

A FATAL RESEMBLANCE

BY CHRISTIAN FABRE. XXX—CONTINUED.

"Asked you to tell me?" he repeated; "she would not dare to tell me herself, feeling, no doubt, that I should penetrate whatever mask she might assume."

In his indignation he forgot that his own coldness to Ned must have imposed a most effective barrier to any voluntary communication on her part.

He was silent then, recalling the sad, pale, anxious face which his niece wore all the evening, a face in such unfavorable contrast to the bright, happy-looking one of his daughter. That was another and a strong link in the chain of corroborative evidence against the unfortunate girl; the bad blood of her low mother was showing in her, and once more the doubts raised by Ordetta's tale were allayed. He was more convinced than ever that Elna was his child.

Elna continued to weep, more from her secret fears than any other cause, and when she saw that her father was still absorbed in his stern reverie, she said with a sob:

"Forgive, her, papa!"

He roused himself. To her dying day she never forgot the expression of his countenance. Her novel-reading and vindictive-looking faces, but this one, with its compressed mouth, its rigid lines, its corrugated brow, and more than all, its flaming, piercing eyes, was much more terrible than anything she had ever seen.

After the first wild look, as it is called, she felt that she was in the presence of a man who would not be trifled with, and she covered her own countenance with her hands.

"Forgive her! Was it you, Elna, my own daughter, who had done a thing like this, my heart and my home broken?"

He closed to you at once and forever. Provide for you I might at a distance, but never should I consent to see again a woman who could so degrade her father by stooping to such an affliction; a daughter who could so disgrace her father by receiving for a moment clandestine attentions, and from a suitor so much beneath her.

Ned as to me now, and shall be henceforth, an utter stranger."

"But, papa," said Elna, taking her hands from her face, and keeping her eyes down, "you will not tell these suspicions of yours to any one—you will not let Mr. Mackay know."

"No," he interrupted, "for the satisfaction of your poor, little, tender, foolish heart, I shall promise you that nothing of this shall pass my lips to any one. It would be little good now, since the poor wretch is beyond all earthly help, and might only add to the grief of his poor old father to feel that, at the bottom of it, was a woman who had been one of my household. Let Ned keep her guilty secret, if it be through her, as I now firmly believe it to be, that this man has come to his death. I shall not reveal it."

That assurance made her tears cease to flow, and well knowing there was no danger of any private conversation between Ned and her father, in which perhaps her falsehoods might be detected, she looked up and became something of herself again.

"I had decided to leave here to-morrow," Elna said. "Mr. Edgar said, and now all that you have told me makes me more eager to go. I shall give orders for the transportation of poor Mackay's body to his home. His father is a worthy old man, and deserved a better son than that scoundrel."

"To-morrow?" repeated Elna.

"Yes; you can be ready, can you not? I am most anxious to remove you from many influences here—that ill-bred, coarse Mrs. Doloran, and Ned. With Carmew I am charmed. It seems one of the strange freaks of nature that he should be so nearly related to that vulgar woman."

"Oh, yes, papa; I can be ready, and I shall be glad to go."

And that assertion was truthful; she was glad to get away from meeting Ned. Knowing how she had calumniated her, she was not yet so hardened in guilt as not to feel a little qualm of conscience for her fiendish work. Her great hope was that their departure might be so hurried as to leave no time for a private interview with her cousin.

For that she had no regret at leaving him; since her father would be invited to Weewald Place, and she doubted not his immediate acceptance of the invitation.

XXXI.

The events of the succeeding day, with that strange fate which is often more propitious to the evil-doer than to the good, were quite in accordance with Elna's secret wishes. Her father, unable to sleep after she left him, waited only the first glimmer of the dawn to go and look at the suicide. And he remained so long by the side of the dead man, impelled by his unseemly vigil by a strange fascination, that he was found there by some of the servants. Later, when it was by his order the body was prepared for removal to Barrytown, everybody believed that it was he, who, in taking an early stroll about the grounds, had recognized the dead man. Nor did Edgar drop a word to contradict the belief. For Mrs. Doloran, when she heard that her guest was dead, upon his departure, and that, immediately after the late breakfast, her anger knew no bounds.

Nice return for her hospitality to take himself away just as she thought she should enjoy him. She hated him now, and hoped she would never meet him again. And when Alan came to say that Mr. Edgar was waiting to bid her adieu, she refused to see him, nor would she permit Ned, who was really ill enough looking to be in her bed, to leave her for a moment, lest she perhaps should say a contemptuous farewell.

And so Alan had to apologize with what grace he might, for his aunt's lack of courtesy.

