

ALL FOR RICHES.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Last Hour.

Mrs. Grant stood looking in upon this scene for a half hour. During that time all the early years of her life passed through her mind. She saw herself a child again at her mother's side, and bounding over the fields with her little hand clasped closely in the toiled-stained one of her father.

His hand was thin and powerless now, and she—oh, how changed! She remembered with a thrill her first dream of love, and a blush mantled her cheek as she remembered its bitter ending. She grew proud and cold, shutting out from her heart all tenderness as she looked upon Mrs. Whitney, and thought how bitterly she had been wronged by her, and of the sweet little boy who needed a mother's love and guidance, and yet received only abuse from the woman who took her place. She was thinking of these things when Mrs. Whitney spoke.

"It is growing late," she said. "We can do no good here. Father is insensible to all around him. Let us all retire excepting the one who is to sit up with him through the night."

Christopher offered to remain with his father until morning, but May would not listen to it.

"Father might awake, and if he should see any other than me with him he would be perfectly wild. Go you all to bed, and if there comes a change I will arouse you. Poor father, I have been your stay so long I will not leave you now." Turning to the others, she said: "It is a mournful consolation to me that I am able to attend him to the end. He has depended so entirely upon me for every comfort that I should feel wronged if any other hand should minister to him at this hour."

Seeing how late it was they all arose and left the room, going to their chambers above to sleep, leaving May to watch beside her dying father.

Stealing around to the back door, Mrs. Grant entered in the darkness. The great watch dog bounded forward with a low, moaning growl. Mrs. Grant whispered, "Poor Bruno," and he fell to licking her face and hands. Fearing lest the noise should arouse those in the chamber, Mrs. Grant whispered sternly:

"Go and lie down, Bruno!" The dog obeyed, and guided by the faint light streaming through the door of the keeping room, which was not quite closed, she silently entered the well-remembered room and crossing it, stood where she could look into the west room.

A low sigh escaped her as she saw how careworn and pale was the sweet face of May. The sound, low as it was, attracted the attention of May, who arose softly and came and stood in the doorway between the west room and the keeping room, holding the candle above her head.

Its rays upon Mrs. Grant's face, and she held up a warning finger.

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May came toward her, and without speaking set the candle upon the little old-fashioned light stand.

Then she stepped lightly across the carpet and put both arms around Mrs. Grant, and the silent tears fell from her eyes upon her sister's costly robes.

Presently she whispered: "You have heard? You know about father?"

Mrs. Grant bowed, and in a whisper asked if she might look upon him.

They went softly into the room, where their father lay. There had been no sudden cry of surprise, no outburst of feeling when May had met her sister. She had ever held in her heart aught but tenderness and pity for Goldie, and only tenderness and pity filled her heart now as she led her to the side of the dear parent who had felt Goldie's loss so deeply; that his powerful frame had grown feeble and weak under the shock.

Goldie knelt beside her father, and putting up soft cheeks against his withered one, whispered:

"Father!" "Father Mellen's eyes slowly unclosed. He looked upon the face held a few inches above his own. His voice was low and natural as he said:

"So you have come for me, Goldie. I have waited a long time, but I waited patiently. I will go with you now, little one."

"Do you know me, father?" Goldie asked.

"Know you child? Of course I know you, 'tis Goldie."

"And you forgive me for all the wrong I have done; you forgive me, father?" she said, the tears falling.

"You have never wronged me, Goldie; but if you had, I would forgive you freely. You had better run out to the barn and tell Tim to harness the horse. We must be going soon," he replied.

It was evident that he knew Goldie, but he had so long ago forgotten all the incidents of his life that he could not recall them now.

Goldie kissed his cold lips and withered cheeks; she smoothed the gray hair from his brow and rested her cheeks against his own.

"It has been a long time since you and I were together, little Goldie, I had a long run for you one morning and we thought we should never find you; but I found your shawl beside the pool, and we feared—we'll never mind what we feared. You've got back now."

It was all coming back to him that he was dying.

Mrs. Grant sobbed.

"You forgive me, father, for all that?"

"Yes, yes, little one! I forgive you; you were sick; your mother said you were sick the night before; I always blamed Belle; where are Belle and the others?"

