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AN OLD MAN'S DARLING.

* * * * * * *

BY MRS. ALEXANDER McV. MILLER

Author of "The Senator's Bride," "Brunette and Blonde," "A Dreadful Temptation," Etc.

[illegible] loyal fidelity of the [illegible] to the heart, it is an honest, hearty word [illegible] her lily white [illegible] clasp of the girl at her feet, looking up [illegible] eyes.

"[illegible] dear girl," she says plainly, "you are the only true [illegible] on earth!"

[illegible] you, Miss Bonnie[illegible] that the words [illegible] are too true for [illegible] Something troubles [illegible] to be happier?"

[illegible] sympathetic, profound [illegible] the eyes of the listener.

[illegible] kind girl," she an[illegible] help me I most [illegible] no one can carry it [illegible] with you, Lucy, and [illegible] I have so few to [illegible] and better when I can [illegible] heart sympathizes [illegible]

[illegible] my dear lass," [illegible] "I'll never forget [illegible] of your kindness."

[illegible] and Bonnie [illegible] gay and tenderly, [illegible] the parlours rang.

[illegible] to test your [illegible] girl, drearily. "I am [illegible] this week. Will [illegible]

[illegible] Away off [illegible] Does [illegible] inquire [illegible]

[illegible] Elsie furrin[illegible] to the ends of [illegible] the residue re[illegible]

[illegible] be taxed that [illegible] France."

[illegible] Lucy [illegible] frogs and [illegible] a smile at the [illegible] of disgust.

[illegible] people be[illegible] among them [illegible] probably stay [illegible] to sch[illegible]

[illegible] seek the beauteous eye of Heaven to garnish,
[illegible] wasteful and ridiculous excess."

[illegible] was a nine days' wonder, and then [illegible] was over. People voted Colonel Car[illegible] a bear and a Bluebeard, and his [illegible] young bride a victim and martyr. [illegible] said that he was secluding her [illegible] in the world because he was too jealous for the light of Heaven to shine upon her.

[illegible] the young man indited some charming verses for his favorite magazine, [illegible] "Those Olive Eyes Across the Sea." [illegible] then the gossip began to die out, [illegible] new subjects engrossed society's [illegible]

[illegible] months rolled on and the Carlyle mystery seemed was almost forgotten, or [illegible] least but seldom named, even by [illegible] who had been the most interested [illegible] first.

[illegible] but Felise was jubilant.

"Mother, you see what I can do," she [illegible] with a wicked laugh. "The honeymoon is barely over, yet I have thrown [illegible] in the old man's eyes and parted him from his darling for two whole years."

"Felise, how did you accomplish it?" Mrs. Arnold inquires curiously.

"I only had a little talk with him, dear, [illegible] confidentially, and I let [illegible] my secret," she answered, [illegible] humorously.

"You might share it with me," her [illegible] mother said, reproachfully. "I never have secrets from you, my dear."

"I only had a little talk and hunting mother just a word dropped in [illegible] ears and there yet the seed I sowed has been [illegible] forth an abundant harvest. I have driven him nearly mad with jealousy and doubt and suspicion; [illegible] put that phase of scolding Bonnibel [illegible] school into his mind. And yet so [illegible] is he by his jealousy that he does not dream of my complicity in the matter, and he will always blame himself for the everlasting alienation that will exist between them."

"You had your revenge sooner than I thought you would. You are a clever girl, Felise," Mrs. Arnold said, admiringly.

"It is but begun," Felise answered, moodily. "If time spares the old man until Bonnibel comes out of her school I will wring his heart even more deeply than I have already done." I hate my time."

Her mother, vengeful and vindictive as she was herself, looked at her in wonder.

"Why it seems to me that you have [illegible] completely avenged yourself," she said.

"[illegible] the wrong received!" Felise exclaims, interrupt her [illegible] mother, and [illegible] Carlyle appear to [illegible] while the wife is [illegible] in my control," asks Mrs. Arnold.

"He [illegible] the world, [illegible] travel [illegible] talked to [illegible] his intention [illegible] could."

"Perhaps [illegible] so yet."

"No, he will not. He is too proud and stubborn to [illegible] voluntarily, and I think that [illegible] so readily in the plan that he can find no hope or extra from it. She is as proud as he is, besides, she does not love him, and his unmerciable harshness [illegible] her perfectly reckless. She will go to the school, not only to break his heart."

