

THE MYSTERIOUS KEY

OR, PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

CHAPTER XVII.

Gerald gently took the two certificates from the hands of his betrothed, carefully refolded and returned them to his wallet. Then he drew her again with his arms.

"Yes, Allison, it has been proved beyond a doubt that I am Adam Brewster's son. Are you sorry?"

"No, no! I am so glad—so glad!" the fair girl unhesitatingly responded, as she nestled closer to him; "but oh! is not too bad that he could not have known—that you both could not have known the truth when you first went into his office? He would have loved you so—he would have been so proud of you. He was very fond of you, and trusted you as he trusted no one else."

"Yes, I know that, and it has been a great comfort to me," Gerald replied with unsteady lips. "Those words of commendation, almost the first that he ever addressed to me, have been more to me than uncounted gold would be."

"Or course they have, Gerald, and I am so glad, too, that I happened to overhear them, and could repeat them so publicly as I did. I shall never forget how earnestly and kindly he looked at you when he said: 'I would stake my fortune upon your integrity and faithfulness to my interests.'"

"How well you have remembered them, Allison!" said Gerald, bending to kiss the lips that had repeated those words which were so precious to him.

"Why, how could I ever forget them?" she returned, with surprise. "They made me so proud of you, and I just gloried in repeating them in court that day, and seeing the face of the judge light up with that look of gladness which told how thankful he was not to be obliged to sentence you; while John Hubbard looked as if he would have been glad to strangle me for having upset his schemes."

"Allison, I am afraid we are talking too long," Gerald remarked, with some anxiety, for her cheeks were crimson, her eyes shone like stars, and her manner was excited.

"No, indeed. It does not tire me at all to talk, and I am so happy to be able to go over all these things with you," she returned, with a joyous little laugh. "Isn't it queer, though, that such a little pressure upon my brain could have made my mind a blank for so many months, and that such a simple operation should have restored to me the memory of everything?"

"It is, indeed, and I know of one, at least, who will always be profoundly grateful for that restoration," said her lover earnestly. "The world has been very dark to me, love, ever since last July, until yesterday, when Mr. Lyttleton told me the wonderful news that you were not lost to me."

"Well, I am sure you have told me something almost as wonderful to-day," Allison smilingly responded. "Oh, to think of it—that you are the heir to all papa's money!"

"It is rather startling, I admit," said Gerald. "And now—with a roguish look into the lovely blue eyes regarding him—"having won my spurs, I shall have no hesitation in taking my bride just as soon as she can be persuaded to appoint the day when she will add the 'Mrs.' to her name. You will not even have to change it, dear."

"H'm! Conditions have changed somewhat since that day when I tried to make you promise that you wouldn't mind about the 'spurs,' retorted Allison, with smiling mockery.

"Indeed, they have." "They are exactly reversed. I haven't even a clerkship to share with you," said Allison wickedly. "I am glad of it," returned her lover sentimentally.

"Gerald Winchester Brewster, you are a usurper. You have robbed my father's daughter of her fortune, and now you dare affirm that you rejoice in her poverty!" exclaimed Allison, with affected sternness.

"It is no robbery, love; it will all be yours just the same, to use as you like. We are only availing ourselves of a caprice of fate and the consequent formalities of law to establish your rights," the young man explained.

"But"—still preserving her mischievous mood—"suppose I should refuse to—come to you as poor as a church mouse? I don't forget how lofty somebody was about a year ago when somebody else almost unsexed herself, and proposed to share and share alike. Perhaps a certain young lady, who has seemed to sing into a nameless nobody all of a sudden, possesses a spark of the same fire in her nature that once animated an aspiring knight."

"Allison!" exclaimed Gerald, a note of keen pain in his tone, while he bent forward to search the face that was resting against his shoulder. "I hope you are not so wounded as your words seem to imply over these recent revelations which have so turned things topsy-turvy. I would rather a thousand times forego the establishment of my claim as the heir to this fortune than have you experience a single pang."

A merry little laugh interrupted him at this point, and a pair of soft arms stole fondly about his neck.

