

THE GUARDED SECRET

CHAPTER LXIV.

He had felt that he was slowly dying. He knew that the physician and all others thought so, too. He had not cared for it. He had rather exulted in the thought, for he had grown weary of his ruined life.

But when Alene Rodney in those few frank words told him that he was dying, it touched a chord in his heart, that thrilled with the keenest pain. There came to him a pang that was like despair at the thought of leaving the world with her in it.

For the first time since that horrible night that had freed him from the hated fetters that bound him to the reformed maniac, he recalled his freedom with a vague, wild rush of happiness at all that was possible to him now, if only—if only that faint, black shadow of death had not stretched out its dark wings over him.

The pang was sharp and bitter. He loved her, and to his fancy it seemed as if fate had created this beautiful woman to be his wife. They had been at war with each other, and yet his heart had gone out to her with its whole freight of manly love and devotion. Must he die now, and leave her for some other happy man—Mr. Lane, perhaps, of whom he was morbidly jealous?

A great longing for life took possession of him. Oh, if only he had battled harder to save his existence, which now he prized so much! He hated himself when he remembered that the physician had said that he had recklessly flung away his life by his despondency and hopelessness.

He pressed closer to her little hand, and looked yearningly into the sweet girl-face with his hollow, burning, dark eyes.

"So you forgive me all," he said, and answered gravely, "Yes, all." "Forgiveness is the boon we grant to death," he said mournfully. "But if I were going to live, Alene, would you be less kind? Would you refuse to forgive me then?"

He waited anxiously to hear what she would say, though he knew that it would not greatly matter now whether she answered him yes or nay. It was too late now. He was drifting too near to the borders of the Shadowland.

She looked at him with a faint, almost tender smile on her exquisite red mouth.

"I would forgive you if you lived just as freely as I forgive you dying," she answered. "You have made all the atonement you could, and I thank you and bless you for it."

"You know all," they have told you all," he said, with a faint flush creeping into his wan cheeks.

"Yes, I have heard all. It was very hard for you, Mr. Delaney. You must have been half mad with your trouble; so I forgive you now all that you have made me suffer. Perhaps it will make your dying bed easier," said Alene, with the wonderful pity and forgiveness of a true woman's heart.

"Easier!" he repeated, with a groan. "Easier!" he repeated, with a groan. "Easier!" he repeated, with a groan.

"For if I lived, and she forgave me, I might win her yet," he said to himself. "Oh, how hard it is to die knowing all this!"

The angry woman softly, and the nurse entered with the inevitable tea and toast. She laid fresh coal on the fire and lighted the lamp. Then she nodded at Miss Rodney with a smile.

"He will get well, now that you have come back and have forgiven him," she said.

"I hope that he may," Alene answered with frank simplicity. "I have made up my mind that I will not know how much harder these words of hers made it for the man who knew that he was sinking daily in the Valley of the Shadow of Death."

"What would I not give to live!" he inwardly groaned.

"I must go back to mamma now," said Alene, moving toward the door. His dark eyes followed her entreatingly.

"Do not go so soon," he pleaded. "You have not told me yet where you have been and how you came back, and I am so anxious to hear."

"Do stay a little longer, Miss Rodney," pleaded Mrs. Griffin, and Alene readily consented to do so.

CHAPTER LXV.

It looked very pleasant and cosy in the sick-room, with the curtains drawn and the fire bright. Alene sat down in the easy-chair Mrs. Griffin wheeled over for her, and was made quite unconscious what a picture of fair, girlish beauty she made sitting there, in her pretty, dark blue dress, with her hair falling over her slight, pretty figure.

"Do you know," she said, looking at the nurse, "that this reminds me of the time when I was at Delaney House—only that it was I who was ill then, and not Mr. Delaney."

"Can you recall those times without being angry with me, Alene?" inquired Mr. Delaney, half fearfully.

"I told you I had forgiven you all, Mr. Delaney," answered Alene, as if that implied everything.

"Thank you," he answered, dropping his head back with a sigh, upon the pillow.

Mrs. Griffin bustled herself in preparing the little table by the bedside, which she now wheeled forward with the simple repast neatly arranged upon it.

"Do you know that I could not swallow a mouthful now?" he said, looking at her with a slight smile. "I am so impatient to hear Alene's story, that I can think of nothing else."

"But he must keep up his strength, mustn't he, Miss Rodney?" said Mrs. Griffin anxiously.

"Most certainly! And I shall not begin the telling of my story until after he has eaten every bit of his toast and swallowed every mouthful of his tea," answered that young person, with her usual cruel directness.

He looked at her imploringly.

"Do you not know that I am far too much excited to eat?" he said.

