

# SIR WILLIAM'S WILL

There was an old pony and an older basket-chaise attached to the establishment, and the two girls often went for a drive. "Though 'drive' is scarcely the word for it," Mollie declared, "seeing that this antediluvian animal, misnamed, with gross flattery, pony, declines to be driven, and goes where he likes and how he likes." Within little more than a mile of the cottage ran the silver Thames, and, when they were tired of the fir-clad hills, the gorse-covered commons, they drove alongside the river, watching the passing boats and stopping to feed the beautiful and impudent swans; and, as Mollie with secret joy observed, Clytie gradually recovered her health and strength—the soft air, impregnated with the magic terebene, was doing its work; and but for a certain wistfulness and vague anxiety, Clytie seemed herself again.

Bulletins arrived daily from the Towers. Percy was progressing favorably; but, Lady Mervyn reported, the patient was extremely irritable and impatient, and daily demanded the most detailed news of the two girls and their doings. Mollie always answered these letters; and they were duly read to the suffering one by his devoted aunt. With the imperiousness of a sick man, he declared his intention of joining them at Rose Cottage at the earliest opportunity.

"So that we shall have him here in the most fretful stage of his convalescence," remarked Mollie. "Good-ye to all our peace then."

Clytie looked at her and laughed lovingly. "As if I did not know that you wanted him, fretful or not, dear," she said in a low voice; and Mollie, apparently too indignant for words at this audacious assertion, flushed hotly, and, softly boxing Clytie's ears, bounced out of the room with a contemptuous sniff.

It was after dinner and a lovely evening, and Mollie, singing softly, went down to the little rustic gate and leaned over it. All was still save a thrush which was practising its scales; but presently Mollie heard a soft footstep on the pine-needles, and looking in the direction of the sound, saw a stalwart young man walking between the pines. So few persons trespassed on their solitude that she regarded him for a moment with curious interest; then suddenly she started, held her breath, and, glancing over her shoulder to see that Clytie was not upon the veranda, she opened the gate and walked quickly toward the stranger. He heard her, and turned sharply; and Mollie, with her eyes dancing, said demurely:

"Mr. Douglas!"  
Jack, with a guilt-dyed countenance, responded with:  
"Miss Mollie—don't—call out!"  
"Why shouldn't I?" demanded Mollie. "But don't be alarmed; I have not any intention of doing so. But what are you doing here? And why did you run away from Withercombe? And why are you dressed like a gentleman?" For Jack wore a tweed suit which had given his tailor intense satisfaction. "What does it all mean, and what do you mean?"  
Jack beckoned her out of ear-shot of the cottage, and, confronting her, gazed at her keenly, yet imploringly.

## "BEST MEDICINE FOR WOMEN"

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For Ohio Woman.

Portsmouth, Ohio.—"I suffered from irregularities, pains in my side and was so weak at times I could hardly get around to do my work, and as I had four in my family and three boarders it made it very hard for me. Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound was recommended to me. I took it and it has restored my health. It is certainly the best medicine for women's ailments I ever saw."—Mrs. SARA SHAW, R. No. 1, Portsmouth, Ohio.

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"Can I trust you, Miss Mollie?" he asked.

"You can," responded Mollie; "as much as any man can trust a woman."

"Tell me," he said, "is she—is she better? I have seen her once or twice, and she seems better, stronger."

"Of course, you mean my sister, Clytie?" said Mollie. "Yes, she is better; quite well, indeed. But hadn't you better answer my questions?"

Jack sighed and hung his head; then he glanced at the sharp eyes and sighed again.

"You know my secret, Miss Mollie," he said. "I—I love your sister."

The color rose an instant to Mollie's face, and she caught her breath.

"I know that," she said. "I've known it all along from the beginning. Well?"

"Well!" echoed Jack, feeling mean and deceitful. "You don't seem to remember, I, Jack Douglas, to love your sister, a Miss Bramley!"

Mollie looked at him curiously, with just a touch of indignation and resentment in her face.

"Oh, you mean because of the difference between you, I suppose."

"Yes," said Jack, feeling still more ashamed of himself. "A common fisherman, you know."

Mollie eyed him up and down.

"You don't look like a common fisherman in those togs—I mean clothes. But if you are, love levels all distinctions, you know; and Clytie—what am I talking about? Mr. Douglas, if you really love my sister, you will behave like a man. A man—you understand? And tell her so."

"Tell her so!" echoed Jack, in dismay.

"Yes," said Mollie, "or what's the use of being a man?"

Jack paced up and down and drew long breaths.

"Perhaps you are right," he said; but—

"There's no buts," said Mollie, decisively. "I don't ask why you left Withercombe all of a hurry, or what you've been doing since. If you are in love with my sister, that explains everything. But—you want my advice?"

"Oh, I do, Miss Mollie," said Jack, fervently.

