BY THE RULE OF CONTRARY.

But at that interesting point Miss Warrington's speculations came to an abrupt termination, for, lifting her eyes a little higher still, she found the subject of her thoughts intently regarding her, in his turn, over the edge of his newspaper. Gertrude colored and looked annoyed, but he half laughingly threw down his newspaper and said apologetically—

"I really beg your pardon, but I was just wondering whether you had forgiven me yet for putting a stop to your committing suicide an hour or two ago."

"I suppose I ought to be very much obliged to you," said Gertrude, looking at him rather shyly.

"I should think so," he rejoined, returning the look with interest.

"But you see I would so much rather have been left behind that I fear I am not so grateful as I ought to be," said Gertrude, demurely, with a sudden scruple as to the propriety of talking to a perfect stranger.

"Then I have the consolation of knowing that virtue is its own reward in my case," he answered, gravely smiling. "I am really sorry to have disappointed you so much, but your friend will come on by the next train of course."

"I was not thinking of my aunt," said Gertrude, while a vision of Miss Hornby and the bonnet-box made her smile. "When there is something extremely disagreeable waiting to greet one at the journey's end, one is not sorry to put off the evil moment even by missing the train."

"I should not have imagined fate could have anything very disagreeable in store for you," said the gentleman, in an incredulous tone.

"Ah, you do not know!" returned Gertrude, shaking her head tragically and without the least remorse dismissing her ast scruple of propriety to the winds.

After this auspicious opening, it was not to be wondered at that Mr. Warrington—for it was he—should move his seat to the one opposite Gertrude's, and, after rearranging the wrappers, bestow upon her part of his coveted bear-skin, and then benevolently beguile the time by entering into a long conversation.

After this the miles flew by with wondrous rapidity. He had been everywhere and done everything; he talked well and pleasantly, and he put forth all his powers for the amusement of the beautiful high-spirited girl who charmed him by every look and gesture. And so these two, who, if they had only known their respective names, would have flown from each other as from a pestilence, managed to pass the long eight hours' journey so pleasantly together that, when the train at last drew up at Euston square station, they were both unfeignedly surprised and not a little disappointed that the journey was over and the time come to go their separate ways.

"Oh, dear me, if that odious John Warrington were only like him!" sighed Gertrude, as, after a rather lengthened adieu to her fellow-traveller, she leant back in the carriage that had been sent to meet her at the station.

"Now, if that girl was only Gertrude," mused Mr. John Warrington, as he watched the carriage out of sight, "it might be endurable."

* * * * *

Mr. John Warrington did not seem in any hurry to make his appearance at Sir John Harcourt's house; nothing was heard of him for a week. But at length one evening he arrived suddenly in the dusk, when no one was expecting him. Gertrude was by herself in the drawing-room, sitting on a footstool and gazing, in a brown study, into the fire, which had burnt down to a dark red glow, making everything in the room indistinct and sombre. Presently the door opened, and without any warning "Mr. Warrington" was announced.

She jumped up in a sudden fit of nervousness. In the dusk all she could see was a tall dark figure advancing towards her, the features of whose face it was impossible to distinguish. She herself was almost invisible, only the numerous frillings and flounces on the skirt of her dark dress shewing plainly in the red glow of the hearth. He came close up to where she stood and, just uttering her name, made a low and ceremonious bow, to which Gertrude responded by one equally dignified. Neither of them spoke a syllable for several minutes; and then Gertrude, putting on her most stately manner, said, in icy tones—

"Pray be seated, Mr. Warrington; and, since we have to go through this very painful and, in my opinion, unnecessary interview, may I beg that you will make it as brief as possible?"

"It cannot be more disagreeable to you than it is to me," he replied haughtily, "I wish to spare you all the annoyance possible, but my part is so painfully ungracious that I must ask you to pardon me if I speak more plainly than seems courteous."

"You cannot speak too plainly for my pleasure," said Gertrude, thawing a little at some subtle intonation of the voice or manner; "but I think it may spare you some unnecessary words if I tell you at once that nothing shall induce me to fulfil the conditions of my grandfather's will."

"Are you fully acquainted with the consequence then?" he asked, gravely. "Do you know the forfeit you must pay in case of refusal to comply with them?"

"Certainly. I lose my fortune;" and Miss Warrington drew herself up in magnificent scorn as she spoke. "But nothing can make any difference, Mr. Warrington. I have at least one privilege left, and that is the privilege of saying 'No.'"

"Pardon me, you cannot say 'No' to what has never been asked," he answered, slightly ironical.

The hot blood rushed into Gertrude's cheeks, and her eyes flashed angrily.

"I considered your presence here a sufficient intimation of your wishes, sir," she retorted hotly.

