

# CHILDREN OF DESTINY.

A Novel by William J. Fischer.  
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## CHAPTER I. THE GRAVENORS.

Blair House, the magnificent home of the Gravenors, stood in the very heart of Kempton, under the sheltering shade of several noble oaks, surrounded by well-kept lawns, its massive, white front facing one of the loveliest residential streets in the city. The estate was the especial delight of the good people of Kempton. On the spacious lawns the choicest flower-beds were to be found all the summer through, creations of brightness and beauty so artistically arranged by a genius, the trusty old gardener, Matt Pency. Several paths led from the street to a marble fountain in the centre of the lawn and here the men and women and children often came to quench their thirst. In the rear of the house stood the conservatory filled with the rarest plants all the year round, and not far off a well-kept flower-garden smiled pleasantly to the passer-by.

When William Gravenor first came to Kempton, in the thirties, all the place could boast of were ten houses, a tavern, a grocery store and a blacksmith shop. The village was a little child out of its cradle just then, learning to crawl up the hill upon which the future city was to rise. All about Kempton was God's own treasure trove, thousands and thousands of acres of rich timber land. On all sides mighty forest-trees lifted their sun-kissed kindly heads to the clouds. One night William Gravenor dreamed a beautiful dream, full of hope and promise. That night, the young sleeper dreamt he saw men at work at Kempton building a large lumber mill; others were busy cutting down the grand old trees in the woods. The lusty, vigorous song of the lumberman was music to his ears. Then the smoke from the lumberman's shanty rose snake-like to the sky, and all this filled his heart with joy. He saw men on their rats in the rivers and the lakes and the thousands of logs floating down lazily to the mill at Kempton. Very soon new families poured into the village and countless buildings sprang up over night almost. The streets were filled with the sound of traffic and cars; hundreds of tall chimney-stacks pointed heavenwards; there was a boom, and in a very short time Kempton threw off its childhood's clothes and donned the garments of a vital, progressive manhood.

It was only a dream, but it set young Gravenor's brain a-thinking. He was a poor man just newly married, came to Kempton to gain a livelihood, but himself and his charming young wife, but he was shrewd, manly, full of business tact and had two strong arms that were ready to do their share in the strenuous battle for existence. Here was the chance of a life-time, and one morning William with several others began to dig the foundation for his intended lumber mill. A few years passed, the project grew, and very soon the young lumber-king was making piles of gold out of those very saw-logs that floated carelessly down the river in the fall.

Years passed, happy fruitful years for the Gravenors. God gave them two children, Muriel and Arthur, who brought much sunshine into those early days. It was during this time of prosperity that Blair House was built, but Mrs. Gravenor did not live long to enjoy it. When life held out its most precious treasures to her it was then God called her home. Fifteen years later the same message came to the lumber-king. He had lived a good life; he had given freely of his money towards charity to lighten countless heavy burdens—and he had done nothing to fear from the Prince of Peace. And thus the Gravenor millions fell into the hands of the two children—Muriel and Arthur—who, together with old Aunt Hawkins, the trusty nurse, and Matt Pency, the gardener, and several maids, constituted the Gravenor household at the time when this story opens. Arthur was then a handsome young man of twenty-eight and Muriel a shy girl of seventeen.

