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VOLUME 26. NO. 22.

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1	Milton	Wm. Panton.	29	26	26	9	24	25	10 a.m.
2	Oakville	R. Balmer	6	3	5	5	11	3	10 a.m.
3	Georgetown	L. Grant	12	16	11	7	17	9	9.30 a.m.
	Acton	J. Matthews	13	11	13	8	15	11	10 a.m.
	Campbellville	S. R. Lister	11	6	10	0	9	8	9 30 "
	Burlington	W. J. Bastedo	5	2	4	2	10	2	11 "

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INTRODUCTION.

"If you are satisfied that such a disposition of your fortune is just, Sir Charles, I have no right perhaps to object," said Edward Sansome, a shrewd lawyer, to his principal client, Sir Charles Rooden, of Rood Abbey.

"Of course I am satisfied," laughed handsome, cheery Sir Charles. "I have a large fortune and a wife as good and true as she is beautiful. Surely I cannot do wrong in leaving my fortune to such a wife!"

"There is a great difference between doing that which is wrong and that which is imprudent," observed Mr. Sansome.

"And you think that my will errs on the side of imprudence?" questioned Sir Charles uneasily.

"So it seems to me," replied the lawyer.

"How can it, when I leave all that I have to my wife?" asked Sir Charles.

"There are so many contingencies," answered the lawyer.

"Yes, I know; you are thinking that it is possible her ladyship may marry again," said Sir Charles.

"It is not improbable," returned the lawyer cautiously.

"It would not be in an ordinary case; but this is not an ordinary case. You seem to forget that our marriage was a pure love-match."

"I have seen the beginning and the end of many love-matches," remarked Mr. Sansome quietly.

"Probably, but not a love-match like ours. During my married life I have never given one thought to any other woman—indeed I might say, in the words of the old song, 'All other women are but shadows to me.' She is the one woman for whom I care and whom I love."

"That is romance, not practical common sense," said Mr. Sansome; "and they differ as light from darkness."

"It matters little whether it is romance or not; it happens to be true," laughed Sir Charles. "I am easy enough on the score of my will. If my fortune were twice as large, I should leave it all to my wife."

"But would it not be as well to insert a clause to the effect that some portion at least of this vast fortune is to be forfeited if Lady Rooden marries again?"

The frank handsome face darkened, and the blue eyes flashed fiercely.

"I would not so insult her for the world!" he cried. "You do not understand the depth of our mutual love and trust; and on that ground I can excuse your professional suspicion. It would be impossible for my wife to marry again in the event of my death. She has been the love of my life, the heart of my heart; and do you think she whose very soul is mine would or could ever listen to the wooing of another man? You will excuse me for saying so, but the very idea seems like sacrilege to me. I am desirous of showing my implicit faith and trust in the wife whom I honour as much as I love; therefore I leave my whole fortune to her, to be held in trust for my daughter Angela. During her lifetime Lady Rooden can make what allowance she may think proper to our daughter. If she marries, it will be in her ladyship's power to give her a very handsome dowry; and at Lady Rooden's death the whole estate goes to my daughter intact. That seems simple enough."

"Yes, it is simple enough," agreed Mr. Sansome, though evidently still unconvinced of the justice of it.

Sir Charles went on—

"If—which heaven forbid!—Lady Rooden dies first—my property will revert to my daughter on my death—for I shall never marry again—and I have chosen proper guardians for her."

"Yes, that is right enough; but—"

Sir Charles interrupted him.

"I am anxious to make my will at once, simply as a matter of prudence. Not that I have any fear of dying yet. I am not much over thirty-five, and, being blessed with good health and a sound constitution, in all human probability death and I will be strangers for many long years. Several of my ancestors lived to be over ninety years of age. It may be the same with me."

"I hope so sincerely, Sir Charles," said the lawyer.

"Thank you," returned the baronet. "But you do not look satisfied yet, Sansome," he added. "Now! what is it?"

"Tell me frankly what you yourself think of my intentions, you will not offend me. I know the value of a truthful friend. Tell me just what is passing through your mind."

"I am inclined to think that you will not be pleased, Sir Charles; still I will speak out my thoughts. I think you are leaving too much in the power of a lady who, though one of the most estimable of her sex, is still only a woman. I see my words have vexed you; I knew they would."

"No, I am not vexed," said Sir Charles; "because I know you mean well. Tell me what you think I ought to do."

"My advice will be very unpalatable to you," said Mr. Sansome; "but I should counsel you to make some change. If you should die before Lady Rooden, and she should marry again, it would be as well to stipulate in such a case that half the property must go at once to your daughter."

"My wife would never marry again," Sir Charles declared emphatically.

"I do before her, all happiness for her in this world will die with me."

"Still there is the possibility of such a thing happening," urged the lawyer cautiously.