"If that is the case, I am very sorry," said Alene, "but I am very sorry, too, that I cannot tell you more of my story until after he has eaten every bit of his toast and swallowed every mouthful of his tea."

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and an aching heart. Ah, how soon the grave would hide him from the sight of those sweet blue eyes!

While the blush still burned her fair face she said to him with a half-smile:

"Did you think I should be rendered so desperate by your refusal that night that I should go away and drown myself?"

"I thought you would go back home, and I was horrified when I found that you had not done so," he replied.

"No, I was too wretched to go back," she said. "I was in a fever of unrest and trouble when I came to you that night. My brain was on fire. I had not stopped to think or to reason. I acted on impulse wholly. But your sarcasm, your sternness, stunned me. When I staggered out of Delaney House I was almost dead with shame and despair for what I had done."

She put up her hand a moment to the sensitive quiver of her lips, then resumed:

"My first thought was to get away from my home. I longed to break loose from old associations and hide myself away from all who knew me. I turned my steps away from Delaney House and staggered along in the snow until my sense of physical discomfort cooled my reckless mood. I began to think that I must stop somewhere or I should perish in the cold. Then I remembered my dear Effie, who had gone south on a bridal tour."

She looked at Mrs. Griffin with a smile in her blue eyes.

"You were expecting to hear something tragic, but my story is the most prosaic one imaginable. I was not meant for a heroine, Alene. I am too afraid of discomfort and trouble. I did not care where I went. But when the snow beat into my face and chilled my feet, I became discouraged. I did not want to go back, but I longed intensely to be with someone who loved me, and to be warm and comfortable."

"Dear," sighed Mrs. Griffin, sympathetically.

"I had some money in my pocket," continued Alene, "Papa had given it to me to buy a black silk dress. I walked to the next station from here, bought a ticket to Florida, and went to Effie and Dr. Anthony. You see, Mr. Delaney, there was nothing remarkable at all in my second disappearance from home," she said.

"You should have written to your parents," he said.

"I am ashamed to say that I would not do so," she answered. "I thought that if I let them all think that I had died, my father would drop the subject of the threatened deed. I did not want him to be killed, neither did I want to be hurt, for, angry as I was, I shrank from the thought of bloodshed. So I would not write myself, nor would I suffer Effie to write."

"You would have spared us all much unhappiness had you done so," he said.

"I came home to Maywood with them at last," she said. "By that time they had argued me into a more reasonable mood. I was willing to return home; but that morning they came over to Chester. I did not come with them. I sent them before me as avant couriers, with the caution not to tell them unless they were very anxious news."

"That I was," they brought back such news that I was almost driven to the House burned to the ground; the deformed maniac dead; you wounded by my father's hand and your whole story revealed; my own name cleared from obloquy; and my friends all ready to crave my pardon for their unkindness. It took my breath away."

He smiled in spite of his pain as he saw the sudden joy-light flash over her face. What mattered all that had happened to him so that she was saved—this fair, sweet girl who had suffered so unjustly.

"You must be very angry with papa, aren't you, Mr. Delaney?" she asked wistfully.

"Angry? No! I have never blamed him. In his place I should have acted the same, no doubt," he replied, calmly.

"But I am very sorry, and so is papa. I came over this morning and it was one of the first things he told me. He would give anything in the world to undo what he has done!" exclaimed Alene.

"Anything," he repeated.

"Anything," she reiterated, earnestly.

"And you, Alene?" he questioned.

"Worse than papa ever did," said the girl in her frank, innocent way.

To Be Continued.

Advertiser Correspondence

A Critic of County Roads.

To the Editor of The Advertiser:

I see by a late paper that Middlesex County is thinking of adopting the county road system. They are told of the beauties of the system elsewhere. Mr. Campbell suggests that a deputation visit Waterloo County and see the county roads there.

Now, foreign fields often look green, but will not bear a close inspection. But the deputation need not go as far as Waterloo County. They need go no farther than Thamesford, in Oxford County, to see the working of the county road system. Let a deputation visit Thamesford and see the results of the expenditure of thousands of dollars of the farmers' hard-earned money on a few miles of road that was last fall hardly passable with even a buggy after a few fall showers—it was so rough.

Should it be a good road in the summer the farmer and his family will be driven off it with the automobile, after footing the bill for building the road.

Let the deputation see the thousands of dollars' worth of useless machinery lying on the roadside, and the farmers asking each other who authorized such an expenditure and where the end is going to be. Oxford is no doubt a rich county, and so is Middlesex, but can any county, however wealthy, bear such reckless expenditure without making other taxes much higher, which we all think high enough already. It is easy enough to say the Ontario Government pay one-third. Who foots the bill in the end?