"You dear, sensitive, self-denying boy! Did you think I really meant a word of all that nonsense? No, indeed, and I am even unmaidenly enough to confess that I am perfectly delighted with the present arrangement. I wouldn't have it changed for the world; for since you are so generous-hearted as to wish to endow a certain poverty-stricken little waif with all you possess, there will now be nothing to keep us apart any longer. The world would probably be shocked at such a confession, and cry 'immodest mercenary!' But what care I? I am only hungry to be loved, and for a home where we can be all in all to each other."

"My darling!" whispered Gerald delightedly. "I might have known that you were in jest—that you would never maliciously twit upon facts. And we shall make a home just as soon as the lawsuit is ended. Where shall it be, Allison?"

"Oh, in the old house, during the winter, Gerald," she eagerly replied. "Then we must spend some part of each year at Lakeview, where you proved yourself such a hero—I cannot give up either of those dear places. But that villa at Newport I never want to enter again; that dreadful man has poisoned its atmosphere for me. Sell it, Gerald, and we will find some other summer home."

"You shall have everything your own way, my darling, and you could not have pleased me better than to choose, as you have done, to live in the old familiar places, where I have been in the habit of seeing you and father—my father! How strange it seems to say it, Allison, and it is the first time I have ever called him so," Gerald concluded, flushing from mingled emotions as he referred to Mr. Brewster in this way.

"How very sad and mysterious the separation of your father and mother was!" Allison thoughtfully observed. "I cannot believe that papa intended to do his young wife any wrong, for he was a good man through and through; but his apparent desertion of her is to me most strange."

"So it seemed to me at first," Gerald replied, "but, as I have thought more about it, I cannot help feeling that if my mother had lived, all would eventually have been well with them. There is certainly something very mysterious about their relations, but the erection of that monument over my mother's grave proves to me that he never willfully repudiated her during her life, and was determined that no reproach should be entailed upon her memory. But by the way, Allison," he added, with a sudden thought, "how do you suppose it happened that one of the other victims of that accident was reported as Miss Brewster?"

"Oh, I imagine my card-case was accountable for that mistake. It was probably found lying beside some one else, and so it was taken for granted that the person was Miss Brewster."

"But, of course, the lady's friends would know better than that when they identified her," objected Gerald.

"True, and yet the reporter's account may have been written before the poor thing was identified, and thus he never discovered his mis-

take; or, even if he did, he may not have thought it worth while to rectify it. I should really like to know who the girl was," Allison concluded thoughtfully.

Later the lovers joined the family below, and a pleasant, social evening followed, although Gerald considerably took his leave at an early hour, having first arranged, if the following day should prove to be fine, to take Allison for a drive.

It did prove to be an ideal winter day, and snugly esconced among abundant robes, the lovers spent a couple of hours driving. The remainder of the day was quietly passed with the Lymans and Lady Bromley, Gerald only leaving in season to catch the evening express for New York.

It was arranged before he left, however, that as soon as Allison should be pronounced strong enough to endure the trip, she should accompany Lady Bromley back to New York and remain with her until the lawsuit was decided, when the young couple would immediately be married.

The Lymans expressed a great deal of regret at the thought of parting with her, for she had grown to seem almost like a daughter to them, but, of course, they could not fail to rejoice most heartily, in view of her recovery and her flattering prospects for the future; while, as they were in the habit of frequently visiting New York, they were comforted with the thought that they could thus see her often.

The day after Gerald's departure, Ellen Carson was permitted to pay Allison a call (and it was very touching to witness the girl's heartfelt joy over the restoration of her youthful benefactress.

"I never was so glad about anything in my life!" she exclaimed, with a beaming face, as she reverently took the dainty white hand which Allison extended to her; "and you're going to get your money all back too, ain't you?" she concluded, with eager interest.

"Yes, I expect it will all come to me," the fair invalid smilingly responded, but not thinking it necessary to explain just how the fortune was going to be restored to her.

"Well, I reckon I can help them do a little fighting on that lawsuit," said Ellen, with an air of importance. "I've always hankered to do something for you, ever since you gave me those ten dollars, and now I'm going to tell all I know, to make those greedy thieves shell out what they stole from you."