One afternoon in late July when Nature looked its loveliest, Aunt Hawkins hid away to a cool spot under the trees in the garden. A wave of heat had suddenly swept over Kempton but it was not to last very long for already a cool wind was creeping up from the lake through the not far distant cedars and hemlocks. The heart of the old nurse beat joyously as she seated herself on the mossy bench which was her favorite resting-place. She was a short, plump, good-looking woman with a perfectly round face. Her hair was a soft, silky white and though she was nearly sixty years of age, not a wrinkle was visible on her pleasant face. But her years were beginning to manifest themselves in her gait. She moved with difficulty, and her hands were already showing the tremor of age. Yet withal she was good to look at as she sat there, in her neat, plain, gray dress and white apron, a favorite volume of Dickens in her hand. There was a quaint, old-time comfortableness about her that was not at all unpleasant. These afternoon reading-hours out in the open were her special delight, and the Gravenor library was ever at her disposal. She was not an intellectual woman, but she was schooled in the philosophy of good living, and had it not been for her coming into the Gravenor household, things would have gone hard with the two small children when they became orphans. When Muriel was but a child and Mrs. Gravenor's life hung merely by a thread, the frail, little woman pressed Aunt Hawkins' hand and with tears in her eyes, begged her to take care of her two little children. And, when fifteen years later, the heart-felt that he was also to be taken away, his last words were: "Auntie! be good to the children. It breaks my heart to leave them. Continue to be a mother to them, for they have only you now." And the good woman fulfilled her promise. She guarded them as zealously as a bird would its young. They looked up to her in all

things. She was a second mother to them in every sense. Mrs. Gravenor herself had christened the matronly, tender-hearted woman "Aunt," and thus she was called by all who knew her intimately. Muriel, unknown to Aunt Hawkins, had stolen into the garden some minutes previously. She loved to be out there amongst the flowers. They were like so many companions—playmates to her, in their many colored dresses. Roses, dahlias, portulacae, nasturtiums and marigolds smiled everywhere. That afternoon, she had asked Matt if she might not gather a few roses for Aunt Hawkins as it was her birthday. "And how old, pray, is the aunt to-day?" Matt asked, inquisitively. "Sixty years, Matt," the girl answered gently.

"So, so—sixty years! well! well! I would not believe it. She is pretty spry for an old woman," he added. "Ah, but she's a good soul, she is. When first I came here about thirty years or so ago, she was a fine young woman then, but she had a broken heart 'n' I couldn't help pityin' her. Your father, girl, kind man that he was, took her in a few weeks before I came."

"Aunt Hawkins had a broken heart, Matt? What do you mean?" asked Muriel. "Ah! 'tis a long, long story," the old gardener answered thoughtfully. "I cannot tell it to you now. Sometime you shall hear it all."

"Very well. You must not forget to tell me for I never knew that Aunt Hawkins' young life had been so sad."

"No, I shall not forget, Muriel," he said, as he turned down the narrow path-way that led to the street.

"Matt! Matt!" cried the girl, loudly. "What about the roses?"

The gardener turned with a pleasant smile on his face. "Pluck all you want, darling," he answered tenderly. "The beds are the prettiest, but they're not half nice enough for you or Aunt Hawkins."

A few moments later Muriel was busy in the garden and as she bent cutting the rose stems, a little sigh escaped her lips. "Poor things!" she murmured. "I wonder if the other roses will miss them."

She gathered the flowers together in her arms, and as she turned to leave the garden, the sunlight stole silently over her face, sweet in its girlishness and for a moment made it more lovely. God had given Muriel rare beauty of form and face. In her plain white dress, the cluster of red roses nestling sweetly against her breast, she appeared very beautiful. Aunt Hawkins always said that she looked like her mother. She had her fine, creamy complexion, her dark black hair, the same small, delicate nose and her blood-red lips.

Gently she glided down between the stately rows of holly hocks, with their crimson and lavender hoods, humming a favorite song. Presently she reached the garden-gate. Then she espied Aunt Hawkins on her favorite bench not many yards away. The old woman had her back turned. Slowly and noiselessly she tip-toed up behind her, then threw her arms about her neck and kissed her tenderly.

Aunt Hawkins had been so wrapped up in her book that she had not heard Muriel's footsteps. "Goodness gracious, child! You frightened me," shrieked Aunt Hawkins.

"Never mind, Auntie," the girl interposed. "The situation was really too tempting."

Muriel could not restrain her laughter and in a moment the dear, old Aunt joined in with her.

"But come let's be friends again," whispered the girl as she put her arms about her a second time.

"Where do all the pretty roses come from, Muriel?" Aunt Hawkins asked.