We farmers. Had one-tenth of the money that has been spent on machinery and otherwise been spent in graveling the roads of Oxford, we would have had incomparably better result. It is all very well for Mr. Campbell to talk; perhaps, he never had a ride in a farmer's wagon, axle-deep in the mud on some back concession that a few cords of gravel would make passable, but will never

get the gravel, for the farmers are taxed so high already to build two or three county roads they can never afford to do anything to the back roads, which have just as good a right to benefit by public expenditure as two or three county roads.

Let the deputation interview the farmers around Thamesford and see what they think of the matter. Don't interview these people who are filling their own pockets if you would learn the true situation. Not one farmer in fifty is in favor of the system or wants it at all, even those residing on the county roads. It was sprung on them by their county representatives without their knowledge or consent. Let Middlesex go slow in this matter. Let the farmers elect representative farmers to their county council that know the earning capacity of the average farmer, and how to spend their money economically, and they will not have foisted on them such an outrageous thing as we have in Oxford County, called the county roads system.

A FARMER.

Thamesford, Dec. 17.

Niagara Power.

To the Editor of The Advertiser:

A lot has been said and written about Niagara power, and I wish to take the liberty of expressing my views.

I have naturally followed this matter with keen interest, as I am personally concerned in the matter, not only as it will affect the Southwestern Traction Company, but the new proposed road to Stratford.

I am free to admit that I was very much at sea as to Mr. Beck's "peak load" proposition, deeming it unjust, until his very lucid explanation to the board of trade the other night, and after that explanation it seems to me one must be rather dense not to see or understand the view taken by the commissioners.

I can readily see that the city (if it properly handles the power question), can get power much cheaper than at the price quoted by Mr. Beck.

As to distribution, I think it a very unnecessary thing for the city to spend \$235,000 on a distribution plant, when we have the London Electric Company in our midst, and the "say so" as to rates.

They have their poles and lines strung, while the city can absolutely control power by means of the powers conferred on it by the power act.

It seems to me that we should pass the bylaw and then meet the London Electric people with a view to arranging rates, and if unable to agree we can then spend our \$235,000, although, unless I am very much mistaken, the company would be ready to take a half-loaf rather than no bread.

As to Mr. Beck's project, I would say that I consider it to be of the very gravest importance, and I am sincerely glad to see that politics is practically eliminated from the discussion.

The hydro-electric commission is not a private promoter looking after private interests, but it is a body of men elected to serve the people, and they seem to me to be spending a lot of brain power, time and energy, entirely in the interest of the people of Ontario, without reward, which is something the private promoter does not do.

I have, like many others, not always been able to see the eye with Mr. Beck, but I feel that, if he is able to carry his power scheme through, he will be conferring an immense boon on his native province; while, if he fails, it will simply be that he is a little ahead of his times.

Up to the present I have seen nothing in the power line that looks to me anything like the equal of the hydro-electric commission's scheme, but I am always open to conviction.

In conclusion I would say that the "peak load" method of charging presents no difficulties to me now, and I believe in its fairness by purchasing power from the commission on that basis, not only for the railroad to Stratford, but for the use for every farmer along the route, and I hope, no stone will be placed in the way of the carrying of the power bylaw next month.

A. E. WELCH.

Feather Beds, Pillows and Mattresses renovated and sterilized; also manufacturers of Mattresses, Feather Pillows, Cushions and Spring Beds. Brass and Iron Beds, Feather Beds, Furniture, Camp Beds, at the Factory, J. F. HUNT & SONS, 593 Richmond Street, Phone 997.

Mrs. Winslow's Soothing Syrup.

Has been used for over THIRTY YEARS by MILLIONS OF MOTHERS for their children while TEething, with PERFECT SUCCESS. IT SOOTHES THE CHILD, SOFTENS THE GUMS, ALLAYS ALL PAIN, CURES WIND COLIC, and is the best remedy for the teething child. Druggists in every part of the world. Be sure and ask for "Mrs. Winslow's."

CARTER'S LITTLE LIVER PILLS.

CURE SICK HEADACHE.

Headache, yet Carter's Little Liver Pills are equally valuable in Constipation, and they also relieve the most distressing cases of indigestion, biliousness, and all the troubles that attend the liver and bowels. Even if they only cure one of these troubles, they are worth trying.

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What Will You Give The Baby On Christmas Day?

Here Are Some Sensible Suggestions:

What could make a more charming frame for the pretty face of the darling baby than one of these dainty, fluffy BEARSKIN BONNETS? Warmth and comfort in them, too. Ours are of excellent quality. Each 50c, 75c and \$1.00
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CROCHETED JACKETS, of soft, warm wool, at, each 50c, 75c and \$1.00
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