Allison smiled at her original remarks, but thanked her, and told her that she felt sure that everything would end all right.

A day or two after Gerald's return from his visit to Boston, he received a note from the chief officer of the bank where he had served so long under Mr. Brewster.

A new president and other officers had been appointed, and the concern was being managed on a different basis. The writer of the note asked Gerald if he would kindly step around to the bank at his earliest convenience, as there was a matter of business upon which he wished to consult him.

Accordingly, the following morning the young man presented himself in the private office of the president, when that gentleman informed him that he wished to be instructed how to gain access to the secret vault which he understood the former president had had constructed for his individual use, but as no one in the bank knew where it was located, he had taken the liberty to send for him to give him the information.

"I want just such a place for my own convenience," he observed. "I have spent hours searching for it, but without success, and I confess that my curiosity regarding this clever hiding-place has become almost a mania," he concluded, smiling.

"Have you Mr. Brewster's keys?" Gerald inquired, but with a thrill of repulsion as he recalled the experiences of that never-to-be-forgotten Sunday when he had come there to execute his secret commission.

"Yes; here they are," his companion replied, as he took from a drawer the identical ring which the late banker had given him during his last interview with him. "This is the key to the secret vault," said Gerald, singling out from the others the tiny bit of steel.

"Yes, I imagined so; but as yet I have been unable to discover any lock which it will fit," the banker responded.

"I can let you into the secret very shortly if you will come with me to the vault," our hero observed, whereupon they proceeded directly to the place.

The drawer which had been Mr. Brewster's individual receptacle

for important papers was drawn forth, when, by the light of a candle, Gerald pointed out the narrow slot in the panel behind which was the secret vault.

(To be continued.)

WORD FOR BUSINESS GIRL

CAPABLE, INTELLIGENT AND SELF-RESPECTING.

The Woman Wage Earner May be as Modest as Her Stay-at-Home Sister.

Most of those who do not come in actual contact with the business girl have the vaguest idea of what she is really like.

In the first place, they look on her as thoroughly undomesticated and devoid of all womanly accomplishments.

In this they make a great mistake, for there is no reason in the world why the business girl should not be a very capable housekeeper.

The girl who has the brains to be intelligent in business affairs has the brains to be equally intelligent in household affairs.

DON'T WANT IDLE LIFE.

The business girl is not always driven to earn her own living through necessity. It frequently happens that she is one of a large family of girls and that her common sense tells her that she is much better off earning her living than idling away her time at home.

If a girl is not married at twenty-five she is usually tired of dances and the tiresome round of social life, and she is very glad to get into some congenial line of work.

The pride of being independent is very sweet, and, though a girl may be independent as far as money matters go, it does not follow that she loses her femininity in the smallest degree.

She can be out in the world, a wage earner, and still be as modest and womanly as though she had never left the home nest.

INTELLIGENT AND CAPABLE.

The girl who is inclined to be bold and fast is in just as much danger of becoming so if she stays at home as when she is engaged in business. In fact, there is even more chance of her getting into these bad habits, as she has more time to get into mischief.

To my mind the average business girl is about the finest product of this country.

She is an intelligent, capable, self-respecting, womanly girl, and the men of the country should be proud of her. She goes about her business in a modest, sensible way, asking nothing but just recognition of her services and respectful treatment from those with whom she comes in daily contact.

She is usually a good daughter, and, owing to her generosity, many little extra comforts creep into the home.

If any young man reads these words let him remember that a good daughter makes a good wife.

Do not for a moment think that I am decrying the home girl, for I am not. I am merely telling some facts about the business girl.

The girl whose plain duty it is to stay at home and help her mother is earning her living just as much as the one who goes to business every day. Keep that in mind, little stay-at-home sister, and don't be blue because you are not paid a salary every week. As long as your mother needs you, you are doing the very best kind of work in helping to lift the burden from her overweighed shoulders.—Beatrice Fairfax, New York Evening Journal.

GREETING BY BULLET.