"From the garden, to be sure. You see, I did not forget that this is your birthday, so Matt gave me permission to pluck the prettiest ones for you. May many more birthdays gladden your heart," the girl said with feeling as she handed her the fragrant flowers.

"Thank you, child! It is all very thoughtful of you and I appreciate your kind words. But alas! I am afraid I have seen most of my birthdays. The summer of life has passed over me, the autumn is now here and soon it will be winter. My darling soon it will—"

She did not finish the sentence. Her voice seemed to choke her.

"Ah, you seem to be sad, Auntie. I do not like to see you in such spirits."

"Some day, child, when you will be sixty, you too, like I will look down the lone pathway of the years, with mingled feelings of pleasure and pain, upon those things, large and small, which at one time or other entered so largely into your life. Besides—"

There was a momentary pause. The woman toyed nervously through the pages of her book while Muriel seated herself upon the grass at her feet. Then in a voice trembling with emotion, she began:

"You have never heard the story of my younger life. Have you not often wondered how I ever came into your household?"

"Yes, often, Auntie. It has been a puzzle to me. But at last I got to thinking that you have been here always."

"Ah no, child. 'Tis a long and sad story—but I had better not tell you."

there stood your father." "I come to bring you no good news, Mrs. Hawkins," said he. "Hurry! Dave is dying." "Dave dying—great God!" I cried. "What has happened?" "The poor fellow was on his way home this evening when a hungry wolf attacked him. He was defenceless, but he fought and struggled with his hands until he choked the animal to death. The wolf, however, had inflicted such dangerous wounds in the death struggle and Dave has lost so much blood that he cannot live much longer."

"Where is he? I cried, despairingly. "Down in the forest, near the bend in the river. The night watchman came across him accidentally a half-hour ago."

"Why did they not bring him home?" I asked. "He is too weak," said your father. "The doctor would not allow him to be moved."

"Then he is dying? Perhaps he is dead now."

"No," replied your father, "I am sure you will still find him alive. But come let's go!"

"Quickly we hurried to the spot, your father and I. The earth seemed to reel before me. When I reached the spot Dave raised his head and smiled gently. "I am so glad you came. I am dying—take my hand," was all he said. "His life hung by the merest thread. Another minute and the struggle was over. That very evening your father took me to Blair House. My heart was broken but I found friends in your dear parents. They sympathized with me, and in time my suffering became less acute. Blair House was to be my home forever they said, and I was glad. Then Arthur came into the world and I nursed him through childhood, and some years later your precious self, Muriel, was entrusted to me. You see, then, child, I have remained with you both until now. I loved your parents. They were good to me, and for their sake and yours I hope to remain with you until I die."

"I am so glad to hear that you intend remaining here always," joyfully cried Muriel, "and, though your early years experienced such great sorrows, I know that Arthur and I shall take good care that your last days may be those of peace. But see! there comes Matt. He seems to be worried about something."

The faithful gardener was walking rather briskly up the narrow path when Muriel summoned him. "Come over here, Matt!"

In a moment Matt joined them. Like Aunt Hawkins Matt was also well on in years, and as he stood there he looked the picture of simplicity and good cheer. He was a tall and very thin man. A large straw-hat covered his bald head and his canned face was all wrinkles. He had no mustache, but a long gray beard showed conspicuously, hiding a rather gaudy, red necktie which had undoubtedly done service for many years. His arms were bare to the elbow. They were strong and very plain. Blue overalls covered a pair of trousers rather short in the extremities. Matt Pency was a very plain, ordinary-looking man, but he had his heart and love for his fellowmen; than many a city millionaire. Yet he was rather simple in many ways. He knew absolutely nothing about the world outside of Blair House. For years he had attended to the gardening about the place, and people admitted that he was an expert at this sort of business. He could talk for hours about plant-life and its uses, and he had no doubts about the doctor. He felt no pulse, looked no tongue, gave me some medicine that almost turned me inside out 'n' charged me a dollar for all my trouble. By Jiminy! that's enough to put anybody out of humor, I think."

