

THE ACADIAN

AND KING'S CO. TIMES.

HONEST, INDEPENDENT, FEARLESS—DEVOTED TO LOCAL AND GENERAL INTELLIGENCE.

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THE ACADIAN.

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only on his breast. Some great trouble had surely come to him, they thought.

"He declared that he was not ill; he would not have a physician summoned. He repeated over and over that he had sustained a great shock, and must have time to recover."

"Did your sick friend die?" asked Amber last night.

"Yes, he died," replied the judge, "and quickly turned the subject to something else."

This aroused Amber's curiosity, for it seemed as if he must have loved the deceased very much to suffer so keenly over his death.

But no clever hints could elicit anything further about the mysterious death.

Judge Camden's sole anxiety now was over his letters.

He dispatched a servant to the post office for every mail that arrived, and he was invariably grieved with disappointment when he turned over his batch of letters.

Amber watched him with blundered curiosity and dread. She could not understand this strange anxiety over the girl he had treated so harshly and cruelly.

She said, on the third day, almost petulantly:

"Grandpapa, why are you so anxious for a letter from Violet? You cannot surely expect her to write to you after the treatment she received from you."

They were alone in the old man's bedroom, where he lay very pale and feeble among the pillows, while Amber sat near in a easy chair, having volunteered to read the morning papers aloud for him.

How bright and beautiful she looked in her warm, crimson morning dress that set off so exquisitely her olive skin, hazel eyes, and wealth of sunny braids. You would not have dreamed that such a beautiful body could have harbored such a wicked soul; yet at that moment she was thinking that her grandfather certainly looked very ill this morning, and that the secret anxiety that seemed to be consuming him would soon wear out his feeble life.

Oh, how she exulted in the thought that at his death all her deep-laid schemes would be crowned with bright success. Violet was wedded to another, and out of the way, and she was betrothed to Cecil. Soon the old man would be dead, and she would inherit a fortune and could marry her lover whenever she chose.

All these bright thoughts were passing through her mind as she uttered the petulant complaint, and she hoped that the words would silence his strange anxiety over Violet; for why should he worry over the girl's silence, when he had so doggedly doomed her to the fate of an unliving bride?

She was startled when a bursting sigh heaved out the old man's breast, and he cried out, with strange agitation:

"Ah, Amber, I treated Violet very cruelly in letting her be deceived into that dreadful marriage!"

Amber's eyes dilated in angry surprise. She thought he had surely fallen into his dotage.

"That dreadful marriage!" she cried, indignantly. "Why, how you must have changed your mind! You thought all along that it was a very fine thing for Violet to marry a millionaire!"

"I was a dotting old fool!" suddenly thundered the judge, in violent self-denunciation, and his wrinkled old features writhed with keen remorse.

"Grandpapa!"

"I was an old fool!" repeated the

judge, in a lower key, and in dreadful self-abasement; and he continued, sadly:

"Amber, I believe I have been half-mad the last few months, and it seems to me as if you have boldly aided and abetted me in my meanness. In fact, you went further in devising devilry! Girl, girl, why did you do it? Why did you put that wicked thing in my head? Why didn't you take your cousin's part?—sweet Violet, who was so pretty and gentle and tender that we ought to have worshipped her instead of driving her to her death!"

"Dead! Dead! Is Violet dead?" gasped Amber, her lips paling in genuine horror, though there was a throb of wicked joy at her heart.

With a deep groan Judge Camden answered:

"I did not mean to distress you with the bad news yet, Amber, but my remorse is greater than I can bear alone. Yes, yes, I fear that pretty Violet is dead! We have hounded her to some dreadful fate—suicide, very likely!"

She gazed at him in consternation and wonder.

"Grandpapa, you must be raving! You look every day for a letter from Violet, and then forebode that she is dead. What can you mean? Is not Violet safe with her husband, the millionaire?"

"No, no, Amber; she ran away from Harold Castello the same night she was married, and her subsequent fate is wrapped in blackest mystery!"

CHAPTER XLII

A space of bitter rage tore Amber's heart at the words of her remorseful grandfather.

Violet had escaped from the leathery hand of her wicked grandfather, and she had married a millionaire!

to insert personals in the newspapers. He did so, but no answer came, and he shares my belief that poor Violet has surely been overtaken by some terrible fate."