"There is no such possibility as regards Lady Rooden," again declared Sir Charles. "You may dismiss that idea from your mind at once and for ever. Think of the other side of the picture, which you have entirely overlooked—what a tie it will form between mother and daughter in case of my death! Their interests will be one and the same; the daughter will always be dependent upon the mother, the mother ever striving to do her best for her child. Instead of feeling anxious, so far as I know, I congratulate myself on the wisdom of the course I am taking. I honestly consider I have done the best for my child."

"If you think so, there is no more to be said," returned Mr. Sansome. "But there is one other question I must ask. In making a will of such importance, one requires a clear understanding on every point. In the event of your death and the death of Miss Rooden, how is Lady Rooden to dispose of the property?"

The baronet thought deeply for some moments, then answered—

"In that case I should lay no restrictions whatever upon it; she can dispose of it as she wills. I have no near relatives, and, unless it should please heaven to bless me with a son, the title, so far as I know, will become extinct at my death."

"You have nothing more to add, Sir Charles?" asked the lawyer.

"Nothing, except that, as soon as you have the will drawn up, I shall be glad to sign it. It will be off my mind, and I shall feel more satisfied."

"It shall be done at once," said Mr. Sansome. "Have patience with me while I recapitulate your instructions. In the event of your death, the whole fortune and estates go intact to Lady Rooden, and she is to have the full benefit of them during her lifetime. At her death they pass to your daughter Angela. If I understand rightly, Lady Rooden is not to have the power to dispose of anything—not an ounce of the family plate, not a picture from the gallery, not a tree from the woods."

"That is so," agreed Sir Charles.

"Her ladyship can, if she thinks proper, make Miss Rooden an allowance; or, if she should marry, it is in her mother's power to give her a dowry."

"Yes," said Sir Charles briefly.

"If however Angela Rooden should die, the property would be entirely at Lady Rooden's disposal."

"Entirely," repeated Sir Charles, his handsome face glowing with pride and generosity.

"She can bequeath it to charities, missions, or anything else she chooses?" queried Mr. Sansome.

"Yes—she will make a wise use of it," said Sir Charles.

"Those are my instructions, and I have simply to carry them out," concluded Mr. Sansome.

"That is all," said Sir Charles.

The lawyer was silent for a few moments; then, raising his head, he glanced keenly at Sir Charles.

"I cannot help it," he said—"I may even forfeit your friendship—but I must say that yours will be the most imprudent and, I will add, the most foolish will I have ever made or heard of."

Sir Charles laughed.

"An honest opinion, at least!" he remarked. "Thank you for it; but in this matter you must permit me to know best. I know what a noble, honourable woman my wife is, and I take an especial pride in showing practically how perfectly I trust her."

"Is it of any use for me to suggest that Miss Rooden ought to have an income of her own?" asked Mr. Sansome.

"Mother and daughter will have a common purse between them," answered Sir Charles.

"Forgive me once more. Suppose that Lady Rooden, as we may naturally hope, lives to a ripe old age; do you think it will be just or prudent to force Miss Rooden to be dependent all that time on her mother's bounty?"

"Oh, I will simply bind them together; it will keep their interests one," replied Sir Charles; and there was a note of impatience in his voice.

"It is a false idea," said Mr. Sansome.

"Still I will carry it out, persisted the baronet. "It is my wish and desire; and," he added, with a smile, "every man can do what he likes with his own."

"True; but no man, even with his own, ought to do that which will injure others," returned the lawyer.

"And you believe honestly that my will may injure those it is intended to benefit?" questioned Sir Charles.

"I do," replied Mr. Sansome; and the baronet was thoughtfully silent for some moments.

"Thank you for your candour; but my opinion is not in the least changed. I will take all the responsibility. When shall I call at your office to sign your will? I am really in town for that purpose."

"Will Tuesday morning suit you, Sir Charles?" asked the lawyer.

"Yes," he replied; and on Tuesday, the twenty-third of April, the will which the lawyer had stigmatised as "imprudent" and "foolish" was duly signed and attested.

CHAPTER I.

A spoiled beauty—spoiled by a devotion and love such as fall to the lot of few women—Lady Rooden did not know the meaning of the word "care." She was only seventeen when Sir Charles Rooden wooed and won her, and from that time he had surrounded her with such loving care that her lots amongst women was quite exceptional.

Few knew such unalloyed happiness as she enjoyed. At times a fleeting regret that she had no son to succeed her husband would come over her; but even that regret was softened when she remembered how deeply he loved their little daughter.