"It does he will die of grief, Felise, or of supination, and then she will be left a young [illegible] widow," cautions Mrs. Arnold.

"No danger," says Felise, carelessly. "Men have died and women have eaten them, but not [illegible] the hunter [illegible] a year. I do not [illegible] the money. The old man has buried his partners and not survived to the games of his movement yet. It is possible he may live to plant the weeping willow over his little white faced dove."

"Perhaps [illegible] has never grieved over anyone since her illness last summer."

"She has been grieving over the loss of Castle Dome," Felise answered, sarcastically.

She rises to the piano and plays a few chords, and goes on again, wandering about the room restlessly. There is a [illegible] and unused to her every movement, and her eyes flash and roll about in these moods in a way that troubles her mother.

"Felise, do you [illegible] well at night?" she inquires, abruptly.

"Why should I not?" the girl asks, turning her head away.

"I do not know; but there is a haggardness and restlessness about you as if you didn't sleep much. I fancy you are getting nervous and wakeful brooding over this revenge of yours. Your face has grown wan and your eyes quite wild. Take care of yourself or you will lose your beauty."

"Never mind, mother; when we go to Paris next year I will go to one of those wonderful women there and have myself made beautiful forever."

"To Paris? Do you really mean it, Felise? I thought you said the last time we went abroad that you were tired of it and [illegible] never go [illegible] again."

"I have changed my mind, madam. That is the privilege of the fair sex, you know."

"I suppose you have some motive in this change of mind, Felise."

"Yes, I have. I mean to be on hand when Miss Carlyle comes home from her finishing school. I have a fancy to see her after the polishing process is completed."

She laughs softly to herself as if something pleasant has occurred to her.

"Well, well, have your own way about it, my dear—you always do. But I wish you could forget the Carlyles and enjoy life better. We have everything to make it enjoyable, and if you wanted to marry, why you could buy almost anyone you wanted with our wealth."

"I could not buy Colonel Carlyle, mother, and I wanted him very much. He is the wealthiest man I know of anywhere."

"You do not need to marry for wealth, my daughter; we have enough of our own."

Felise did not answer. She was absorbed in thought. Nothing Mrs. Arnold could say made the least impression on her mind.

She was wedded to one idea, and as the weeks and months rolled by it only took a firmer hold on her feelings.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Madam Carlyle, monsieur, your husband, awaits you in the salon."

The tall, beautiful blonde, practising a difficult sonata at the piano, pauses a moment and suffers her white hands to rest idly on the keys.

"Colonel Carlyle, did you say, madam?" she inquires calmly.

The dignified head of the Parisian school bows in assent, and stands awaiting her mistress's pleasure. The latter rises slowly, folds her music together, restores it to the proper place and turns to the music-room.

"You will wish to make some changes in your dress, off course," the lady superior blandly asserts.

Madam Carlyle gives a glance downward at her dress of dark blue cashmere. It is made with almost nun-like simplicity and fits her rounded, graceful form to perfection. The neck and sleeves are finished with frills and fine lace, and there is not an ornament about her except the rings on her tapering fingers. She does not need ornament. She is rarely, peerlessly beautiful with her fair flower-face and luxuriant crown of golden hair.

"It is not necessary," she answers. "Colonel Carlyle is perhaps impatient."

There is a delicate-veiled sarcasm in the words, barely perceptible to the trained hearing of the listener. With that simple speech she turns and glides from the room, leaving the lady superior gazing after her in some surprise.

"They say that we in France make marriages de convenance," she murmurs in French (which we will spare our readers); "but surely the Americans must do likewise. That old man and that fair young girl—surely it is the union of winter and summer. After two years' absence she goes to him as coolly as an iceberg."

Meanwhile Mrs. Carlyle has glided down the long hall, opened the door of the reception-room with a steady hand, and stepped across the threshold.

"Bonnibel!" exclaims a voice, trembling with rapture and emotion—"my darling wife!"

His arms are about her, his lips touch hers.

After a moment she gently disengages herself and looks up in his face.

"Colonel Carlyle," she exclaims, involuntarily, "how changed you are!"

Ten years instead of two seem to have gone over his head.

A look of age and weakness had grown into his face, his erect form has acquired a perceptible stoop; yet a look of disappointment flashes into his eyes at her words.

"It is only the fatigue of travel," he answers, quickly. "I have been a great wanderer since we parted, my dear, and the weariness of travel is still upon me. But as soon as I get rested and recuperated I shall look quite like myself again."

