SIR WILLIAM'S WILL

CHAPTER II.

He looked down and tapped the will with his fingers.

"No?" he said, at last.

"No!" she responded swiftly, the blood mounting to her face, her eyes flashing indignantly. "Sir William Carton was a masterful man; he rose from that factory there"—she pointed in the direction of the Pit Works—"and bought my father's house and land; there seemed to be nothing he could not buy. But he has not bought me."

Mr. Granger's wrinkled fingers continued to play on the parchment. He knew enough of women to be aware that it is better to let their emotions find their proper vent, in words and tears; and now there was something suspiciously like tears in the beautiful gray eyes.

"Please put yourself in my place," she said, with a falter in her voice. "Would you like to be made the instrument of a father's malice, his vengeance, on his son?"

Mr. Granger coughed. "I don't think Sir William intended—"

"Ah, 'intended'! How can he know what he intended? All we know is—is what he has done; sold me, and his son, into mutual slavery—if we should be weak enough to consent. Yes, that is the pith of the matter, Mr. Granger," she went on, resolutely, her brows coming together, her eyes glowing, "I refuse, at once and absolutely, to comply with the terms of the will. Give me a piece of paper and pen, please."

The lawyer's fingers ceased to play, but he did not prcure the required articles.

"Time enough for such decided action, my dear Miss Clytie," he said, gravely. "You have twelve months in which to make up your mind."

"I do not need twelve months," she said, promptly. "I want to—to release myself at once, to leave this place."

He shook his head. "You can do neither," he said. "You must remember that I pointed out to you that Sir William had foreseen this—er— not unreasonable antagonism to his wishes and had provided for it by the clauses which put you in possession of the estate until the twelve months have elapsed, and makes your renunciation invalid for a like period."

Her lips came together and she moved to the window.

"He seems to have thought of everything. I feel as if—as if I were in a net," she said.

Mr. Granger affected to busy himself with some papers and averted his eyes from the girlish figure; he knew that the threatened tears were now falling.

"He was a far-seeing man," he murmured.

"He was an unjust one," she retorted, without turning. "Unjust to me—cruelty unjust to his son. Where is he?"

"Sir Wilfrid is, or was, at a place in Australia called Mintona," replied Mr. Granger. "Of course, we have written to him."

"And—and he will come home, of course. How soon—how soon? But I will not stay here till then," she broke off.

Mr. Granger shook his head remonstratingly.

"I do hope you will be reasonable," he said, pleadingly. "Please don't make my task harder than it is, Miss Bramley. I need not tell you that there is a great deal of business to be got through; I shall have to consult you at every turn. And there is no one else, remember. You are mistress here—for twelve months, a tany rate."

"Mr. Carton—where is he?" she asked, impatiently.

"At the Pit House, the house Sir William lived in before he bought Bramley."

"Why doesn't he— Will he not help us?"

Mr. Granger shook his head. "I am afraid not. Mr. Carton has been very ill since the funeral—the strain, the excitement, no doubt. He has only just sufficiently recovered to attend to business, the business of the works, of which he is now proprietor. And"—he paused—"he has informed me that he will take no part, will not—interfere is not the word I want—"

"I understand," she said, with a touch of bitterness. "He is ashamed of the will, and refuses to be connected with its wicked provisions. There is no one to help us—I beg your pardon! But, no, it is true; for you will not help me."

"Forgive me. I propose to assist you to the bast of m yability; but I cannot overrule the conditions of the will. My dear young lady, why not face these—er—trying circumstances? Why not ——"

The door opened, and a girl of sixteen, with her hair—red hair—streaming down her back, ran in, calling:

"Clytie!"

At sight of the lawyer, she stopped short, looking from one to the other; then she ran to her sister, and, putting her arms round her, cast an indignant glance at the unfortunate lawyer.

"What have you been saying to Clytie? She's been crying! What is it, Clytie, and who is he?"

As Clytie sank on a chair, and, sobbing, bowed her head over the girl, Mr. Granger rose, gathered his papers together, and, with a kind of grim sadness, said:

"I am an unfortunate man, who is trying to prevent your sister from doing something foolish, my dear," he said. Then, with a sigh and a shake of the head, he left the room.

Mollie drew her sister's head onto her girlish bosom, and stroked the beautiful hair lovingly.

"What has that old man been saying to you, Clytie?" she asked, soothingly. "Why have we come here? What does it all mean?"

"It means that Sir William has left me the Hall and all his money—and—and—that Mr. Granger wants to persuade me to keep it, Mollie!"

Mollie drew her head back and looked shrewdly at the flushed face and burning eyes.