"Is that all he did?" asked Mrs. Hawkins. "No, you not receive any medicine, any liquid, powders or pills?" "To be sure he gave me some stuff to drink—two doses, I believe. He called it some fancy, high falutin' name. Just a minute, I'll have it in a second. Ah yes! em-tic or some such sounding thing. Em-tic, yes—that's the word."

"I thought Matt he would not let you go without giving you some medicine," remarked Muriel.

"Medicine!" he retorted angrily. "Why, what good was the concoction to me anyway? Sure, I could not hold it on my stomach at all—at all. And to think he had the nerve to charge me a dollar for it when it wouldn't even stay down five minutes."

The two women at once took in the situation. Matt, poor fellow, could not imagine what they were laughing at. The sound of their voices irritated him and he stood for a moment, gazing about in strange bewilderment. Then he turned away abruptly.

"Poor Matt! simple as he is, he has really a heart of gold," remarked Muriel.

"I am afraid we hurt his feelings," exclaimed Mrs. Hawkins. He did look so pitiful when we laughed. It was positively rude, Muriel. I feel rather sorry for it all."

Just then a voice sounded from the garden—a thin, weak voice, tuned to some melody, tender and soothing. It was Matt's. He was busy at work amongst his flowers in his little world that was filled with beauty. Presently a lonely thrush joined in the old man's song in sweet accompaniment.

"Matt is singing, Auntie," whispered Muriel. "Listen! The poor soul seems to have forgotten the sting of our outburst of laughter."

It was a touching, plaintive strain and the two women could not help listening to the pleading voices of man and bird, that floated over the fragrant rose-bushes and the stately rows of tall holly hocks.

## CHAPTER II.

THE MYSTERIOUS LETTER.  
The little canary warbled cheerfully

in the library as Aunt Hawkins rose from her chair to stir the fire in the grate. It was a cold evening without. The winds were blowing wildly over the hills—rather an unexpected change from the warm, peaceful afternoon. The skies were filled with heavy clouds, and, here and there, in the blue could be seen the tranquil stars, sentinelling the glad hours of approaching night.

Aunt Hawkins felt rather chilly as she sat near the table doing a bit of sewing. In her hurry to finish her little task she had forgotten to add more fuel to the fire. A few feet away, book in hand sat Muriel, dreaming of the little silken-haired heroine whose stormy career she was following through the interesting chapters.

The library was the most inviting room in Blair House. On the three sides of the room stood rows of bookshelves filled with the volumes that William Gravenor had collected in his lifetime. On the other side of the room two large windows looked out into the moonlit night. The heavy damask curtains were only half drawn. Two large palms stood on pedestals near the pleasant windows. The floor was covered by a Turkish rug, and from the ceiling a heavy glass chandelier hung, full of many sparkling lights. Over the large arched doorway that led into the drawing-room hung two costly paintings in oil—likenesses of the former owner of Blair House and his charming wife. Marble busts were on the bookshelves. Upon the table in the middle of the room stood the bouquet of roses which Muriel had given Aunt Hawkins in the afternoon, and a bowl in which three or four pretty gold-fish were swimming.

Just as Aunt Hawkins had seated herself after attending to the fire there was a rap at the door. Turning, she beheld Kitty, the cook, in her nicely starched white cap and apron, a small silver card tray in her hand.

"Pray, ma'am, pardon my interrupting, but someone just this minute left this note at the door and bade me deliver it post-haste to Mr. Arthur."

Arthur had not returned, but I shall see that the note is handed him, Kitty."

Mrs. Hawkins took the proffered envelope. It bore a woman's handwriting. "And do you suppose, ma'am, that Arthur will be in for dinner this evening?" It is getting late—and—

"Kitty bit her lips nervously and plucked her apron. "I would like to know if you see, ma'am, Silas promised to take me to the theatre to-night, and I would not like to disappoint him for all the world."