The belief certainly seemed plausible, but Amber dared not credit it. She trembled with horror at the threatening overthrow of all her hopes.

"The loss her love Cecil now, when he was almost her very own—she thought was madness!"

In a husky voice she cried:

"I do not believe that Violet is dead. She is probably in hiding, fearful to return lest she should be delivered up to Harold Castello. But how strange that he permitted her to escape! Did he tell you how it happened?"

"I have seen him, and he told me his theory. The French maid he employed to guard Violet disappeared at the same time, and he believed that she proved false to her trust and helped her mistress to escape."

In a feeble voice, broken by remorseful sighs, he told Amber of the fire in Violet's room that night, and that Castello had been forced to leave the house to have his burns dressed by a physician. During his absence she had escaped.

"So it was Harold Castello who sent for you a week ago?" Amber cried, eagerly.

"Yes."

"But, grandpapa, you said it was a sick friend."

"Harold Castello was sick from his burns."

Amber's eyes began to dilate with an awful suspicion. She panted, wildly:

"But you told me, did you not, that your sick friend was dead?"

"Yes, I told you so!"

"Was it true?"

"Yes, yes," Judge Camden answered, impatiently.

"Then—then—Harold Castello—Violet's husband! Do you mean to tell me, grandpapa, that he is dead? burst out Amber, in wildest dismay.

"Harold Castello is dead and buried," was the startling reply.

CHAPTER XLIII

Again Amber was speechless from surprise.

She could scarcely credit her own hearing, and stared dumbly at her grandfather for confirmation of his startling statement.

He watched her in silence a few moments, then said, peevishly:

"I did not intend to tell you all this until I got better, for I'm tired and sick from the awful strain upon my nerves, and it fatigues me to talk much; but you have somehow wormed it out of me; so I will try and finish the story."

"Please do, for I am very curious," answered Amber, disregarding his confession of weakness, and he continued:

"Harold Castello, in the excitement of extinguishing the fire in the room, burned his hands and scorched his hair, but did not suppose he had seriously injured himself until he reached the physician's office, where he became alarmingly ill. To be brief, he had, in his combat with the fiery element, swallowed fire, as the common saying is. His life was doomed."

"Heavens!" uttered Amber, with glaring eyes of horror.

"Yes, it was terrible," exclaimed Judge Camden. "He was carried home by the physician and valet, and put to bed, never to rise again. Horrible suffering supervened, rendered more terrible by his agony of mind when he learned of Violet's flight. But no search was made at first, for he believed that she had returned to Golden Wil-

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At length realizing that he could not live, he sent for me, begging that I would bring Violet to his bedside, as he had one request to make of her before he died."

The judge passed in his narration with a gasp of weakness, and motioned for a glass of the wine that stood on the little stand by the bed.

Amber obeyed his gesture, and after swallowing the wine he rested a few moments, and resumed:

"You know how hastily I left Amber, without confiding in any one, I hurried to Harold Castello's dying bed, and soon learned what I have told you of Violet's flight. He was bitterly distressed because we could not find Violet, and gave me a parting message for her. I also witnessed his will, in which he left her his entire two millions, as an atonement for the persecutions she had suffered at his hands."

"Two millions! To atone for his honorable love," sneered Amber, almost wild with rage and envy of her hated cousin.

"Yes, and it was well earned by his sufferings when she found herself his wife," protested the judge, stoutly, and he added: "Ah, you did not know that you were pushing Violet into a union with a flood, or you would never have planned that awful marriage. But Violet knew him better—she had heard of him before; and if she killed herself rather than be his wife, I dare not sit in judgment on the hapless girl. He was a villain, and his punishment seemed a just one. He confessed to me that he had led a wicked life, and was not a fitting mate for my pure Violet. Why, look you, Amber, when the funeral cortege was moving to the cemetery, it was stopped by a young girl as lovely as a queen, and with the most tragically sad face I ever looked upon. The valet got out and spoke to her, and he told me afterward, that she was one among several beautiful girls that his dead master had lured to ruin and disgrace. Is it any wonder that poor Violet shrank in fear from the villain that we chose for her husband?"

Amber sat trembling, overwhelmed, crying out in her heart that fate had played her a cruel, a terrible trick.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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