The Roodens of Rood Abbey had been for many generations owners of that fair and fertile domain. Like many of the old ancestral homes of England, Rood Abbey had originally been the property of a religious order; but, falling victims to the rapacity of the reigning monarch and the bigotry of the times, they had been expelled the country, their "property" confiscated, and large lands were given to Guy Rooden, a Court favourite, whose descendants had lived there ever since. Many parts of the old abbey had successfully resisted the wasting hand of Time, notably the massive battlemented towers and the ponderous old entrance-gates through which king, queen, and mitred abbot had often driven. Many a solemn procession had passed through those portals, many a long train of armoured knights and fair ladies had rided through the grand avenue of giant chesnuts.

The abbey itself was a substantial old building of gray stone, the towers of which were almost covered with ivy. It stretched its tendrils round the great arched windows; it climbed to the very top of the tall towers; it clung in rich masses to the ancient walls. Rood Abbey, as seen by the light of the summer sun or by the moon's pale beams, presented a picture at once picturesque and imposing.

The estate, which was situated in one of the most beautiful of the Midland Counties, was singularly favoured by Nature, and not the least of its charms was the bright flashing river Leir, smooth and peaceful in places, spanned here and there by rustic bridges, and widening in its course until it developed into the broad, deep reach in front of the abbey itself.

Sir Charles Rooden had succeeded when quite young to the inheritance of Rood. He was one of Fortune's favourites, handsome in face and figure, with a genial, kind, cheery manner that made him universally beloved. He was the ideal of an English landlord—handsome, brave, generous, a true lover of all outdoor and manly sports, his hand ever open to relieve distress, his ear ever ready to listen to the sorrows of the unfortunate.

He was still young when he fell in love with one of the most beautiful girls of her day, Laura Milroy, the only daughter of the Earl of Milroy. The young baronet believed her to be the fairest, the most graceful, the most tender-hearted of her sex, and during the whole of his married life he discovered in her nothing but perfection. In his blind idolatry he never perceived that she was vain or selfish, that she was shallow at heart; he discerned in her only the attributes of a good and noble woman, and he loved her with a full and perfect love, believing in and trusting her implicitly. His wife was the centre of his hopes and plans, the one object of his care and worship; and next to her in his affection came his little daughter, whom, because of her beautiful face and sweet serious eyes, eyes in which dwelt a sweet brooding seriousness, they named Angela.

Sir Charles worshipped the child just as he did its beautiful mother. He commissioned one of the leading artists of the day to paint the picture of Lady Rooden and Angela, the slender stately young mother looking down on the child playing amidst roses at her feet. Concerning the undeniably lovely face of Lady Rooden the artist made no remark—he transferred it, with all its subtle loveliness, to canvas; but with the face of the child Angela he was enraptured.

"They have named her well," he said to himself. "So far as the human idea can realize an angel's face, she has one. How deeply she will suffer, and how intensely she will enjoy! There will be no medium for her. She will know the very abandonment of sorrow and the height of happiness. If it be true that the shadow of the future lies in the face of a child, this one will have a strange life."

Angela had reached her twelfth year when her first great sorrow fell upon her. A sweeter, fairer maiden it would hardly have been possible to find. Graceful, sensitive almost to a fault, tender and loving of heart, gifted with the truest refinement, gifted too with a poet's soul, she was a continual source of wonder and delight to Sir Charles. He would not allow her to leave home for school, but engaged clever and accomplished governesses for her, so that she should always have her near him. The girl worshipped both her parents, though her father's character had the greater attraction for her, and, quite unconsciously to herself, she loved him even more than she did her mother.

To those who knew how frail and uncertain human love is, there was something almost pitiful in the devotion of the child to her father. The blow, when it fell, was therefore all the more terrible to her. For there came a day, bright and sunny, full of perfume and sweetness and song, when Sir Charles Rooden left home in the morning with laughing jesting words on his lips and was carried back in the evening dead.

It was a bright May morning when he started. All the hawthorn-trees in the park were in full bloom, and the luscious perfume of may and lilac filled the air. The tresses of the golden laburnum waved in the gentle breeze, the giant trees were unfolding their pale-green buds to the genial warmth of the sun, and the birds were carolling a welcome to returning spring. Lady Rooden walked with her husband as far as the end of the drive. There the groom stood holding his horse; and Angela, clinging to her father's hand, begged that either she might go with him or that he would stay at home.

"You do not know, papa," she said, "what a different house this is when you are out of it."

"But," he reminded her laughingly, "you have your mamma."

"Yes; you are the sun and she is the moon."

Sir Charles laughed again.

"A poet's comparison," he said. "I shall not be long, Angela. I want to ride a little way down by the river, for I am told that one of the bridges over the Leir is not safe; I must go and ascertain what is necessary to be done. You shall ride with me this afternoon."

He kissed his wife's smiling face; he clasped his lovely little daughter in his arms and bade her "Good morning," and then rode away.