He was, however, assured by Mr. Edgar's manner, and by the gentleman's earnest invitation to himself to visit Weewald Place, that Mrs. Doloran's eccentricities were quite understood.

"But Ned, papa," said Elna, with a charming warmth "I cannot go without bidding her adieu."

Mr. Edgar, in the indignation that the very mention of Ned's name aroused, forgot for the moment the presence of Alan, and answered sternly:

"It is my wish that you should not see her." After which his daughter said no more, but dropped her eyes very becomingly, and appeared to be somewhat

sorrowful. Carmew was disturbed and pained. Linking what Miss Edgar had told him only the day before of Ned's secret acquaintance with young Mackay, and Mr. Edgar's coldness to her because of that acquaintance, with the facts that, in the suicide, Edgar had himself discovered this identical Mackay, and was now so eager to leave Barrytown, and so stern in his order to bid her adieu, not to see Ned, he could come to but one conclusion—that the story of the previous day, which his informant wanted so charitably not to believe, must be quite true, of which truth, perhaps, Edgar had clean the imprudent, if not erring girl. Then her own pale and sick-looking countenance that he saw when he went to speak to his aunt in the latter's apartment, seemed to be a proof of the truth of the story. Well might the pleasant things against her, as he now believed, young Mackay's suicide lay at her door. And not until that moment did he realize how much he himself loved Ned. But he knew it now, knew it by the agony of his own thoughts, and though he formed all the parting ceremonies with perfect courtesy, it was with something of a pre-occupied air but little flattering to Elna.

Piqued and saddened by it, she said, as he assisted her to a place in the carriage: "May I be assured that you will accept my father's invitation to Weewald Place?"

She lingered purposely, as she spoke, with her hand upon his arm, and her eyes looking fixedly into his own, so as to throw all the witchery of her exquisite beauty about him. But the effect was lost, for he saw only one face—the face of a poor human nature, a little dattered by Edgar's unusual condescension. He bowed his head when told the news, and for a few minutes let his tears have their way down his furrowed cheeks.

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One day that he had contemplated her thus for some time, he said suddenly: "What do you think of my asking Mr. Carmew to visit us immediately?"

"I thought to wait a month or so before renewing my invitation to him, but there is really no reason to wait so long."

"O papa," she answered, "it would be so delightful, and the sudden color that glowed in her cheeks, and the immediate straightening of her form, with the pleasant showing in her whole changed countenance, attested the truth of her words."

Edgar felt he had made a new discovery; that his daughter loved Carmew, and that her manner, which he had been attributing to other causes, was due solely to the fact that her heart was in another's keeping. Wondering if the affection was mutual, and if so, whether Carmew had openly professed it to Elna, he asked:

"Has Mr. Carmew said you very marked attention during your stay at his home?"

"No, papa," opening her beautiful eyes with that look of innocent wonder which she knew how to assume with such excellent effect, "nothing beyond that which he would pay to any lady guest. I was accompanied by my male escort as the other ladies were, I supposed he deemed it his duty to attend me when I rode, and to pay me some attention at our evening parties."

Her father was somewhat relieved; charming and devoted as he thought her to be, he still feared that she might have been receiving marked attentions without her first asking his consent, and in that case there would have been a strange parallel between her and Ned.

But at the same time he felt also a little relief of pain that this child whom he loved so intensely could so soon and so readily give her affections to another; could be willing to leave his home to brighten that of a stranger. Still he took himself to task for the way in which he had treated her, and he resolved to keep her more than should have kept her children, and why should he want the very brightest of her years bound to him, an old man now as he imagined himself to be, though hardly in his fiftieth year, when the full of simplest reason demanded that she should be free to marry whom she pleased, and to do it very freely, in a useful sphere?

Thus, even in the event of her marriage, she need not be separated from him. Her husband might be induced to make Weewald Place his home, and in that case Edgar would not only have the society of his daughter, but that of her husband.

And a paper pinned to his breast, you say, Mr. Edgar?" the poor old father repeated, when the gentleman had told the story.

"Yes, saying for love he had done it. Do you know anything of his private affairs, Mackay; anything that might have driven him to such a deed?"

"Nothing; but how should I know? He was away from home so much. In the last eighteen months he has scarcely been here a week. His sister, Annie, may know. They took to each other warmly, more than most brothers and sisters; only she died, her father, and her mother, and so delicate that I'm afraid this news will be the death of her too, and—"

He stopped suddenly, for the thought of the loss of both his children caused a great lump to rise in his throat, and he turned away, unable to say more.