"I hope so," she answers, politely. "Pray resume your seat, sir."

He looks at her a little wistfully, as she seats herself some distance from him.

"Bonnibel, are you glad to see me again?" he asks, gently.

She looks up, startled, and, hesitating what to say to this point-blank question.

He sees the struggle in a moment, and adds, quickly and a little sadly.

"Never mind, my dear, you need not answer. I see you have not forgotten my harshness in the past, and you are not prepared with an answer that would make me happy. But, my darling, you must learn forgetfulness of those things that alienated you from me, or I shall bend every effort now to the end, object of making you happy. I have come to take you away with me, Bonnibel."

A slight, almost imperceptible shiver runs through her at the words, and she smothers a faint sigh.

She will be very sorry to leave the haven of peace in which she has rested securely the last two years. She has grown fond of her quiet life among the "precious, pale cold" nuns of the convent, and is both to break its tranquility going back to the jar and fret of life with her jealous husband. She wishes that she might stay in the convent all her life.

"Do you intend to return at once to the United States, sir?" she inquires.

"Not yet, unless you particularly desire it. I want you to see something of life in the delightful Paris, as we Americans call it. I have rented an elegant chateau and furnished it in bachelor style, according to what I fancied your taste would prefer; have engaged a retinue of servants, and there is lovely garden of flowers in bloom, the house is ready, and only awaits its mistress. I have tried to arrange everything as you would like it."

"[illegible] you are very kind," she murmurs, almost inaudibly.

"The next thing," he goes on, "is to take you to Worth, where you may order as [illegible] as handsome as a queen's, if you choose. And jewels—well, you shall have as many and as costly ones as you like."

"I have enough jewels, I think," she answers. "There are the pearls, Uncle Francis gave me; then my wedding gift—the diamonds."

"Pshaw! you will need many more when you are fairly launched on the tide of gay society. You will see women fairly loaded with jewels—you must get have less than they. Not but that you are beautiful enough to dispense with extraneous ornament, but I wish you to outshine all others in adornment as well as in beauty."

The long lashes drooped over her cheeks a little sadly as he talks. So these are the things with which she is to fill her life—society, dress, jewels, fashion. A long life, too, perhaps, for she is lonely [illegible] young. For other women there may be love and happiness—for her, nothing but the gilded pleasures that wealth can purchase. Ah, well, and with a start she remembers Mrs. Arnold's threat and her weak vacillation in it—those are the things for which she sold herself to the old man sitting yonder. She made the bargain herself, and now she must abide by it. She is a fettered slave, but at least her bonds are golden ones.

"You are very kind," she answers, trying hard to be cordial and grateful for his generosity. "I do not know how to thank you for your munificence, sir."

"I will tell you," he answers, quickly. "Try to like me a little. Bonnibel, I dreamed of winning your love, but things went wrong and I—I—he was too harsh with the heavy hand I had caught—so I came to win your hatred instead. But that was so long ago. You will try to like me just a little now, Bonnibel?"

The pathos of his words, the weary looks touch a tender chord in young heart, and they are the key-note of reserve that is freezing around it. There was yet to him, pitying he [illegible] with youth and health, into his white jewelled hand.

"Indeed I will try," she says earnestly. "Only be kind to me, do not frighten me with your fierceness, and I will like you very indeed!"

He kisses the little hand with the ardor of a boyish lover, feeling his heart beat warm and [illegible] gently spoken words.

"A thousand thanks, my [illegible] exclaims. "Your words have made me very happy. I will talk to [illegible] jealous temper and [illegible] regard. And now, my dearest, [illegible] seen enough for one day? [illegible] want to go away [illegible]?"

"You wish me to go at once?" she [illegible] slightly.

"To-day [illegible] have [illegible] my wife, [illegible] I want you to [illegible] tomorrow [illegible] Worth [illegible] and [illegible] tean."

"But lady mid[illegible] and [illegible] [illegible]

"Tell your maid to pack your trunks and he will [illegible] for [illegible] Carlyle and [illegible] By the [illegible] as you [illegible] have your [illegible] [illegible]?" he [illegible]

"You remember Lucy—the girl who [illegible] from New York?" she [illegible]

He frowns slightly.

"Yes, I [illegible] that she will be [illegible] now, dear. You [illegible] [illegible] [illegible]