

Meanwhile, Jessie Muir had gathered from Monsieur Perrot sufficient information respecting the true state of affairs, to set her mind at rest with respect to Reginald Brandon's intentions; and encouraged by the interest which the Colonel and Lucy had always taken in her prospects, she felt a secret assurance that they would prove powerful auxiliaries in advocating the cause of Harry Gregson, and reconciling her parents to his suit. Neither was she mistaken in her calculation, for while the preparation for the entertainment of the numerous guests was going forward, Colonel Brandon, after a brief consultation with Ethelston, called David Muir aside, and opened to him the subject of the youth's attachment to his daughter.

It is difficult to say whether the surprise, or the wrath of the merchant were the greater on hearing this intelligence, which was not only a death-blow to his own ambitious hopes, but was, in his estimation, an act of unpardonable presumption on the part of young Gregson.

"Colonel, ye're surely no in airneat! it's no possible! Jessie, come here, ye hizzie!" said he, stamping with anger, and raising his voice to a louder pitch.

It happened that Jessie, being engaged in conversation with Monsieur Perrot, did not hear his call, and the Colonel took the opportunity of leading him a little further from the house, and entreating his calm attention to the explanations which he had to give. David walked on in silence, his face still red with anger, and his heart secretly trembling within him when he thought of his next interview with Dame Christie.

The Colonel, who knew both the weak and the good points of his companion's character, dexterously availing himself of both, effected in a few minutes a considerable change in his views and feelings on the subject. He represented to him that Ethelston would now have a house and establishment of his own; that his property was already very considerable, and, with prudent management, would receive gradual augmentation; and that, from his attachment to Gregson, it was his intention to make the honest mate's son the managing agent of his concerns; to facilitate which purpose he, Colonel Brandon, proposed to advance a few thousand dollars, and to establish the young man in a suitable house in Marietta.

"David," continued the Colonel, "you and I have long been acquainted; and I do not think you ever yet knew me to give you counsel likely to injure your welfare or your prospects, and you may trust me that I would not willingly do so now. The young people are attached to each other; they may certainly be separated by force; but their hearts are already united. Harry is an honest, industrious, enterprising lad; he will start in the world with fair prospects; every year will lend him experience; and as you and I are both of us on the wrong side of fifty, we may be very glad a few summers hence to rest from active business, and to have about us those to whom we can entrust our affairs with well-placed confidence."

There was much in this speech that tended to soothe, as well as to convince, the merchant. He was gratified by the familiar and friendly expressions employed by the Colonel, while his shrewd understanding took in at a rapid glance

the prospective advantages that might accrue to the agent managing the extensive affairs of the families of Brandon and Ethelston; added to this, he was at heart a fond and affectionate father; and the symptoms of irritation began to disappear from his countenance; yet he scarcely knew how to reply, and before even he meant to speak, the name of his gude-wife escaped from his lips.

"Leave me to manage Dame Christie," said the Colonel, smiling. "Ethelston shall go into Marietta himself, and break the subject to her, founding his request upon his regard for the elder Gregson, who has served under him so faithfully ever since his boyhood. Come, my good friend, let us join the party: I do not press you for any reply now; but if you should detect a stolen glance of affection between the young people, do not be angry with Jessie, but think of the day when you first went forth, dressed in your best, to win a smile from Dame Christie."

"Ah, Colonel, ye're speakin' of auld lang syne now!" said the merchant, whose ill-humour was no longer proof against the friendly suggestions of his patron, though he muttered to himself, in an undertone, as they returned towards the house, "I ken now why Maister Hairy was aye sae fond o' the store, when the ither lads were fain to win' awa to hunt in the woods, or to fish in the river! Weel a weel, he's a douce callant, an' the lassie might aiblins gae farther an' fare waur!"

The preparations for the entertainment were still in progress, under the superintendence of Aunt Mary and Monsieur Perrot, the latter having already doffed his travelling attire, and assumed, in his jacket of snowy white, the command of the kitchen, when Harry Gregson, who had opened the Marietta post-bag, put a letter into the hands of Reginald Brandon, which he instantly knew, by the bold, careless handwriting, to be from his uncle Marmaduke. He broke the seal, and read as follows:—

"Shirley Hall, July 15.

"DEAR REGINALD,

"I have very lately received your letter, announcing your intention of making a hunting excursion in the west, in pursuit of bears, elk, wolves, Indians, and other wild beasts. I hope you'll come safe back, with a score or two of their outlandish brushes. After you left me, I began to feel very uncomfortable, and did not know what was the matter, for I was cold by night, and sulky and out of sorts by day. Parson Williams took me in hand; but though we drank many a bottle of old port together, and played drafts, and attended several road-meetings (which you know was an amusement I had never tried before), it was all no use, and I began to think that I was on a down-hill road to the next world; but, somehow or other, it happened that I dropped in now and then to the parsonage, and whenever I had talked half an hour with Margaret, (you remember Margaret, the parson's daughter,) I felt in a better humour with myself and all the world. So matters went on, until one day I mustered courage to ask her to come up to the hall, and change her name to Shirley. She did so, and your old uncle writes with the halter round his neck. When I married, Perkins came down from

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