"And Silas Butterworth shall not be disappointed, Kitty," answered Aunt Hawkins. "It would be a pity to have Silas drive in from the country for nothing—so just hurry upstairs and put on your best clothes. Muriel and I shall see that Arthur is well cared for."

"A thousand thanks, ma'am," said Kitty. "Silas and I are engaged you know, but that is miles from getting married, eh? Kitty Frederick isn't in such a hurry to change her name to Butterworth. You may depend upon it, ma'am."

Just then Kitty heard footsteps outside. "Ah! I'm sure that Silas!" And in a second she ran out of the room.

"Kitty is a good girl, Auntie," remarked Muriel, looking up from her book. "I do hope she will not think of marrying that Silas Butterworth for a long time yet."

"And so do I," interrupted Mrs. Hawkins. "It would be very difficult to please her."

Presently the old family clock in the hall struck eight. The house was quiet. The sound of the clock outside had the slightest touch of melancholy in it.

"Goodness!" exclaimed Muriel, "eight o'clock and Arthur not home yet."

He is likely busy at the mill. This is the last day of the month you know, Muriel."

"But I am sure he is not at the mill at this hour. You know, Auntie, he went fishing this afternoon with a few of his friends."

"O I did not know that," answered Mrs. Hawkins. "By the way Muriel, have you not noticed that Arthur has been acting strangely of late? He is not the same as he used to be."

"Yes, I have noticed it. The bright smile and cheerful laugh seems to have left his face. He always looks so worried. Only yesterday I found him sitting here in the library gazing into space. His mind seemed to be wrestling with some problem. He was so absorbed in his thoughts that he did not hear me enter the room. And then I always seem to see such deep lines of sadness in his face. I wonder what can be the matter."

"I have no idea, Muriel. Do you think he might be worrying over business affairs?"

"I hardly think so. Only last week he told me that everything was running smoothly at the mill."

Presently a light dawned in Mrs. Hawkins' mind, and her thoughts stole swiftly to the mysterious letter which Kitty had handed her but a few minutes before.

"Muriel come here," she said. "Let us examine this letter. It seems strange that it should have been brought here this evening. The postman never makes his rounds as late as this. How stupid of me not to have asked Kitty who handed her the letter."

"It all seems very strange to me," ventured Muriel. "See! the address shows a woman's handwriting. Who could it be from?"

That very moment the front door opened, and there were sounds of feet steps in the hall. Arthur appeared in the doorway, his face showing a faint smile.

"At last! at last!" joyfully exclaimed Muriel as she ran across the room to embrace him. "Really, Arthur I thought you were never coming. Auntie and I have been picturing all manner of things for the last half hour or so."

"That is really too bad, and I am sorry you were so about me, little pet," he said tenderly as he seated himself near the fire. "This is a cold night and I am nearly frozen. We would have been back hours ago, but we took

a canoe and sailed up the river, and, before we knew it, were miles away from home."

"Was the fishing good, Arthur?" questioned Muriel, eagerly.

"Yes, very. It was fine sport. It would have filled old Isaac Walton's heart with joy. I caught a great many fish, but I sent them to the homes of the poor people of Kempton."

"You must be hungry," interrupted Mrs. Hawkins. "Dinner has been ready a long time. Come Muriel! Come Arthur!" And she led the way to the dining-room.

"By the way, Arthur, she remarked. "Just a minute." She turned and walked over to the table and took up the strange letter.

"Some one left this at the door for you this evening," she continued. "I almost forgot to hand it to you."

Arthur looked at the address. He recognized the handwriting at once, and a shadow crept over his handsome face. Quickly he walked over to the light, opened the envelope and eagerly read the contents.

Arthur Gravenor looked the picture of strong, athletic manhood as his eyes scanned the lines hurriedly. He wore a plain tweed suit of gray. His face was clean-shaven, fair complexioned, and, withal, good to look upon. Yet the color was fading quickly from the glowing cheeks. His perfect row of white teeth met for an instant, then he bit his lip. A strange look came into his eyes, and a heavy sigh escaped him. He whispered a few words under his breath but the two women did not understand him.