"Then you made a mistake," he said, in a voice as proud as her own. "My wishes have not been consulted in the matter. I consented to a personal interview with you only under extreme pressure, knowing how embarrassing it must needs be to both of us."

"Then may I ask what did bring you here, sir?" asked Gertrude, with supreme hauteur, beginning dimly to comprehend that she had nothing to fear on the score of Mr. John Warrington, and in a fit of perversity not a little piqued at it.

He hesitated a moment before answering, devoutly wishing the self-possessed young lady before him would contrive to be a little quicker of comprehension. The interview was proving even more embarrassing than he had anticipated, all the more so that with all her magnificent dignity and self-possession there was a subtle charm and fascination about Miss Gertrude Warrington that made his ungracious task most terribly disagreeable.

"It seems that by the terms of the wills," he began, in a constrained voice, "no arrangement could be completed unless I saw you personally. I wish to explain to you—and I assure you I do so very reluctantly—that—that I have not the least intention—the wills insist that in case I could not——" Here he came to a full stop, and stared helplessly into the fire, most devoutly wishing himself at the antipodes, and dimly conscious that his companion was rather enjoying the situation than not.

"Well?" queried the young lady, calmly, while an amused smile crossed her face as the nature of his difficulty dawned upon her.

Making a supreme effort, he began again.

"I came here because I was assured I must see you, and—and tell you personally that—that I—that on no account can I—that I am very sorry, but that—— Hang it all! Confound the wills!" And here Mr. John Warrington fairly came to grief, and strode up and down the room in genuine embarrassment, totally unable to inform the stately young lady before him that no consideration on earth should induce him to marry her.

Gertrude came to the rescue with a little malicious laugh.

"Mr. Warrington," she said frankly, offering her hand, "it seems we are both of one mind on this point. I feel more than grateful to you for your frank admission, and I heartily beg your pardon for my mercenary and unjust suspicions."

With a feeling of intense relief John Warrington took the offered hand.

"It is I who ought to beg your pardon," he said gratefully. "You cannot imagine what a nightmare my embarrassing position has been to me. I assure you I nearly ran off to America yesterday out of sheer fright. I felt it almost an insult to mention the terms of those two absurd wills to you; but Sir John Harcourt would have no mercy, and made me come."

Gertrude laughed.

"He was most tyrannical, as I know to my cost. But"—in a tragic voice—"what will become of our two fortunes now, Mr. Warrington?"

"I have not the slighest idea," he said, with a grim smile, "for no one seems to have contemplated such a catastrophe as our mutually refusing each other, and I do not think there is any provision against such a *contretemps*."

"Then," said Gertrude, in a disconsolate voice, "I suppose we shall both lose our money. I think I could have borne the loss of mine with tolerable equanimity, but I do not feel quite so philosophical when loss comes to both."

"Perhaps some of the lawyers may be able to solve the knotty problem," he replied, indifferently, thinking with rather suspicious regret what a charming girl this cousin—whom he had just refused to marry—seemed to be. He stayed a few minutes longer, as if unwilling to go, and then, with a rather prolonged shake of the hand and a low bow, he left the room.

Gertrude heard the hall door close after him. A most unwonted feeling of sadness came over her as she turned to the fire again, wondering why some tones of Mr. Warrington's voice, some fancied resemblance in his tall athletic figure, reminded her so strongly of her pleasant fellow-traveller.

* * * * *

What to do with the money did prove a knotty point for the lawyers, for, as Mr. Warrington had surmised, there was no provision in either of the wills against the refusal of both parties to comply with the conditions. The lawyers wrangled; and the only immediate consequences were that Mr. John Warrington's allowance of five hundred a year and Miss Gertrude Warrington's of one thousand were stopped? So the months sped on, and when the summer came round affairs were still in abeyance.

At the end of July the Misses Hornby and Gertrude were settled for two months at a small village on the Welsh coast, rejoicing in the unpronounceable name of Llan-y-Wrellyn. They had a pretty cottage standing in its own grounds on a steep cliff overlooking a beautiful sweep of bay.

The place was entirely destitute of society, save a few temporary visitors—chiefly artists or stray tourists—who took up their quarters at the primitive village inn. There was no amusement but what was to be had from exploring the lovely country around, or boating and fishing.

They had been there two or three weeks, when one day Miss Jane Hornby and Gertrude—who was seized with a mania for exploring—set off to visit a tempting bit of ruin, the remains of an ancient watch-tower, which stood at the end of a long reef of rocks at the extreme point of the bay, and which at full tide was entirely covered by water.

They started early, with many cautions from Miss Hornby to mind and not get surrounded. But the walk was long, the rocks were slippery, and the ruins very interesting. It seemed to Gertrude that they had been climbing and exploring only a few minutes, when, looking landwards, she discovered, to her dismay, the water already flowing over the reef, and advancing pretty rapidly on the low ledges and heaps of broken stones which composed the ruins of the old tower.