Discharge Revolvers in Air on Meeting or Parting.

A very pleasing custom of the Montenegrins is that of discharging revolvers in the air at meeting or parting. A score or so of men will accompany a popular guest to the outskirts of the village, and as he rides off they speed him with a deafening fusillade. They will fire their revolvers, too, at the conclusion of a jollification, and are not then always very careful of the angle of discharge.

In the accident ward of Montenegro's only hospital the majority of cases are men thus accidentally shot. There is also a certain dance where a ring is formed and a man and girl prance round, the former striving to leap as high as possible, emitting fearsome yells and firing his revolver at every leap. When that was in progress I always took a front seat lying down.

BRITAIN'S BIG INCOME

JOHN BULL'S NATIONAL BALANCE SHEET.

How Two Hundred Million Pounds are Spent—Colossal Figures.

Even an American multi-millionaire might be staggered by an attempt to grasp the colossal figures disclosed by John Bull's national balance-sheet, issued as a Blue-book recently.

In the financial year ended March 31st last, the Exchequer receipts totaled £205,137,275 19s. 10d., the great bulk of this money being derived from customs, excise, estate duties, land-tax, post office, and property and income-tax.

Money raised by creation of additional debt accounted for a further £2,636,155, and amounts temporarily borrowed came to £3,500,000.

Where the money went is even more interesting. Twenty-eight millions were absorbed by the National Debt services, £470,000 went to the Civil List, £271,790 in annuities and pensions, £77,738 in salaries and allowances, £518,292 to Courts of Justice, and £331,288 to miscellaneous services.

The Civil List £470,000 includes the following items:

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| Their Majesties' Privy Purse | £110,000 |
| Salaries of his Majesty's Household and retired allowances | 125,800 |
| Expenses of his Majesty's Household | 193,000 |
| Royal bounty, alms, and special services | 13,200 |

ROYAL FAMILY ANNUITIES.

Annuities to the Royal Family include:

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| The Prince of Wales | £20,000 |
| Princess of Wales | 10,000 |
| Princess Christian | 6,000 |
| Princess Louise (Duchess of Argyll) | 6,000 |
| Duke of Connaught | 25,000 |
| Duchess of Edinburgh | 6,000 |
| Duchess of Albany | 6,000 |
| Princess Henry of Battenburg | 6,000 |

Trustees for his Majesty's daughters 18,000 |

For political and civil services Viscount Cross and Lord George Hamilton each draw £2,000 a year pension; Mr. Henry Chaplin, Lord Balfour of Burleigh, and Mr. Gerald Balfour, £1,200 each. Two late Speakers of the House of Commons—Viscounts Peel and Gully—are down for £4,000 a year each, while the pensions for judicial services in England alone reach a total of £45,789.

CROWN'S ITEMS.

Here are some curious items under the heading of miscellaneous revenue:

Amount received from Venezuelan Government in respect of claim of British subject who cannot be found £609 0 0 |

Conscience money remitted to Chancellor of the Exchequer 717 0 0 |

Unclaimed estate of bankrupt's estate at Smyrna 7 12 6 |

Commission on sale of photographs (National Portrait Gallery) 17 4 0 |

The gross receipts of the postal service were £19,904,504, of the telegraph service £3,602,552, and of the telephone service £1,523,622.

MAULED BY PANTHERS.

Girl's Fierce Struggle in a Seaside Circus.

A girl animal tamer, "Mlle. Alice," was attacked and badly mauled by two panthers in the Marine Gardens at Portobello, the seaside resort near Edinburgh, Scotland.

She was taking the animals from the cages to the arena for the performance at the time. The panthers were in a sullen humor, and resented her efforts to coax them along the passage leading to the arena. They hung back and suddenly sprang on her, bearing her to the ground.

The large crowd present were horrified to hear screams coming from the passage. The manager rushed to the girl's rescue, firing his revolver, which was loaded with blank cartridges, while others, with iron bars, after a fierce struggle, thrust the infuriated animals off their victim, who by this time had swooned.

The girl was badly lacerated on the chest, thigh and scalp, and was covered with blood.