that I had no right to doom her to perpetual mental darkness without making a desperate effort to give her back her enjoyment of life."

Lady Bromley still wavered in her mind as to what she ought to do. Gerald, she knew, was busy preparing for the approaching trial. He could ill afford the time to come to Boston to remain until this test should be consummated, and she well knew he would do if he were told of Allison's existence, her condition, and the contemplated measures of her restoration.

Then, too, he would be in perfect agony of suspense and anxiety until the ordeal was over, while if it could be accomplished without his knowledge, and end well, his loved one would be restored to him in her right mind, and he would never realize the horror of her present condition.

But that "if" was a serious consideration.

"Suppose the surgeons do not succeed?" she murmured tremulously, and with a shiver of dread. "Then she will probably remain as she is now as long as she lives," said Mr. Lyman, with a sigh.

"And have you no fears that the experiment will prove fatal?"

"I have thought of every contingency," he answered, smiling sadly. "Who does not, in deciding such grave questions? But I can foresee no new complication. Acute inflammation is the worst feature to be feared, and since it did not attend the previous operation, I see no reason why it should follow this one."

"Then," said her ladyship, with sudden determination, but looking very white, "I should advise no change in the plans that you have made. The young lady is an orphan; she has no relatives; at least there is no one who really has any authority to decide such a matter except her betrothed, Mr. Winchester. I feel almost a motherly regard for and interest in this young man, who for some time has been a member of my family, and I honestly think that I am justified in authorizing you, in his stead, to have the arrangements which you

have made carried out exactly in accordance with your own and the surgeons' wishes. I am sure the tender care which you have thrown around this dear girl ever since that terrible accident is sufficient guarantee of your desire to do all that any parent could do for an own child."

"Thank you, madam," heartily responded Mr. Lyman. Then he continued, with an apologetic smile: "And now will you kindly tell me how I may address you in the future?"

"Excuse me, sir," said her ladyship, flushing. "I have certainly been very remiss in not introducing myself before. But my name is Bromley. I came out in such haste I have no cards with me."

Then she went on, as she gazed wistfully toward Allison's fair, delicate face, which was like some exquisitely tinted picture painted on ivory and framed in gold:

"She is very beautiful, even though her mind is so sadly darkened!"

"She is, indeed," replied Allison's protector, as he bestowed an affectionate glance upon her. "We were very sorry to be obliged to cut her hair, which was a veritable 'crown of glory' to her, but it had to be sacrificed to facilitate the operation, and on account of the inflammation resulting from the concussion. It was at first shaven close to her head, but has grown very rapidly during the last few weeks."

(To be continued.)

## On the Farm

### NEAR AND FAR.

#### Interesting Bits of Knowledge About 'Most Everything.

There are 750 golf links in Great Britain.

The Japs make a paper cloth that washes like linen.

Of British bird's eggs a complete set is worth about £200.

The value of pictures in the National Gallery is about \$6,250,000.

A single orange tree will produce 20,000 oranges, and a lemon tree, 8,000 lemons.

Three gas companies in London consume between them 4,000,000 tons of coal per annum.

When a hen attains her third year her laying capacity is at its best. She will lay, on an average, from 300 to 500 eggs in her lifetime.

The champion shorthorn bull, Duke of Hoole, which belonged to M. J. H. Maden, of Bacup, England, has been bought for \$7,875 for exportation to the Argentine Republic.

More matches are used in the United Kingdom than in any other one country in the world. It has been estimated that English people use an average of eight matches each person per day.

Cairo has the biggest University in the world. There are about 9,000 students and 200 professors. The chief subjects taught are Mohammedan law and matters connected with the Koran.

The shareholders of one of the leading gold-mining companies at Bendigo have just elected a lady, a Mrs. Holmes, to a vacant directorship—said to be the first instance of the kind on record.

A Norwich, England, firm is completing 1,100 miles of wire netting for the Australian, Queensland, and Victorian Governments. The netting is retailed by the Governments to settlers, and is used for keeping rabbits from the crops.

The drink bill at most London hospitals is much less than it used to be. At Guy's, for instance, the sum yearly expended on alcoholic liquors for the patients is at the rate of \$2.25 a bed. In 1862 it was no less than \$17.25.

Dogs are well provided for on the Prussian State railways. The latest arrangement for the comfort of touring canines is hot-water pipes and spring mattresses. A bit of hard board with no spring in it is the ordinary man's or woman's portion.

A huge conger eel, which had left the river and made its way up a small stream threading the marshes near Boston (England), was stranded on the falling tide. Two men secured it just before the tide came up the creek again. The conger measured 5ft. 3in. in length, 23in. round, and weighed just 40lb.

In connection with the tercentenary of the rule of the Romanoffs the Russian Post Office will issue a series of new postage stamps bearing the effigies of various Russian monarchs, including Peter the Great, Catharine II., and the reigning Czar. The portraits will be executed by some of the most famous artists of the day.

Now let us see what it is that makes one land rich and another poor. The poor land is found nearly always to be very destitute of carbonate of lime. It is often waterlogged, underdrained. Lacking lime the humus has not gathered in it, thus bacterial life is absent to a