"Oh, auntie, auntie!" she called, hastily. "See, we are quite surrounded! What shall we do?"

Miss Jane glanced up in affright.

"Quick," she said—"be quick, Gertie! We must wade along the reef before the water gets any deeper."

Throwing away specimen baskets and sunshades, they grasped each other by the hand and stepped into the rippling, eddying water, which along the top of the reef was only a few inches deep. But almost at the first step Miss Jane slipped on the treacherous seaweed and fell. With great difficulty Gertrude helped her on to her feet again, and led her back, faint and trembling, to the heap of ruined stones; then, desperately frightened, she raised her voice in a loud cry for help. There was no living thing in sight. Eagerly and anxiously they scanned the blue rippling sea, flowing so persistently over the reefs of rock. Nothing was to be seen save a few gulls sweeping down on to the crests of the waves—not even a fishing-boat was in sight. With great trouble Gertrude persuaded her aunt to let her try to cross the ledge alone. It was almost a forlorn hope, but it seemed too horible to wait there quietly till the pitiless sea should have covered them with its teasy waves. She tied her dress away from her feet, and, taking one of the sunshades to feel her way with, advanced boldly along the reef for some twenty yards. Then she suddenly slipped and fell into deep water. Repressing a wild scream of fright, she managed to scramble on to the reef again, and then, faint and dizzy, crept back to the still safe refuge of the old ruins. Here, in horrible fear, shivering in their wet clothes, the two ladies waited, every now and then raising their voices in cries for help and waving their handkerchiefs as signals of distress. But the quick minutes passed on, and no living thing was to be seen on land or sea. The water crept up higher and higher, so slowly, so remorselessly. It was already at the foot of their last heap of stones, and they could see in each other's blanched faces the horrible dread that possessed them, when suddenly a small boat shot out from the shelter of the land, and, impelled by powerful strokes, drew rapidly towards them. It seemed hours to the two, waiting and fearing, on the now rapidly disappearing heap of stones, with the spray of the waves splashing over them, but it was in reality only ten minutes, till they were lifted with a strong hand from their perilous refuge and placed in the stern of the small boat. The oarsman threw them a rough pilot coat and an old rug, both of which had seen much service on the water, and, without wasting any words, bent again to the oars, apparently only intent on getting his shivering freight as quickly as possible to land.

Very miserable and woe-begone they looked. In her scramble out of the water Gertrude had lost her hat, and her morning-dress of summer holland clung to her in damp heavy folds, while the water fell in quick drops from a long tress of bright hair that lay uncoiled on her shoulder and down to her waist. She had put up her hand to fasten it round her head again, when she caught the quick glance of a pair of steady gray eyes regarding her with a look half doubtful, half recognizing. Collecting her scattered wits, she looked back in her turn, and discovered, to her astonishment, that the man seated opposite to her in rough sailor shirt, pea-jacket, and tarpaulin hat, with his boat half filled with dead flukes, was none other than her very well remembered travelling companion. Involuntarily she flushed up as a smile of recognition crossed his face and, with a slight bow, he said merrily—

"I had no idea it was an old friend I was to have the pleasure of rescuing from such an unpleasant predicament."

"How can we thank you!" said Gertrude, eagerly. "But for you we should have been drowned."

"No, I think not," he replied, smiling back at her. "You had been seen from the shore by the fishermen; but, as my boat is the lightest, I decided to come myself. You should have been sure of the tide, young lady, before venturing on such a dangerous spot as that."

"We never thought of that," said Gertrude, almost timidly. "It seemed to come up without a moment's warning; and it was so pleasant climbing among the rocks."

"Yes, it is. I have been trying to drag myself away from Llan-y-Wrellyn for the last week, and I have not succeeded yet."

"Then I suppose it is you who have been at the inn for the last three weeks, and who went out in the lifeboat in the gale?" said Miss Jane, curiously; for strange tales of a wonderful feat of daring had floated up to the ladies at the cottage.

"Yes," he answered carelessly; "I came for a week and I have been here three. But you are shivering with cold; I must put a little more speed on."

He redoubled his exertions, and the tiny boat seemed to fly through the water. In a few minutes the keel grated on the shingle, and the stranger, springing out, handed the two ladies to shore, put on his jacket, and, giving up his boat to a man, offered his arm to Miss Jane, to help her up the steep path leading to Bella Vue Cottage.

As a matter of course he was asked in and introduced to Miss Hornby as their deliverer. In their gratitude and delight the two old ladies could not do too much for him, and pressed him earnestly to stay and spend the evening with them.

"I shall be only too happy," he said, "if you will first allow me to return to the inn and change my sea-going toggery—it is scarcely fit for a lady's room."

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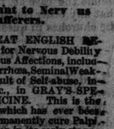
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