

**THE SQUIRE'S LEGACY.**

By Mary Cecil Hay.  
CHAPTER XXXVIII.

On many and many a summer evening, as Anna Wakeley sat sewing in the window of her cottage on the slope, had she raised her eyes to let them rest yearningly upon the sunset glory in the western sky. But to-night, while the winter sky flamed crimson in the west, hours after sunset time, she stood before her cottage window, with strained and feverish gaze, her fingers tightly locked, her face white as death, and touched to anguish every now and then, when the light sped upward with a gleam of glory, or on the strong wings of the wind, swept toward the timbered walls of the old farm, and the long thatched buildings on its western side.

For long had the neglected fire been dead in the cottage grate, yet Oliver sat beside it, with a pipe in his mouth, holding his dirty newspaper to catch the light of a candle which flared beside him on the table; but his eyes, though even staid than usual to-night, were never for one minute fixed steadily upon the columns. There was a new restlessness in his glance.

"Oliver!" His wife's call was a perfect cry of anguish; but Oliver paused deliberately before he lowered the paper and looked across the kitchen, gathering a dead, unnatural sleepiness into his gaze. "What is it, my dear, looking about?" he asked, heavily. "Can't you leave a man to read his paper after a hard day's work? You're staring yourself enough for 'alf a dozen on us. Ah! What d'ye start for?" he added, with an eager, expectant change of tone. "Is it the furriner ye see coming?"

Oliver had risen in the excitement of this hope, but one glance into his wife's face—without one from the window—showed him that there was no sign upon the slope of the man whom he had expected; and he dropped again, heavily and sulkily, into his seat.

"How the flames roar and rush!"—the words were a very whisper as they came from Anna's lips, while her locked hands rose and fell before her in a measured, restless misery—"and the ground rises so steeply between the rick-yard and the river. Oh, Oliver, in the name of pity, go and help! Can any man see such danger and destruction without offering the little aid he can? For it's little that even the strongest of us can do at such a time."

"You'd best shut that shutter," Wakeley muttered, refilling his pipe. "I've told ye afore; and, if ye don't do it soon, I'll come do it myself. A nice hour this is for deceer, women to be up and starting about 'em!"

"I am going," said Anna, turning to face her husband, her look firm in all its agony and pain. "If you can bear to stay here and see the wind swaying that flume straight to the door, go!" she broke off, pleadingly. "And go quickly, Oliver. The stacks are gone—nothing can save them; but life may be in danger, and we can all help there, perhaps."

"I go!" echoed Wakeley, with an attempt at scorn in his savage voice. "Not I! And what d'ye mean by taking that tone on? Ye say the stacks is gone—just as if I cared. It isn't me—it's the furriner as wanted 'em burned. He'll be glad o' this accident—eh?"

The last word was uttered so sharply, after a pause, that its own suspicious motive was laid bare at a glance.

"Yes, he will be glad," said Anna, quite quietly; but the fingers with which she was trying to close the window shutter shook so helplessly that she was obliged to give up the attempt, in spite of the strain she put upon herself.

And so the red light still glided in, and laid a flush of its own color upon the woman's pallid face, and gave a flash of its own savagery to the man's sullen scowl.

But Oliver, watching suspiciously, saw one purpose strong in his wife's face; so he rose from his chair and threw off his coat with clumsy haste. "Ye're not going; and so I tell ye, once for all!" he said, moving about noisily while he spoke. "Ye'll stay at 'ome like a respectable woman, and the wife of a respectable man—so I tell ye, once for all. Why, of course," he added, with a crafty lowering of his rough tone, "ye're a respectable, comely foun' o' p'ovling about at nights; and so let them as is fond o' that sort o' thing go and 'elp now. We don't know anything about what's going on at the Green Pits. Why should we? Come away now, and shut that shutter. D'ye 'ear?"

This was a usual conclusion to Oliver's addresses to his wife, and perhaps it was because its frequency had robbed it of all interrogatory properties that it generally, as now, won no reply. A pause followed his words, which was so marked and so emphatic that it seemed to him, in his concealed wrath, to be of untold length. Yet it was only one minute after the utterance of his rough words that, watching furtively from his position on the hearth, he saw his wife fall on her knees beside the window with a cry, and cover her eyes with her locked fingers.

"If you don't think it's bed-time, I do," muttered Oliver, stirring uneasily. "Come along, girl. What's that their light at the Green Pits to do along of us? It's out of the way o' 'em since dark. Come along, d'ye 'ear? And jest put that shutter up, that a man's 'ouse may look respectable this time o' night."

"You can put the shutter up when you choose," said Anna, speaking calmly, when she arose, and turned her face from the glass to which it had been so near. "I'm going."

"No, ye ain't!" roared Wakeley, both face and voice betraying a keen and evident fear, though rough and as authoritative as ever, "less ye mean ye're going to bed."

"Even a woman," resumed Anna quietly, though with intense trembling, "can help in the carrying of the water around that hill."

"No, she can't, and no she won't," roared the man; "a woman's don'ts to stay in doors; and when she don't know it of herself her husband must teach her. I'll have no gallivanting down there, d'ye 'ear! No more I'll have any sniv'ling up 'ere, and so I tell ye once for all. Remember, as we two are 'ere at 'ome all this night, and have been 'ere since dark. Ye'll maybe have to tell that after, and it's well to be ready—women are such fools sometimes, if they're took by surprise. We've bin in out of the wind and I've bin reading you the paper, while ye sewed that their shirt o' mine, ain't fond o' being out o' nights, when there's a decent fire, and supper, and bed at 'ome. That's the truth as you'll maybe have to tell 'em some time."

He had laid his heavy hand upon his wife's shoulder, and as he spoke he tightened his strong fingers, with a grip which at any other time would have brought a cry from her lips; but now, without even a struggle, she moved from his grasp, as if her strength were really the greater of the two.

"If I am asked," she said, coldly and distinctly, "I shall tell them that you were out to-night so late that the fire must have broken out—though I had not seen it, having the shutters closed—before you came hurrying in from the Green Pits."

"I—say," whispered Oliver, his hard lips, drawn back from his teeth, as he lowered his savage face to his wife's, "if ye tell any lies like them, ye'll repent it—lye 'ear! Hullo!"

The exclamation followed the threat so rapidly that it was little wonder Anna's startled gaze rested on her husband's face so curiously for the first moments.

"It frightened you," she said then, her lips stiff with fear, though she spoke coldly. "I have been expecting it before. I knew that as soon as any one could reach Kingwood, they would ring the alarm bell. It is no use, of course, but I knew some villager, in his fright, would do that, to hasten the engines from Minton. In this wind, the sound, loud as it is, scarcely travels beyond us. It—it needs 'alarm you."

"What d'ye mean?" grumbled Wakeley, making a surly effort to regain such ease as this sudden summons had robbed him of. "It was your-self that was frightened. Come from that door!"

(To be continued.)

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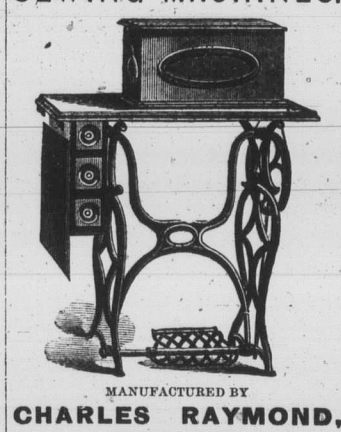
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