"I am here, dear father! You know me, don't you?" said May, coming forward.

"I guess I do know you, my sweet angel! Your face has been close to me all through this lonesome journey. All the others went away, but you stayed by. May, God bless you by and by. It is growing cold here; we must go soon, Goldie."

"Kiss me before you go, father," sighed May, bending over him.

The old man kissed the lips placed to his own, and murmured:

"Good-by, May; God bless you!"

He closed his eyes and seemed to be sleeping.

By and by Mrs. Grant said:

"He is asleep; I must go now."

"You will not go and leave him until after he has passed to the other world?" asked May.

"I cannot stay, May. I have married a wealthy man, and if he should know the story of my life, he would hate me. I am as much alone in the world as though I had no sisters or brother. This is a sad, weary life, May, but there must be an ending sometime."

The old man had opened his eyes, and lay gazing wistfully at his children.

"Do you want anything, father?" asked May.

He shook his head.

"Let us all three go together," he said faintly.

May clasped one of his hands in her own, and Goldie clung to the one she held.

"If there is any change I must call them," said May. Even while she spoke, the breath came gaspingly, then stopped. The kind father was dead. Mrs. Grant bent over the still form, kissed the cold lips, and murmured:

"Father, dear father, take me with you! Do not go and leave Goldie."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

The Return of Frank Whitney.

The sleepers in the chamber at the old farmhouse were aroused by the

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sound of a heavy fall. Hastening down the stairs, one after another, each one saw the form of May lying upon the floor and Farmer Mellen lying dead upon his bed.

Christopher was the first to reach the spot while he was bending over his father, to find if the breath had left the body, the others came in.

Mrs. Whitney made a great show of grief. She wrung her hands and cried:

"My poor, dear father, speak to me once more!"

Minnie was bending over May, who gave signs of returning animation upon being removed.

Two of the neighbors, who had slept in the house for several night past, were now aroused, and came forward to perform the last sad offices of kindness. May was carried into an adjoining room, and was attended to by Mrs. Whitney and Christopher's wife.

Seven hours later May was asleep, with her brother sitting in the keeping room, ready to go into the room where she lay should she awake. He was leaning back in the leather-covered armchair when May spoke.

"Come here a moment, Christopher," she said.

Her brother was beside her in a moment.

"Close the door, please. I have something to tell."

He closed the door, and she continued:

"Goldie has been here to-night. She was with father when he died."

"Impossible!" responded her brother.

"Nevertheless, it is true. He died holding one of her hands and one of mine. I arose to call you, but remembering nothing afterwards excepting a faintness and a fall. I must have fainted. She must have left the house before you came down, if you saw nothing of her."

"Let me collect my thoughts. I caught a glimpse of a shadow dying between me and the light as I entered the room. But I did not think of it being anything but a shadow. Now I think of it, there was no object to cast a shadow there. When did she come?" he asked.

"She came directly after you had left the room. She says she is married to a wealthy man."

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"I know all about that," replied the brother; and he gave May a full account of all that had happened at Laurel Glade during his stay there. Exchanging promises of secrecy, the brother and sister congratulated each other that their lost sister was comfortably situated. Instead of being the wanderer May had feared she was.

"How glad I am that time has proved to you the truth of what I told you after I was sick with brain fever," said May.

"I could not believe anything so marvellous could be true," he answered.

"Will Goldie visit us, Christopher?" "There is no Goldie for us, Sister May. She is just as truly dead to us as though her body lay beneath the dark waters of the pool," he replied.

We will pass rapidly over the funeral and the leaving of the old farmhouse for a while. May needed rest, and Christopher insisted upon her accompanying Minnie and himself to their home in New York.

Mrs. Whitney had returned to her home immediately after the funeral. She only passed for an hour at Christopher's house while waiting for the carriage to come for her.

Mrs. Grant had found no difficulty in entering the house unperceived, thanks to the management of Jane, who now assumed airs of importance and familiarity since she considered herself possessed of some of the secrets of her mistress.

In all that Mrs. Grant had done requiring the assistance of Jane to keep her secret, there had been no real evil. But this wily Frenchwoman would not easily have been persuaded that this was the case.

(To be continued.)

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