Lady Rooden waited with anxious surprise for the return of her husband. He was the embodiment of punctuality, and for him to fail in any appointment was most unusual. When he rode out, he said that he should be home for luncheon at two; but two o'clock came without bringing the master of Rood Abbey. Three four, and five struck, and still he came not. Then Lady Rooden grew anxious. At first she persuaded herself that he had met with friends, and had ridden on with them, although it was unlike him to do that without sending word to her; but, as the hours slipped by, she grew more and more uneasy.

"Angela," she said to the child, "how late papa is! Let us go to the western terrace and watch for him."

Mother and child stood leaning over the stone balustrade, looking down the drive—the fine avenue of chesnuts, with the shining river in the distance.

"I cannot see him, mamma," said the child.

And Lady Rooden, shading her eyes, from the sun with her white hand, remarked—

"There is something wrong down by the river, Angel. I see a crowd of men."

"Perhaps the bridge has given way and papa is telling them what to do. He would soon see what ought to be done."

The evening was fair as the morning. The wind stirred the lilacs and the long laburnum-tresses gently in the garden below; nature seemed to be reposing in the peaceful calm that had settled over all.

"I wonder what it is, Angel?" said Lady Rooden. "The crowd seems to be moving and coming in this direction. They are carrying something. What can it be?"

"I do not see papa," said the child, whom nothing else interested; and they grew silent as the tall troos and the winding of the river hid the crowd from their view.

"I wish papa would come!" cried the child presently; and then, after a few minutes there was a sound of tramping footsteps, of hurried hushed voices, and the old butler came hastily on to the terrace.

"My lady, my lady, come in quickly!" he cried. "Do not look towards the river! Come in!"

Lady Rooden turned to him in wonder.

"What is it, Jarvis?" she asked.

"An accident, my lady," he replied. "Pray come in."

"What is the matter?" she demanded, on re-entering the room. "What does that noise mean? What is it?"

"Oh, my lady," exclaimed the agitated old man, "I wish I were dead, instead of living to say such words to you! There has been an accident, and my master is——"

"What!" she gasped, her face growing white and rigid.

"What?" cried the child, who had followed them. "What has been done to papa? Where is he?"

"He was found in the river, my lady!" Jarvis replied, wringing his hands.

"In the river? Found in the river, do you say? Then he is dead!"

"He is dead, my lady, and they are bringing him home!" answered the man.

With a wild cry Lady Rooden flew from the house down to the avenue, where she met the men bearing the lifeless body of her husband. When she saw his dead face, she fell, with a low anguished cry to the ground, and was carried back home senseless.

It was not until the first shock was over that anyone thought of the child. They found her lying near the window of the room, in an agony of grief which no words of comfort could abate.

The mystery surrounding Sir Charles Rooden's death was never solved. Whether he had attempted to cross the river where it was shallowest, and had been carried away by the force of the current, or whether his horse had become restive and dashed into the water, no one ever knew. No one had seen the baronet; no one came forward to say that they had met him on that day. That it was an accident every one agreed, but how it occurred there was no living witness to tell.

How deeply the genial, generous master of Rood was mourned was shown by the assemblage of rich and poor who came to pay a last tribute of respect to a neighbour and friend.

In his will Sir Charles had not forgotten any of his faithful old servants or any of the charities he had supported. Yet to those who listened to the reading of the document there seemed to be something strange in it. It was strange that no income had been settled on the daughter for whom he had always such unbounded affection, strange that no dowry had been left to her, strange that not one farthing of what must ultimately be a large fortune should reach her until her mother's death, strange that so vast a fortune should be left to the absolute disposal of a beautiful young widow. No restriction was placed upon her; there was no forfeiture of money if she married again. The only thing she could not do was to part with property belonging in any way to house or estate. She could not sell a picture or a tree: everything was to descend to Angela just as she had found it.

"A strange will!" the listeners agreed, but it only showed the implicit trust Sir Charles had in his wife.

Lady Rooden was a little surprised herself. She had not expected such unreserved generosity, and she had certainly thought that provision would have been made for Angela. She caught the child in her arms and kissed the fair young face in a passion of tears.

"You shall not suffer, my darling," she declared, "for papa's generosity to me. I will more than make up to you for it."

But Angela did not understand. She only clasped her arms more tightly round her mother's neck.

"Mamma," she asked, with a shudder, "is it true that they have left papa in the ground?"

"Alas, yes, my darling; it is true!"

"And he hated cold and darkness! Do you remember how he always asked for light and warmth? I cannot bear to think of him lying there."

"When you think of your papa, my dear, do not think of the cold dark grave; but look up at the sky, so bright and blue, and remember he is there."

"Then he can see us!" she cried; and the sweet childish voice was full of awe.

"I do not know, my dear; I am not wise enough to tell you; but very likely he can."

And Angela grew up with a habit of raising her head to the skies, as though seeking her father's face there. How she missed him! How terrible was the blank, the desolation, the pain that seemed never to grow less! There was times even when Lady Rooden seemed to grow impatient with the child for her excessive grief