"Oh, I beg his pardon!" Mollie said, slowly and in a low voice. "He was right—and you are trying to be a fool!"

CHAPTER III.

"You are trying to be a fool!"

The words as they are written down look offensive enough. But Mollie had a particularly free charter from her elder sister, and Clytie was too accustomed to such speeches from Mollie; and, indeed, the girl had a happy and unconscious facility of sharp retorts and quick repartee, which, uttered by her soft, full lips, and with her clear, beautiful voice, seemed innocent enough at the moment of delivery. It was not until the sufferer, the object of her wit and appailing candor, was removed from the charm of her presence and the speil of her girlish audacity, that he felt the barb of the dart she had inserted in him.

Between the two sisters was a love almost more than sisterly; for they had been left alone in the world when Mollie was quite a little child, and Clytie had mothered her; but gradually, as Mollie's wings and legs had extended, the girls had seemed to change places, and it was Mollie who now almost mothered Clytie.

Not that Clytie was lacking in mental or moral strength; but she had inherited something, at any rate, of the gentleness, the tenderness, and the unworldliness which had proved so fatal to the Bramleys, especially to her father, who had assuredly been the most gentle, the easiest going and most unbusinesslike of men. Mollie was a kind of "sport," as gardeners say, and had inherited her sharpness and shrewdness from some ancestress on the maternal side.

Clytie could be firm enough, as has been seen, when her sense of duty and honor and right demanded a resolute stand; but Mollie always had her armor on, her lance couched, and her young, untamed spirit eager for combat. Clytie not only loved her, but understood and was proud of her; and so she was not offended when she was told that she was threatening to make a fool of herself, but said, with a sigh:

"You don't understand, Mollie."

"Didn't I say so?" retorted Mollie, perching herself on the arm of the chair and drawing Clytie to her, with a soothing and protecting air which was quaintly maternal in so yoing a girl. "I was asking for information. I come into the room and fined a nice-looking old gentleman frowning, and my beloved sister in tears, and I naturally ask the cause. And you tell me that he is scowling and you are weeping because Sir William Carton has left you Bramley and a large fortune, and that you don't want to take them. I am naturally surprised and somewhat indignant."

"Sir William has left me not only all this, but—a husband," said Clytie, wiping her eyes and hiding some portion of her blush with the same handkerchief.

"Really?" said Mollie. "Sir William doesn't do things by halves. You are sure he hasn't left two; one for me? Who is the happy young man? He is young, I hope."

"It is his son, Wilfred," said Clytie.

"No! Why, he must be the present baronet, of course! If so, perhaps you will tell me what you are crying for?"

"It is so shameful, Mollie," said Clytie. He is Sir William's only son; and for me to take all Sir William has left me would be to rob Sir Wilfred. It is true I can refuse it—him; and, of course, I shall do so. The property will then go to him; and everything will be right."

"Excepting you," said Mollie. She was silent for a moment, her sharp but pretty brown eyes narrowed to slits; then she said: "And hasn't he any say in the matter? He might be another kind of fool and refuse to marry you; though, I confess, I cannot imagine any man being such an imbecile."

"Of course, he would refuse to marry me," said Clytie, in a matter-of-fact tone. "Then the property would come to me for my life, and afterward go——"

"To the Asylum for Lost Cats, I suppose; that's where the money of people like Sir William generally goes in the end."

"No; it goes to Mr. Hesketh Carton."

"The tall, thin man with black hair and white face?" said Mollie. "He's worse than the Asylum for Lost Cats."

"Don't be prejudiced and unjust, dear," said Clytie. "You know nothing of Mr. Hesketh Carton."

"No, I don't; that's why I don't like him. There is something about him—I think it's his nose—it's too thin—or, perhaps, it's his eyes; they're too small and black. Or is it his lips? I don't know what is the matter with them; but I don't like them. So, if Sir Wilfred refuses you, and you refuse him, all the property goes to Mr. Hesketh Carton. In-deed!"

She was silent again for a moment or two; then she asked:

"What is Sir Wilfred like, Clytie?"

Clytie shook her head. "I don't know. I have not seen him since we were boy and girl; and then we only met once or twice. He was always at school, and we were on the Continent with father when he was home for the holidays. I shouldn't know him if I met him. His father and he were always quarreling; and at last they parted, and Wilfred Carton went abroad—to Australia, Mr. Granger told me."

"What was he like?" Mollie asked again.

"Oh, how can I remember, dear?" replied Clytie, with a little impatient gesture. "He was, I think, a—a nice boy."