Muriel grew frightened. "What's the matter, Arthur?" she said uneasily. "That letter seems to have brought you bad news."

"No, no, Muriel. Just as I read it a faint, sickening feeling stole over me and almost overpowered me. But I have been so long without my dinner. I think this is probably the cause."

"Then, come, Arthur, you shall not wait another minute," remarked Muriel.

Arthur stepped hastily to the fire place, tore the mysterious letter and threw it into the flames. Some of the embers, however, fell to the paved floor in front of the grate. Arthur did not notice them. He was too excited. Just then his thoughts were with the writer of that letter. Muriel, however, noticed the few white scraps lying around and decided that she would gather them at the first opportune moment.

Arthur sat at table that evening, but he ate very little. For the last four years the management of the extensive lumber business had fallen to his lot and it was only natural to imagine that there were many worries in connection with it for a young man of twenty-eight. After dinner he lit a cigar. He tried to smile, but it was a strange smile, such as Muriel had never seen before. She did not like her brother's actions at all.

"I am going out for a while this evening," he said to Muriel. "I have some little business matters to attend to. Now be a good girl and do not worry about me."

"How can I help it, Arthur? You know you are all I have in this world, and—"

Then the tears came to her eyes. A feeling of pity stole into Arthur's heart, and he drew her to his breast, kissing her forehead tenderly.

"There! little angel!" do not cry any more!" he said with emotion. "I must away now. I will be back soon."

"This mysterious letter was not a good omen," she said to Mrs. Hawkins as she entered the room. "It contained bad news. I could read it plainly in Arthur's eyes. A change is coming over my brother. What can it all mean?"

Thereupon Muriel went to the open fire-place and picked up the torn fragments of the letter. There were eight or ten pieces. Lifting them to the light she approached the table and remarked: "I wonder, Auntie, if these fragments will give us a clue. They are pretty small, but perhaps we may be able to discover the writer."

Nervously the girl's eyes followed the words on the little, white fragments.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, "Here's the name of the writer—Mazie Rawlins! Good heavens! Mazie Rawlins! the poor widow's daughter on Shelbourne Avenue—"

"What dealings can this girl have with Arthur?" asked Mrs. Hawkins.

"Ah, I see it all," cried Muriel, her face white with excitement. "On these slips I can decipher two phrases—'You torture me' and 'I do not love you.'"

The girl sighed deeply. "O, I see it all," she continued. "Arthur is in love with Mazie Rawlins. He is going to her to-night. I'll follow him and see what it is all about. There is not a moment to be lost."

"Muriel, it is getting late. Are you not afraid?" asked Mrs. Hawkins anxiously.

"Afraid? No, Auntie. There is something wrong somewhere, and I will find out the cause. Poor Arthur! He has been acting strangely. I see it all now, and my heart breaks for him. The black cloak, Auntie—quick! I must go. Arthur, I am sure, is only a block ahead by now."

"I fear for your safety, child."

could see a pale light flickering in one of the windows. The name of Grandma Rawlins was well-known in the city. She came to Kempton in her girlhood and grew old with the place. But what made her a figure of special interest was her extreme old age. She was now well over a hundred and had been bed-ridden for two years. She was blind and God also took away from her the gift of hearing. She had three sons, but Mazie, the youngest child, was all that remained now. The other children were sleeping the last, long, eternal sleep in different parts of the world. Fate had separated them in early years, and God willed that they should never meet in this life again.

Grandma Rawlins, however, was well taken care of. Mazie tended and watched her carefully. Poor, frail, little woman, nestling sweetly in her neat, white bed—it was well that God had given her so good, so noble a daughter. Angels could not have made her last years pleasanter. The touch of Mazie's warm hand and the press of her red cheek were the gifts of life the old woman prized deeply.

