

"May I ask," said Alicia, as they sauntered along the way leading to the cottage, "what is the particular nature of the business that required my presence here at this time? I have thought it no trouble to come, but rather a pleasure, but it seems to me rather unaccountable that such a necessity should arise."

"I would prefer to leave that matter untouched, until we arrive at the cottage, when your brother, and probably your uncle Andrew will be present. It is not a matter so essential but that it might have been dispensed with, I presume, but your uncle agreed with me, that it was better to request you to be present. But now, as we surmount this little elevation, we come in view of the cottage, and see, away to the right are the ruins of the old castle. It was in one of the rooms of the old ruins that the genuine will was found, and sometime I must tell you by what stratagem the discovery of its hiding-place was made. Gundry was a consummate scoundrel, but not as sharp as he might have been, or he would have occasioned us much more trouble. Much of our success, however, is owing to either luck or Providence, for, as we were on our way here, we met a party on the cars, who gave us very valuable information, and the only one in this country that could have imparted it."

Alicia, whose curiosity had been fully aroused by these brief references to their exploits, was anxious to hear the whole narrative, but feeling that there would not be sufficient time, she simply complimented Frank on his success in accomplishing so much in so short a space of time.

When they arrived at the cottage, they found Rudolph and Andrew Dennison, who had arrived a short time previously, seated in the arbor in the garden, and after a hearty and affectionate greeting between the nieces and their uncle, he proposed that they go to the cottage, and attend to the little matter for which they had met.

What was Alicia's surprise, when Frank opened the door unceremoniously, and on entering, they found the house unoccupied.

Baskets of provisions, however, were placed on the table in the dining room, and some of the old furniture formerly belonging to the deceased David Dennison had not been removed.

Alicia was placed at the head of the table, where she sat years before when she poured tea for her uncle David, and the rest of the party drew up on each side of the table.

"My dear niece," said Mr. Dennison, addressing Alicia, as he rose to his feet, you will probably remember that some eleven years ago, when you visited your late uncle David, you occupied the same place at the same table where you now sit. And such was the favorable impression then made upon him by the manner in which you discharged the duties of the occasion that he resolved you should have the opportunity of filling the position again. Through the perfidy of an unmitigated scoundrel, however, you had nearly been deprived of your rights; but by the skillful exertions of our two friends here, of the firm of Airlie, Crossin & Airlie (whom I had employed, to investigate the case, with a view to ascertain whether in law and equity, I could not establish a claim to the estate, or some portion of it,) the genuine and last will of my unfortunate brother has been discovered. Mr. Airlie will read so much of the will as at present concerns you, which will explain the reason of your being sent for."

Frank then took from his pocket a document, and read as follows:—

"I, David Dennison, do hereby devise and bequeath unto my niece, Alicia Mercer, of 'Meadowvale,' all my estate, real and personal, with all my effects of every character and description whatsoever, excepting only such sum or sums, as shall be necessary to defray my funeral expenses and such charges as may be just and necessary for the administration of this, my last will and testament; the property so bequeathed, to be handed over to her on the anniversary of her eighteenth birthday, she being present at the head of the table in the dining-room of the dwelling on the premises conveyed in this bequest, and known as the 'Aberfoyle' estate. But in case of sickness, or other calamity rendering her presence there impossible at that date, then and in that case, possession may be given at another time, or by handing over to her the title deeds.

And I hereby constitute and appoint my brother, Andrew Dennison, my brother-in-law Benjamin Mercer, and Philip

Prentiss, of Oaklands, executors of this my last will and testament, &c., &c.

"Some of the minor stipulations of the will," said Mr. Dennison, "are rather eccentric, but it would not be in keeping with the character of my brother if it were not. To-day," addressing Alicia, "as Mr. Airlie has informed me, it is your eighteenth birthday. I have therefore in compliance with the letter of your uncle's bequest, only to hand over to you the will and title deeds, which I now have the honor and pleasure to do, at the time and in the place appointed. You are now mistress of the Aberfoyle estate, and at the head of your own table, on which, as my appetite is in good condition, I propose that you order some lunch spread, after which I advise that with the assistance of these legal gentlemen and Rudolph you search the premises for papers; for your uncle was supposed to have funds invested, and I would not be surprised if Mrs. Gundry in her haste left the papers relating to them behind, and it is not improbable she was not aware of their existence."

For a moment Alicia looked sober and troubled, and heaved a little sigh, whereupon the whole party burst out into a fit of laughter.

"You need not laugh," said Alicia, "it is no light responsibility for an unexperienced girl to have a large estate thrust upon her, and not know what to do with it; however, as uncle suggests, I order lunch; but as I have no servant, I suppose I shall have to do duty myself," and suiting the action to the word, she began laying the table, and, with the assistance of Ellen, who laughingly begged to receive her commands, soon had the repast prepared, after having partaken of which they visited the various rooms and explored the closets and drawers.

"I am quite at a loss to know what to do with my possessions," said Alicia to her uncle as the party entered the library. "I shall have to look to you for advice and assistance in the matter."

"Well, then said Mr. Dennison, my advice is to get some reliable party, I would suggest Mr. Airlie, who has been instrumental in securing it to you, as the most suitable party, to undertake the business for you. I think you will have no difficulty in arranging the matter with him, and I think it would be as well for you to talk over the preliminaries at once, while we explore the other portions of the house."

"Will you undertake the business for me," said Alicia to Frank, as the rest of the party passed on. "You may ask any reasonable remuneration."

"What if I should ask what you would deem unreasonable?"

"Then I would remonstrate, and you would have to modify your demands; but I do not apprehend any such difficulty."

"Suppose, then, I should accept no pecuniary reward at all?"

"Then, I could not accept your services, as it would increase the obligations I am already under to you, and of which I hoped to ease my mind by giving you liberal remuneration for managing the estate."

"Do not speak of obligations. I have no desire to make money out of any transaction in which you are concerned. The consciousness of having rendered you a service, or of having contributed at all to your happiness is a sufficient reward; yet, for once in my life, I wish I were rich. I would then make you an offer, which it would be presumption for me to do now."

"Contributing to the happiness of others, is certainly very commendable, and often acts reciprocally, but does not always improve our temporal affairs. But pray what would you do if you were rich; make me an offer for the estate on speculation?"

"O, Alicia! do you not know that there are more precious things than gold, or houses, or lands, or even worldly honors; heart treasures that gold cannot buy, and without which everything else is unsatisfying?"

"Admitting all you say is true," said Alicia, looking out upon the lawn: "that gold cannot buy sympathy and affection, and confidence, and piety, and yet these are precious and desirable things; you cannot wish to be rich on their account, as you say they are not to be procured for gold; why then associate riches with them at all: do you not think that the love and sympathy and piety of the poor are as genuine, and as precious to them, and as sacred in the sight