Elna was really touched. He placed his hand on the old man's arm and said with a strange tremulousness in his own tones:

"Do not let her know anything about it yet, and when she returns she may be strong enough to resist the information. How long is she to remain with her aunt?"

Mackay, having by an effort recovered his voice, answered:

"As long as she likes; I wasn't particular, so long as it was doing her good."

"Very well then, my dear, and send her no word of this."

To which proposition the old man assented.

And Elna, when told all that by her father, felt intensely relieved. Annie Mackay away from home, and likely to die, was nothing of the kind, and the very sympathy expressed for old Mackay had a cold, unfeeling ring about it that made Ned turn away from the letter with disappointment.

Young Mackay was laid to rest in the little country cemetery, on a bleak afternoon, when the dreary aspect of nature seemed in mournful keeping with the bereaved old father. Quite a concourse of the country people witnessed the interment, for the Mackays were well known, and old Mackay much liked and respected.

Edgar did not attend the funeral, but he assumed all the expense, and to make further amends, he offered the old man the better and more lucrative situation of head gardener in Weewald Place, which offer was gratefully, if not gladly, accepted.

Elna was gay and melancholy by turns; for, hardened as she had become, she could not keep down the still white face that rose so often to reproach her. Her father, because of his deep affection, singularly watchful of her, noticed her fitful moods and attributed them to the lonely contrast that Weewald Place was to Rahandabad. Mrs. Stafford, though kind, and gentle, and cultured, was hardly sufficient society for a girl of Elna's lively temperament, and he himself was perhaps too old and too much inclined to melancholy reticence to prove an agreeable companion. Such were the arguments that

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Edgar felt he had made a new discovery; that his daughter loved Carmew, and that her manner, which he had been attributing to other causes, was due solely to the fact that her heart was in another's keeping. Wondering if the affection was mutual, and if so, whether Carmew had openly professed it to Elna, he asked:

"Has Mr. Carmew said you very marked attention during your stay at his home?"

"No, papa," opening her beautiful eyes with that look of innocent wonder which she knew how to assume with such excellent effect, "nothing beyond that which he would pay to any lady guest. I was accompanied by my male escort as the other ladies were, I supposed he deemed it his duty to attend me when I rode, and to pay me some attention at our evening parties."

Her father was somewhat relieved; charming and devoted as he thought her to be, he still feared that she might have been receiving marked attentions without her first asking his consent, and in that case there would have been a strange parallel between her and Ned.

But at the same time he felt also a little relief of pain that this child whom he loved so intensely could so soon and so readily give her affections to another; could be willing to leave his home to brighten that of a stranger. Still he took himself to task for the way in which he had treated her, and he resolved to keep her more than should have kept her children, and why should he want the very brightest of her years bound to him, an old man now as he imagined himself to be, though hardly in his fiftieth year, when the full of simplest reason demanded that she should be free to marry whom she pleased, and to do it very freely, in a useful sphere?

Thus, even in the event of her marriage, she need not be separated from him. Her husband might be induced to make Weewald Place his home, and in that case Edgar would not only have the society of his daughter, but that of her husband.

And a paper pinned to his breast, you say, Mr. Edgar?" the poor old father repeated, when the gentleman had told the story.

"Yes, saying for love he had done it. Do you know anything of his private affairs, Mackay; anything that might have driven him to such a deed?"

"Nothing; but how should I know? He was away from home so much. In the last eighteen months he has scarcely been here a week. His sister, Annie, may know. They took to each other warmly, more than most brothers and sisters; only she died, her father, and her mother, and so delicate that I'm afraid this news will be the death of her too, and—"

He stopped suddenly, for the thought of the loss of both his children caused a great lump to rise in his throat, and he turned away, unable to say more.

Elna was really touched. He placed his hand on the old man's arm and said with a strange tremulousness in his own tones:

"Do not let her know anything about it yet, and when she returns she may be strong enough to resist the information. How long is she to remain with her aunt?"

Mackay, having by an effort recovered his voice, answered:

"As long as she likes; I wasn't particular, so long as it was doing her good."

"Very well then, my dear, and send her no word of this."

To which proposition the old man assented.

And Elna, when told all that by her father, felt intensely relieved. Annie Mackay away from home, and likely to die, was nothing of the kind, and the very sympathy expressed for old Mackay had a cold, unfeeling ring about it that made Ned turn away from the letter with disappointment.

Young Mackay was laid to rest in the little country cemetery, on a bleak afternoon, when the dreary aspect of nature seemed in mournful keeping with the bereaved old father. Quite a concourse of the country people witnessed the interment, for the Mackays were well known, and old Mackay much liked and respected.