"Then take the first opportunity to tell her," said Mollie. "It's a beautiful night; it will be a fine day to-morrow. We shall be down at Shepperton Lock to-morrow, in a thing they call a basket-chaise, at three o'clock in the afternoon. Good evening, Mr. Douglas."

She turned and went back to the cottage before Jack could say a word.

At three o'clock the next day he was seated on the edge of Shepperton Lock; and Mollie, as she persuaded by whip and voice, the pony to approach the spot, exclaimed:

"Why, there's somebody I know!—Snoog! Jack! It's Douglas, last!"

Clytie, who had been lying back, with her eyes half-closed and drinking in the soft, perfumed air of the early spring, sat bolt upright and, with a blush, exclaimed:

"Jack Douglas! Impossible! Mollie!"

"It is always the impossible that happens, my dear," said Mollie, calmly. "How do you do, Mr. Douglas?" she screamed.

Jack came forward. His face was pale, for his heart was beating furiously.

"It's a—strange meeting," he said, as he shook hands. He was too agitated to notice the tremor that shook Clytie's little paw as his big fist enclosed it. "I—I came down here—"

"Oh, don't explain!" exclaimed Mollie. "You are here, and that's enough. We are staying at a place called Rose Cottage. Come up and have some tea with us. You have given us tea often enough, and we are glad to return the compliment. You shall drive, for my arms are tired. This is a pony. I mention the fact because you might take it for a piece of wood. Sit where you are, Clytie. And what brings you down to this part of the world, Mr. Douglas?" She did not wait for an answer, but rattled on as if it were quite the most natural thing that he should be sitting on Shepperton Lock; and Jack offered no explanation.

He persuaded the pony to ascend to Rose Cottage; and he said but little during the journey, addressing even that little to Mollie, rather than to Clytie. The color came and went in Clytie's face; but Mollie seemed to be so absorbed in Mr. Jack Douglas as not to notice her sister's embarrassment.

During their slow progress to the cottage, if he looked at Clytie it was only with a sideways glance. When they came to a hill, he and Mollie got out and walked; and Mollie talked as freely and as unrestrainedly as if she and Jack Douglas had only been apart for a few hours. Insensibly he and Clytie fell into her manner; and then they were all laughing and talking, as if they had been meeting like this for many days, long before they reached the cottage.



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Mollie commanded tea to be brought out under the veranda; and, afterward, Jack lit his pipe and lay full length at the feet of Clytie as she reposed in the huge wicker chair. Once or twice he tried to rouse himself from the delicious dream, to explain his presence and his sudden departure from Withercombe; but Mollie always managed to stop him, without seeming to do so. She called their attention to a blackbird, or the red glow of the sunlight on the furze, or dilated on the beauty of the neighborhood; and at last Jack acquiesced in their evident desire to bury the past and accept his presence there as quite an ordinary matter.

He talked of London, of anything that came into his mind; and Clytie lay back in her chair and listened with half-closed eyes and lips slightly parted, with a smile, a smile of contentment and happiness. And Mollie watched her covertly. They asked Jack to remain to dinner, and waived aside the obstacle of his morning suit.

It was a delicious, a delightful meal; and afterward they went outside—that is, Mollie and Jack did. Clytie remained indoors, and going to the piano, played the Braga serenata; and the exquisite music, to which she sang sweetly and softly, stole over him like an intoxication. He could not trust himself to speak to her.

"Say—say good-night to her," he said, hoarsely. "I will come to-morrow evening."

Mollie nodded, as if no further words, no explanation, were needed; and he strode off.

The music ceased presently, and Clytie came out.

"Has he—has Mr. Douglas gone?" she asked, looking round.

"Yes," replied Mollie. "How strange our coming across him! I wonder why he left Withercombe so suddenly? But I shouldn't ask him, if I were you, Clytie. You saw how I dodged the subject? How well you are looking to-night! As well as I ever saw you in my life. Wonderful air this! What a good-looking man Mr. Douglas is; have you noticed it? I suppose not. Now, he's what I call a man."

Jack made his way back to London in a kind of dream; indeed, he felt as if he were actually being moved, impelled, by some mysterious force outside himself. He was too much intoxicated, too much enthralled, to remember his old resolution, to make new ones.

The next morning Clytie went about the cottage singing; and went about the garden also singing; but suddenly her song ceased, for Mr. Hesketh Carton appeared at the gate. He greeted her pleasantly, and, in his best manner, apologized for his presence. It seemed that he had received a letter from Bramley, which demanded her attention. He explained that he had got her address from the butler in Grafton street. Clytie welcomed him pleasantly, and asked him to stay to lunch, and Mollie, who had been down to the river, and who had asked Clytie not to wait, found them at that meal. Hesketh Carton was as agreeable and as entertaining as usual; and he remained to tea, chatting with the girls and amusing them with the latest London gossip.