Mazie Rawlins was a good-hearted girl. In order to make a living for herself and her invalid-mother she gave music lessons to a small number of pupils. Her constant devotion to her infirm mother did not allow enough time for her income was little and her best plan, careful saving she managed very well, year to make ends meet. She played the piano remarkably well and deserved a hearing from the musical world. In the years back, she had been a great friend of Signor Pastini, whose studio had stood just across the street from her mother's cottage. She had been a bright, little thing and had, now in, and in time she the Signor took her in, and in time she developed into one of his best pianists. She was destined to carve a name for herself, but the ties of home bound her fast. Thus she sacrificed the concert-platform in order to care for her poor, old mother and in her heart she deemed it her duty to do so.

When Muriel reached the Rawlins' cottage the sound of music floated into the desolate street. Quickly she tip-toed across the lawn and hid behind the large rose-bush that stood in front of the half-open, cottage window. A soothing Mendelssohn aria was just then sounding from the room. Muriel recognized it. The music recalled tender memories to her. She pressed closer to the window, and presently her eyes stole into the plain, little cottage room. Mazie Rawlins sat at the piano. Her fingers moved slowly over the keys, but her thoughts were elsewhere.

"How pretty she looks!" Muriel whispered. "Poor thing! But where is Arthur? Perhaps after all I am on the wrong track. I shall wait a few minutes."

The minutes hung like heavy, leaden hours upon Muriel's heart. "I wonder what it all means," she mused. "Why should Mazie write my brother a letter?"

Just then footsteps sounded on the pavement. They were coming nearer and nearer. Presently a man passed by hurriedly. Another minute and there was a rap at the door of the Rawlins' cottage.

Muriel raised herself full length before the window. Every nerve in her body tingled. Her breath came in interruptions. Her eyes stared into the cosy little room.

Mazie ceased playing. Like a frightened bird she rose and turned towards the door. There was just the faintest smile on her lips. She halted for a moment. Her plain, black gown hung gracefully from her shoulders. She looked very pretty. The sudden excitement had brought the color to her cheeks. Her soft, bright eyes had a dreamy look in them as she toyed nervously with the little golden necklace round her throat. But it was only for an instant. Then the door opened quickly, and the man entered.

"It is Arthur. I'll remain here quietly and listen," whispered Muriel to herself.

## TO BE CONTINUED.

## LARRY O'NEIL.

Half an hour past noon on a bright May day, Larry O'Neil, for lack of anything better to do, dropped into Christie's salerooms. Some necessary legal business had obliged him to leave his retirement in Donegal, and when he found the family solicitors were not to be hurried into any unwelcome speed, he found time heavy on his hands. Once he would have had no difficulty in spending a few days pleasantly enough in London, but that was prior to the time of the occurrence that had transformed the light-hearted Larry O'Neil into a gloomy and morose recluse.

The famous salerooms were pretty well filled, and an unoccupied chair and looked indifferently around him. As he did so, the occupier of the next seat turned towards him, eyed Larry doubtfully for a few minutes and then held out his hand.

"Captain O'Neil, isn't it?" the man said, eagerly.

Larry's face darkened. "No, I am in the service no longer," Mr. Hilton," he said quietly.

"Well, you're Larry O'Neil, anyhow," Mr. Hilton said, "though I doubted the fact for a minute. I never knew you had a taste for bric-a-brac."

"Oh, I haven't!" Larry smiled slightly. "I merely strolled in here because I had nothing else to do. Are you purchasing?"

"I have just bought a Kang-he-vase," Mr. Hilton replied. "It's very unique. Then he sighed. "One has to cultivate an interest in something or another."

"I suppose," Larry assented indifferently and rose to his feet. Mr. Hilton did likewise.

"There is nothing else I want," he explained. "Come to my flat for luncheon, will you Larry?"

Larry began to excuse. Mr. Hilton interrupted him.

"You'll do me a kindness, really old fellow," he urged. "I'm very lonely at times," and then Larry remembered that Mr. Hilton's wife, to whom he had been tenderly attached, had died at San Remo seven or eight years before.

"Thanks, then I will," Larry assented "but I should warn you that I'm not the