

A door opened at that moment, and Uncle Adam walked straight into the room. Uncle Adam was a rather old gentleman, but always good-natured. Even now he did not look the least bit offended, though he must have heard all I had said. I jumped up, thoroughly ashamed of myself. But he only said:

"Come, come, my little girl, this is pretty hard on your old uncle. I'm sorry you think me such a miser."

"Oh, uncle," I pleaded, "please forgive me. I didn't mean that at all. I'm out of spirits, and that makes me unjust."

"Well, never mind," said Uncle Adam, bustling across the room and taking a seat. "Come here, Miss Ada. I have a proposition to make. I don't want to be poisoned for a legacy—don't interrupt me, my dear—so I am going to give you a little present, instead. Suppose I bribe you to be an old maid, eh? I will settle ten thousand dollars on you now, on condition you live and die Ada Lyon, spinster. There!"

"If you will forgive and forget all my ugly speeches, uncle," said I, "I'll agree to the condition with pleasure."

"Ada," said mother, faintly.

"Let her alone, Agnes, let her alone," said Uncle Adam, with a majestic wave of the hand. "She'll take the matter into due consideration. See here, Ada, we must have a clear understanding. There is to be no drawing back. If you sign the necessary paper, the money is yours at once; but should you ever marry you forfeit every cent. Are you ready to ratify the contract?"

"Yes, uncle, at once; and I will show that I am in earnest."

"Stop, stop—not at once. I'll give you till night to think about it. Don't be rash. In order to escape being called a miser, I'll bribe heavily." And Uncle Adam unceremoniously marched out of the room.

I turned to mother, flushed with triumph. She was still sitting by the window, looking pale and troubled.

"Ada, come here," she said, almost in a whisper. "Look out. Isn't that Theo Rounsaville?"

I sprang to her side. An open landeau, drawn by two superb gray horses in gold-mounted harness, had just been driven up the avenue.

"He has come to ask you to drive with him," said my mother; "at least it looks so."

I blushed furiously. "Do you think so, mother?" I said. The moment after our visitor was announced.

What a delightful day that was! We drove down to the beach; the solemn ocean monotone seemed changed to joyous music. Then we went round through the pine woods. Then we came home, while the western sky blazed with the sunset, and the gray twilight had set in. My accepted lover, for he had proposed and I accepted him, bade me good-by at the door and went down the avenue.

I ran up-stairs and into my mother's room, stopping only to throw off my hat and gloves.

"Well, Ada?" was mamma's inquiry.

"All's well, mamma," I answered, laughing and blushing.

But when I had finished my little confidences she said, still smiling, however:

"You will be a portionless bride, remember, my darling."

For the first time, I thought of that odious contract.

"Do you suppose Uncle Adam meant all that?"

"I don't doubt it," she replied; "and you promised to arrange it finally to-night, Ada."

I jumped up. "I am going now," I said.

"What will you say to Uncle Adam?"

"Never mind; I'll fix it," I answered gayly. "I'll either coax him or scare him."

I laughed all the way down to the study, until by the time I reached the door my eyes were full of tears. I let them stay, paused to collect my ideas and compose my face, then tapped at the door in a subdued way, and went slowly in.

Uncle Adam had taken the shade off the reading-lamp, laid his meerschaum down by it, and was busily writing.

"Take a seat, take a seat," he said, without looking up. "I'll have everything ready in a few minutes. What is your conclusion?"

I seated myself in a great arm-chair close to him, and sighed deeply.

"I'll sign it, uncle," I said, and sighed again.

"Well, what's the matter?" he said, looking round at me. "I'm afraid it will make me very unhappy," I said, with another sigh.

"Why, Ada," he said, in a puzzled way, "I thought it was the very thing to make you happy. What do you mean?"

"Yes, Uncle Adam," I said, having recourse to my handkerchief; "but then I don't want to live single."

"Oh!" said he. "You've changed your mind. You don't want the money?"

"Yes, I do," I exclaimed, with a hysterical little sob. "I love him; but I won't marry without anything of my own. I'm ashamed."

Uncle Adam never could stand tears. He left his chair, and took my hands from my face.

"Ada," he said, severely, "tell me instantly, straight up and down—whom do you love?"

"Mr. Rounsaville," said I, solemnly.

"You are a foolish child," said Uncle Adam, patting my head. "I knew Rounsaville was coming here to-day, and so I wouldn't let you bind yourself by any promise until he came. But what absurd nonsense is this? Come, child, I won't bribe you to live single. If you marry Rounsaville, I'll give you ten thousand dollars."

"Will you, uncle?" I cried, in ecstasy.

"Don't cry any more, then," he said, almost tenderly.

"Kiss me, my dear, and go to your mother."

I ran up-stairs.

"Mamma," I called, "I've taken the bribe."

I frightened her dreadfully, but soon explained.

And Uncle Adam gave me on my wedding-day the ten thousand check with which, originally, he had bribed me to be an old maid.

The Heir of Kesterton.

THERE was consternation at Kesterton, for there could be no doubt of it—Morley Ashford was married. After but a slight hesitation, when appealed to by his amazed mother and indignant father, he had acknowledged it himself, and there was no longer any attempt made to refute the rumors.

But his parents were in despair. Morley Ashford, the heir of Kesterton, the oldest and finest estate in the county, had married a slip of a girl, a mere child, daughter of a fisherman on the coast.

Morley, with his tall, slight figure, his easy grace, his frank blue eyes and clustering chestnut hair, was but twenty. No one had dreamed of his marrying yet; but indulged, if not spoiled, this marriage had come of the unquestioned freedom in which he spent his days—had been consummated with no thought of wrong.

"It was when you and mother went to Switzerland last autumn," Morley said to his father. "She was such a taking little thing. I was bewitched to go down there to old Rushton's, and her mother wouldn't let me see her unless I married her. So the banns were put up over at Blackhaven, and Gladys and I were married. I didn't think, I am sure sir, but I might marry her if I liked."

Old Peter Ashford groaned.

"Morley, you blockhead!" he burst out, then checked his impetuous anger. "It is my own fault. I did not realize that you were no longer a child. I have told you nothing of my wishes—my plans, what is due to yourself, to me, to posterity. Oh Morley! all my high hopes—"

The old man broke down in unworded tears.

Morley, so careless and light-hearted, was serious enough now at sight of his father's grief.

"I am very sorry, sir," he said. "What would you have me do now?"

"Will you obey my requirements in this matter?"

"I will do anything but give up Gladys."

The squire was wisely silent. He conferred with his wife. The result was that in three days the three set forth on an extended continental tour—Morley's accompanying his father and mother being made a condition of their accepting their daughter-in-law on their return.

For several months Morley corresponded with his wife regularly. He tried also to interest his mother in his young