Clytie, after he had gone, went up to dress. She was in the best of spirits, and Mollie, with a smile, heard her singing. As a rule, Clytie

was rather careless about her attire; that is to say, she was not devoted to dress, as some women are; but this evening she took an unusual interest in her maid's choice of a frock; and she came down looking, as Mollie informed her, looking wickedly lovely, in a light "confection" almost suited to midsummer; but the weather was warm.

They dined happily, almost merrily; and after dinner they went out under the veranda, as usual, with their tea. They heard the gate swing, and presently Jack came across the lawn. Mollie put him in a chair between them, and, after a few words, went in to get him a cup of tea. Jack turned to Clytie to speak to her; but the words died on his lips and he sprang to his feet; for she had gone as white as death, her teacup had slipped from her hand, and she lay back with half-closed eyes.

"Miss Bramley—Clytie! You are ill!"

"No, no!" she breathed, and she strove to sit upright. "Please say nothing. I—I want to speak to you."

Mollie came out with Jack's tea.

"Go and play us something, Mollie dear," said Clytie, in a low voice.

Mollie went, and Jack stood regarding Clytie earnestly and anxiously. She looked as if she were in a dream, a trance. She gazed straight before her, as if she were looking at vacancy, commencing with herself, as one might commune with the spirit that was leaving the body. Suddenly she turned her eyes—they were like the eyes of a clairvoyant, scarcely human, almost spiritual.

She seemed as if she were desirous of speaking, as if she were painfully eager to do so, but as if she found some almost insuperable difficulty in giving voice to the emotion which set her lips quivering and made her eyes dark with pain and trouble.

Jack looked toward the window anxiously, as if he would call Mollie; but Clytie raised her hand slightly to check him.

"I must speak!" she said in a low voice. "But ah! it is so difficult! And yet I cannot wait. There is no time. I dare not stop to ask what you— you will think of me. I want to ask you a question which will surprise, shock you. I must—I must ask you. It is—"

Her brows were drawn together, her hands writhed in her lap; but her eyes met his steadily. "Will you marry me?"

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Will you marry me?"

Jack did not start, his heart did not even leap. He felt like a man in a dream. The glamour of his presence, her voice, the subtle influence of his love, deprived him of the capacity of surprise. He was like one held in a thrall. He had been living in a dream during the last two days; and this was a part of the phantasmagoria. It actually did not seem strange to him that a woman should address such a question to a man; for was it not Clytie who had spoken? Clytie, the purest, the most modest of her sex? It was she who had put the question, and, because it was she, it was bereft of all immodesty, impropriety. A sense of sudden joy, of unspeakable happiness thrilled through him; but vaguely, not acutely—for was he not in a dream?

She waited for his answer, her eyes on his.

"Yes," he said in a low voice, a little thickly. "You know I will."

She gave a sigh of relief. "You do not ask me why I ask you," she said, her lips quivering, but with no blush on her face, which was still white, her brows drawn straight. "You will not ask."

"I do not ask, and I will not," he said.

He longed with a terrible eagerness to tell her that he loved her, that her question had opened the gates of paradise to him, the lover's perfect earthly paradise; but he was aware, in some subtle way, that to speak of love, of passion, would break the spell under which this happiness of his was being woven, as if by supernatural hands.

"You are good," she said, "very good to me. I know what must be passing in your mind—what you must be thinking of me—"

Her voice broke, and now there came a faint color to her face.

"I think nothing but good of you," he said, almost humbly. "It would be impossible for me to think anything else."

"And you do not ask the reason," he said. "I am surprised, startled. You would not believe me if I were to tell you that I was not. You must have some good, serious, powerful reason for— for saying what you have said to me. We will let it rest until— until you choose to tell me. I want to say only this, Clytie, that is saying yes, I have accepted at your hands a gift more precious—Oh, what can I say? But you know, you must know that I love you—that I have loved you since the first time we met."

He paused a moment; should he tell her that he was Sir Wilfrid Carton? He felt the impulse to do so; but he resisted. He was completely in the dark as to her reason for asking him to marry her; it was impossible for him to even form a conjecture, and he was terribly afraid lest, if she should know who he was, she should draw back.

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A Pagan Fashion.

The fashion of keeping little dogs as objects of luxury is not at all modern. Both Greek and Roman women used to have small pet dogs, over which they made as much to do as does a fashionable lady of to-day over her poodle.

Even men, usually foreigners, were not ashamed to stroll about the Roman streets carrying dogs in their arms. It is said that Julius Caesar, once seeing some men thus occupied, sarcastically inquired of them if the women of their country had no children.

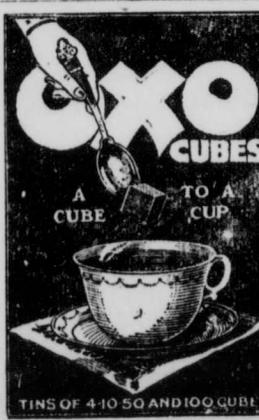
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