"He was a good-looking boy, at any rate, if that is his portrait in Sir William's room. Oh, yes," she continued answering the surprise in Clytie's beautiful gray eyes, "I have been nearly all over the house. You didn't suppose I was going to sit in a corner, with my finger in my mouth, while you were quarreling with that old gentleman? No; I have been into nearly all the rooms. What a magnificent place it is, Clytie! It's like one of those 'ancestral homes, you read of in the old-fashioned novels—stately rooms, vast halls with figures in armor, a stained-glass window, oak-paneled walls, terraces, and peacocks, plush lawns and jeweled flowers-beds, servants in rich liveries only they are in black now—the whole box of tricke complete. And it all belonged to us Bramleys, didn't it? How did we come to lose it, Clytie?"

"We didn't lose it; we sold it," replied Clytie absently. She was still dwelling, brooding, over the absurd will.

"The same thing," said Mollie cheerfully. "'One must speak by the card lest equivocation undo us.' That's 'Hamlet.' Nice to know the poets. How did we come to sell it, then, Miss Brecise?"

"Oh, it is an old story," said Clytie, pushing her soft, dark hair from her forehead with her white and beautifully formed hand. "We were in difficulties. We were always in difficulties"—she sighed—"and father cut off the entail and sold Bramley to Sir William."

"And the Pit also belonged to us, didn't it? And father sold that to Sir William?"

"Yes," said Clytie, listlessly. "He wanted to make provision for us two girls."

"And did he?" asked Mollie.

"He did —he would have done so; but he put the money into an investment that turned out badly; and so he left us only just a little to live upon. That is why we are so poor."

"I beg your pardon. Were poor. You forget that you are the mistress of Bramley and——How much is it, Clytie?"

"A quarter of a million, Mr. Granger says," replied Clytie, ruefully.

"Bramley and a quarter of a million!" Mollie exclaimed softly, gazing ecstatically at the moulded ceiling. "And you propose to give up all this, to go back into stuffy lodgings in London, to live on cold mutton and Dutch cheese. To wear our tailor-made costume at one pound six, to slosh about in cheap boots, to ride in penny busses? Not if I know it!"

"Mollie, you don't understand," urged Clytie. "You're too young."

Mollie got off the chair and, thrusting her hands into the pockets of the coat which formed part of the cheap costume which she had derided, looked steadily, and somewhatdefiantly, and yet pityingly, at the tear-stained face.

"Oh, am I? I am old enough to prefer Bramley Hall to 149 Goodman street; to know the difference between a court dressmaker and a cheap, ready-made 'emporium.' I am old enough to know that you are out of your place in Goodman street and in your place at Bramley, to be painfully aware that a young and lovely girl like you ought to live in a paradise like this, to take her proper position among proper people. I am also conscious that Bramley Hall would suit your young and meek sister much better than dingy lodgings in the purlieus of Camden Town; in fact, my anxiety that you should not make a fool of yourself is absolutely selfish. I propropose to remain at Bramley Hall—I suppose we can do so?"

Clytie shrugged her shoulders helplessly.

"Yes," she said. "This ridiculous will states that we should live here, at the Hall, as if it absolutely belonged to us. I have twelve months in which to make up my mind, to come to a decision. Of course, I do not want a year. I would surrender the property at once; but Mr. Granger tells me that I cannot do so until twelve months have elapsed."

"Hurrah! There was some sense in Sir William, after all! Twelve months. All sorts of things can happen in a year; and I vote that we enjoy ourselves, Clytie, for that period."

"Enjoy ourselves!" murmured Clytie, with a sigh. "Yes! Why not?" retorted Mollie. "At any rate, I mean to do so. I've fallen in love with this old place; I suppose that's a kind of family ancestral feeling. And I'm going to be very happy. And so are you, of such ashrd shrd shrd s dhrahrdshs I will take precious good care. For goodness sake, pull yourself together and get rid of that 'mourning-bride' expression! What have you go to cry about? You've got a year of wealth, of luxury, of amusement. I suppose there is plenty of money?"

"Oh, yes," assented Clytie. "I understand from Mr. Granger that we could have what we wanted, that—I was absolute mistress here—for a year, of course."

"Hurrah!" cried Mollie. "We've got twelve months before us; and twelve months is something, everything. In twelve months——"

There came a knock at the door, and Sholes entered. He wore a black tie and had the manner of a man who had lost his mother.

"Mr. Hesketh Carton," he said.

Clytie looked at him, then at Mollie, and back again at Sholes doubtfully; but Mollie nodded with calm assurance, and said:

(To be continued.)

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