

took her away, and assumed the control of all her inheritance. At the age of eighteen she was to come into possession, and as the time drew near the Rajah informed her that he wished her to marry his son. But this son was detestable to her, and to her English ideas the proposal was abhorrent. She refused to marry him. The Rajah swore that she should. At this she threatened that she would claim the protection of the British government. Fearful of this, and enraged at her firmness, he confined her in her rooms for several months, and at length threatened that if she did not consent he would use force. This threat reduced her to despair. She determined to escape and appeal to the British authorities. She bribed her attendants, escaped, and by good fortune reached my Residency.

"On hearing her story I promised that full justice should be done her, and succeeded in quieting her fears. I obtained a suitable home for her, and found the widow of an English officer who consented to live with her.

"Ah, Chetwynde, how I loved her! A year passed away, and she became my wife. Never before had I known such happiness as I enjoyed with her. Never since have I known any happiness whatever. She loved me with such devotion that she would have laid down her life for me. She looked on me as her savior as well as her husband. My happiness was too great to last.

"I felt it—I knew it," he continued, in a broken voice. "Two years my darling lived with me, and then—she was taken away.

"I was ill for a long time," continued the General, in a gentle voice. "I prayed for death, but God spared me for my child's sake. I recovered sufficiently to attend to the duties of my office, but it was with difficulty that I did so. I never regained my former strength. My child grew older, and at length I determined to return to England. I have come here to find all my relatives dead, and you, the old friend of my boyhood, are the only survivor. One thing there is, however, that embitters my situation now. My health is still very precarious, and I may at any moment leave my child unprotected. She is the one concern of my life. I said that I had come here to ask a favor of you. It was this, that you would allow me to nominate you as her guardian in case of my death, and assist me also in finding any other guardian to succeed you in case you should pass away before she reached maturity. This was my purpose. But after what you have told me other things have occurred to my mind. I have been thinking of a plan which seems to me to be the best thing for both of us.

"Listen now to my proposal," he said, with greater earnestness. "That you should give up Chetwynde is not to be thought of for one moment. In addition to my own patrimony and my wife's inheritance I have amassed a fortune during my residence in India, and I can think of no better use for it than in helping my old friend in his time of need."

Lord Chetwynde raised his hand deprecatingly.

"Wait—no remonstrance. Hear me out," said the General. "I do not ask you to take this as a loan, or any thing of the kind. I only ask you to be a protector to my child. I could not rest in my grave if I thought that I had left her unprotected."

"What!" cried Lord Chetwynde, hastily interrupting him, "can you imagine that it is necessary to buy my good offices?"

"You don't understand me yet, Chetwynde; I want more than that. I want to secure a protector for her all her life. Since you have told me about your affairs I have formed a strong desire to see her betrothed to your son. True, I have never seen him, but I know very well the stock he comes from. I know his father," he went on, laying his hand on his friend's arm; "and I trust the son is like the father. In this way you see there will be no gift, no loan, no obligation. The Chetwynde debts will be all paid off, but it is for my daughter; and where could I get a better dowry?"

"But she must be very young," said Lord Chetwynde, "if you were not married until forty-five."

"She is only a child yet," said the General. "She is ten years old. That need not signify, however. The engagement can be made just as well. I free the estate from all its encumbrances; and as she will eventually be a Chetwynde, it will be for her sake as well as your son's. There is no obligation."

Lord Chetwynde wrung his friend's hand.

"I do not know what to say," said he. "It would add years to my life to know that my son is not to lose the inheritance of his ancestors. But of course I can make no definite arrangements until I have seen him. He is the one chiefly interested; and besides," he added, smiling, "I can not expect you to take a father's estimate of an only son. You must judge him for yourself, and see whether my account has been too partial."

"Of course, of course. I must see him at once," broke in the General. "Where is he?"

"In Ireland. I will telegraph to him to-night, and he will be here in a couple of days."

"He could not come sooner, I suppose?" said the General, anxiously.

Lord Chetwynde laughed.

"I hardly think so—from Ulster. But why such haste? It positively alarms me, for I'm an idle man, and have had my time on my hands for half a lifetime."

"The old story, Chetwynde," said the General, with a smile; "petticoat government. I promised my little girl that I would be back to-morrow. She will be sadly disappointed at a day's delay. I shall be almost afraid to meet her. I fear she has been a little spoiled, poor child; but you can scarcely wonder, under the circumstances. After all, she is a good child though; she has the strongest possible affection for me, and I can guide her as I please through her affections."

After some further conversation Lord Chetwynde sent off a telegram to his son to come home without delay.

CHAPTER II.

THE WEIRD WOMAN.

THE morning-room at Chetwynde Castle was about the pleasantest one there, and the air of poverty which prevailed elsewhere was here lost